LEADERSHIP CHARACTERS IN MALAYSIAN RELIGIOUS-NGOs: AN INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Leadership is a key function and process to unlock the effectiveness and enhancement of any organisation development including Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and Religious-NGO (RNGO). This can be done through at least three main characteristics i.e., charismatic, transformational and servant leadership. Previous research proved that these characteristics are relevant for NGOs, but less study is found on RNGO. RNGO is a form of NGO that is well known in its active role in contributing to a harmonious, as well as religious society. This paper will focus on the concept of leadership for RNGO and seeks to do some introductory study on the identity of Malaysian Muslim RNGOs by looking into different characters of leadership applied to different RNGOs based on their ethnicity identities. In short, using the qualitative method of documentation analysis and literature review, this paper aims to identify leadership characters of three different types of RNGOs which are the Malay, Indian Muslim and Chinese Muslim RNGOs. This early study is to investigate whether those three leadership characteristics are already applied or suitable to be applied in these ethnicity-based RNGOs. The introductory study found that all the three selected Islamic RNGOs representing the Malays, Chinese and Indians are adopting and practicing charismatic, transformational and servant leadership in executing organisations’ objectives, and would possibly be a yardstick to effective RNGO leadership development in the future.

Keyword: Leadership characters, Religious-NGO, charismatic, transformational, servant

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership studies have witnessed a dramatic increase over the last decade. In fact, it has resulted into a diversity of leadership development and theories. A very stunning finding in the scholarly research on leadership is that it has advanced from the theoretical discussions on the general leadership processes towards a phenomenal evolvement which leads to a key to be investigated. In this context, it has expanded into two-dimensional micro and macro processes in leadership. Micro leadership involves a way of understanding perceptions, emotions and cognitions, whereas the macro leadership focuses on the outcomes from social-relational context and dynamisms of the follower and leader relationship. For both micro and macro processes, as well as the huge roles played by leaders within the complexity of organisational systems, it defines leaders as the central discussion in determining any type of organisation’s success and effectiveness, including the public and private sector, as well as non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Conceptually, the meaning of leadership, as found by Rost was extended into 200 different definitions in different categories. In fact, Burns emphasized that the observation on the meaning of leadership is the most observed, yet the least understood phenomena based on Rost’s findings. Looking at the broad definition of leadership which encompasses goals, skills and the background of the leader himself, a direct definition of leadership can be seen from Jay Lorsch’s ‘as an individual who influences others to follow him or her’. However, as many perceived that defining leadership should not exclude these three important elements – common and shared mission, win the subordinates’ hearts and minds, and power or authority – a comprehensive definition on leadership is given by James Macgregor Burns. Burns defines leadership as a mobilization process undertaken by individuals who are using the power they draw from

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motives, values and access to resources in a context of competition and conflict in their pursuit of goals.\textsuperscript{8} Despite the definition of leadership is continuously and widely debated to suit different contexts, approaches and mechanisms, at the same time, failing to produce a good leader with leadership characteristics will lead to dysfunction in achieving an organisation’s goals.

Therefore, this article tries to investigate the leadership characteristics that may be applied by Malaysian Religious-NGOs (RNGOs) which uses Islam as their pillar or principle prior to their establishments. In addition, due to the Malaysian uniqueness of having multiracial identities that consist of Malays, Chinese and Indians, the exploration on how these identities have built their respective organisations and how it contributes to the relationships with people and other parties are best explained on what leadership characters are involved. This article suggests that the three characteristics; charismatic, transformational and servant leadership is the best characteristics to be adopted in leading Islamic-RNGOs. These characters are well embedded in the presence of organisations as well as in the leaders themselves who lead the organisation, despite the challenges they faced. These can probably be seen and analyzed from multiple dimensions of organisational presence such as mission and vision, media report, achievement, conducted programmes, productions and public’s feedbacks. However, this writing is a new effort to enhance and refresh the existing literature and theory of leadership for the benefit of current discussion and evaluation mainly toward Islamic RNGOs in Malaysia, in hopes that it could overturn the ‘trust deficit’ that hampered the ‘government’ at the time being.

**LEADERSHIP DEFINITION: WESTERN AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF NGO**

Due to the huge number of Islamic-based organisations; in which to an extent could be narrowed down into racial-based identity, leadership is the key issue in determining the success of these organisations respectively. Leadership is defined in both fictional and speculative, yet still in the range of academic studies and scholarly treaties which to Roger Gill, there is still no definite end for leaders to define leadership who lives in the popular spectrum.\textsuperscript{9} Criticism on how leadership was defined should not be ignored. In fact, it could help in addressing the lack of consensus on what leadership is in the actual practice. To some, this lack of consensus led to

mixing up the definition of leadership and management, whilst most agreed that it is a separable issue as stated by the United Kingdom’s Investors-in-People Institution (IIP), which says, “Leadership and management are almost impossible to define because they mean different things to every organisation.” ¹⁰

Departing from this understanding, more than 200 leadership definitions were discovered by Rost, which later were defined accordingly into relational, situated, patterned, and formal/informal nature for leadership definitions by Carter et.al. It is due to the understanding that leadership is a phenomenon, and contemporary definitions that have also advanced a view of leadership as situated in specific context.¹¹ These four categories have well explained the nature of R ngo leadership practices as a form of NGO. Religious organisations can be considered quite fluid in its operational management as they are believed to have zero bureaucracies compared to government and business entities.¹² As mentioned earlier about the definition of leadership consisting of three elements – common and shared mission, win the subordinates’ hearts and minds, and power or authority – Table 1 presents a sample of definitions from the past century of leadership theories.

Table 1: Exemplar Definitions of Leadership

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (year)</th>
<th>Leadership definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follet (1925)</td>
<td>“It is possible to develop the conception of power-with, a jointly developed power, a coactive, not a coercive power . . . power is capacity... power-with is jointly developing power” (pp. 101, 109, 115).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigors (1935)</td>
<td>“Leadership is a process of mutual stimulation which, by the successful interplay of individual differences, controls human energy in the pursuit of a common cause” (p. 378).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gibb (1954)</td>
<td>“Leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality” (p. 884).</td>
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<tr>
<td>French &amp; Raven (1959)</td>
<td>“Our theory of social influence and power is limited to influence on the person, P, produced by a social agent, O, where O can be either another person, a role, a norm, a group or a part of a group . . . The “influence” of O must be clearly distinguished from O’s “control” of P ” (p. 151).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollander &amp; Julian (1969)</td>
<td>There is a “need to attend to leadership as a property of the system of a group; recognize the two-way influence characterizing leader-follower relations” (p. 387).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dansereau et al. (1975)</td>
<td>“The vertical dyad is the appropriate unit of analysis for examining</td>
</tr>
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leadership processes” (p. 47).

Burns (1978) “Surely it is time that . . . the roles of leader and follower be united” (p. vi).

Fernandez (1991) “We argue that leadership, particularly that aspect of leadership which is reflected in respect, is inherent in the relations among individuals, not in the individuals themselves” (p. 37).

Hollander (1993) “Without followers there are plainly no leaders or leadership” (p. 29).

Klein & House (1995) “Charisma resides not in a leader, nor in a follower, but in the relationship between a leader who has charismatic qualities and a follower who is open to charisma, within a charisma-condusive environment” (p.183).


Osborn et al. (2002) “Leadership is socially constructed in and from a context where patterns over time must be considered and where history matters” (p. 798).

Hogg (2001) “Leaders may emerge, maintain their position, be effective, and so forth, as a result of basic social cognitive processes” (p. 186).


Howell & Shamir (2005) “Followers’ self-concepts play a crucial role in determining the type of relationship they develop with the leader” (p. 97).

Balkundi & Kilduff (2006) “Our network approach locates leadership not in the attributes of individuals but in the relationships connecting individuals” (p. 942).

Uhl-Bien (2006) “I identify relational leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination . . . and change . . . are constructed and produced” (p. 655).

Hackman & Wageman (2007) “One does not have to be in a leadership position to be in a position to provide leadership” (p. 46).

Drath et al. (2008) “Leadership has been enacted and exists wherever and whenever one finds a collective exhibiting direction, alignment, and commitment” (p. 642).

Friedrich et al. (2009) “Multiple individuals within the team may serve as leaders in both formal and informal capacities” (p. 933).

DeRue (2011) “[Leadership is] a social interaction process where individuals engage in repeated leading-following interactions, and through these interactions, co-construct identities and relationships as leaders and followers ” (p. 126).

Morgeson et al. (2010) “Leadership is the vehicle through which [team needs] are satisfied, regardless of the specific leadership source” (p. 5).

Yukl (2010) “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 8).

Eberly et al. (2013) “We posit that what gives rise to the phenomenon of leadership is a series of often simultaneous event cycles between multiple loci of leadership” (p. 4).

Yammarino (2013) “Leadership is a multi-level... leader–follower interaction process that occurs in a particular situation (context) where a leader . . . and followers... share a purpose . . . and jointly accomplish things... willingly”
“Leadership is a social process that involves iterative exchange processes among two (or more) individuals” (p. 161).

In giving a balanced overview on the definition of leadership, an Islamic perspective should be taken into account. In Michael H. Hart’s book entitled “The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History”, Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] is listed as the first man of the world’s most influential persons over the human history. There are two reasons, according to Hart, as to why Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] was listed as number one: he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both of religious and secular levels. As leadership in Islam refers to the practices of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh], as well as his sayings which entails leadership as a guardianship, the best definition of leadership from an Islamic perspective is as follows in Table 2.

Table 2: Exemplar Definitions of Leadership from Islamic perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (year)</th>
<th>Leadership definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safi (1995)</td>
<td>“the capacity to mobilize a group of people towards a set of articulated goals, and to ensure their continuous cooperation for the realization of these goals” (p.206)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohd Yusof (1990)</td>
<td>“Leadership is the influence exerted by an individual in a situation directed towards achieving specific objective or objectives.” (p.204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badawi and Beekun (1999)</td>
<td>“… leadership in Islam is not reserved for a small elite. Rather, depending upon the situation, every person is the ‘shepherd’ of a flock, and occupies a position of leadership” (p.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andek Kelawa (1999)</td>
<td>“leadership in Arabic language covers a wide area and is not limited to state or racial (group) leadership, but extends to leadership in the fields of knowledge, worship as well as custody and guardianship of a trust.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan (2007)</td>
<td>“Leadership in Islam is considered as a trust and a responsibility. A leader is required to meet his obligations to God, the Supreme Power as well as to discharge his duties towards his followers to the best of his abilities.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The notion emergence of leadership’s definition in organisational structure has dwelled into the public domain, private and NGO respectively. For example, in an NGO leadership

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development, a comprehensive means in assisting to develop leadership capabilities for NGO is an urgent need which should consist the dimensions of NGO, effective NGO leaders and be alert on the changes of external development.\textsuperscript{14} As Hailey and James further explained, as NGO faces particular management challenges distinct from those faced by governments or for-profit organisations, an NGO has to ensure its readiness in facing future complexity mainly in leadership processes and managerial problems.\textsuperscript{15} In discussing the importance of leadership in Islamic movements including Islamic RNGOs, Yusuf al-Qardhawi and Sayyid Abul ‘ala Mawdudi has expressed their major concern on ‘leadership’ and prioritized it as an important element that must receive attention.

Considering global report on leadership from Edelman Trust Barometer 2016 and 2017 and Outlook on the Global Agenda 2015, leadership development for NGOs are critical in time. It is a must to distinct the roles of NGOs (including RNGOs), government and private sector as the former offers liquidity in leadership practices whilst both of the latter are strictly stringent in achieving vision and mission statement. Richard K. Ghere puts a comprehensive proposition on NGO leadership as \textit{distinguishable by its prevalent reliance on cognitive processes to transform altruistic aspirations into operational realities}.\textsuperscript{16}

\section*{LEADERSHIP CHARACTERS FOR RNGOS}

Character in leadership is essential despite the nature of organisational environment. It is believed that a leader with character can give an organisation a significant competitive advantage. In fact, Connaughton emphasizes that a leadership character is an antidote to an organisational fatigue, including in a care unit such as the hospital.\textsuperscript{17} In this paper, three leadership characters were chosen to be discussed further; and they are of charismatic leadership, transformational leadership and servant leadership. In author’s view, these three are much best to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
be practiced and to be applied in the context of NGO where religious teachings and beliefs are organisational principles and objective, or also known as RNGO.

**Charismatic Leadership**

According to Politis, charismatic leadership provides room for vision and energy to be applied through knowledge sharing within the organisation.\(^{18}\) However, it needs a cause to let out the charismatic attitude from leaders, as to Jayakody, the cause is the main factor, especially during crisis.\(^{19}\) Yet, Politis suggests that the culture that is embedded within a certain condition of the country, people and organisational structure should be taken into account as the crisis that occurs are diverse in numbers.\(^{20}\) For example, in Taiwan, researchers found that charismatic leadership has given significant impact on employee outcomes.\(^{21}\) Therefore, charismatic leadership can be perceived in terms of vision, risk-taking, challenges and encouragement; and energy and determination.\(^{22}\) But, it is far from being termed with ‘motivational’ leadership.\(^{23}\)

The term ‘charisma’ is mostly used in political discussion as a political leader who has substantial attributes can influence his or followers to execute his or her orders. House and Baetz defined a charismatic leader as a person who ‘by the force of their personal abilities are capable of having profound and extraordinary effects on followers.’\(^{24}\) In contrast to the idea of charismatic leaders are politicians, Willner insisted that charismatic leadership is neither personality-based nor contextually-determined, but rather the phenomenon was largely relational and perceptual.\(^{25}\) He later stressed that by saying, “It is not what the leader is but what people see the leader as that counts in generating the charismatic leadership.”\(^{26}\)

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21 Ibid. 8
Building up from the given definition and conceptual discussion, values in charismatic leadership are considered primary assessment. The values that entrench for charismatic leadership varies among different researchers. For example, some researchers tend to focus on the content of the vision and adapting communication style in delivering a speech as a key factor. Inversely to others, innovative strategic vision, showing identity to members’ needs, displaying unconventional behavior, risk taking and showing sensitivity to the environment are major values in charismatic leadership.\(^27\)

Due to that, charismatic leadership and its values are widely perceived by different organisational setting from public to private sectors. Despite sharing a common goal in delivering services to the mass in the setting of NGO and R NGO, charismatic leadership is shown to have significant impact on the factors of sensitivity to the environment, strategic vision and articulation, concern on members’ needs and status quo consideration.\(^28\) In fact, these values are not an alien to any religious teachings or principles, especially in Islamic circle of leadership theory.

From an Islamic point of view, there are two types of charismatic leaders; ethical charismatic leaders and unethical charismatic leaders. Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] are the best role model for the former, who used power for the benefit of mankind, learn from criticism, producing future leader after him and relying on himself on an internal moral standard. All of these can be seen in the Qur’anic versus and Prophet’s sayings that described about his companions lives are much influenced by him. Dissimilar to the former, the latter refers to those who are motivated by self-interest, opposing any views and criticism and lacking of moral code in their lives.\(^29\) In this sense, leaders of RNGOs should learn and be able to follow the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] in their leadership hierarchy which applauds views, as well as criticisms, and most importantly, to produce new leaders. By having a dynamism in RNGO’s operational system, a current leader should consider the following standard in organizing the next leader: organisational vision and mission are clearly articulated, organisation’s philosophy


that are based on volunteerism, promoting volunteerism among the youths, observing the multitaskers’ outcomes and giving rewards.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Transformational Leadership}

The four ‘I’s’ were always referred to in defining transformational leadership. They are: idealized charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration; where Bass (1995) and Avolio et.al (1991) are the pioneer researchers in transformational leadership discussion.\textsuperscript{31} Apart from them, Pastor and Mayo insisted that transformational leaders who are able to exert strong influence on followers by giving them a space of individualized consideration to discuss future possibilities that may lie within their self-sacrifice.\textsuperscript{32} In fact, transformational leadership is believed to help in encouraging the followers’ performance beyond an organisational expectations.\textsuperscript{33} Hence, the most central topic that surrounds transformational leadership is the ability to inspire and transform the followers towards a better ethical personality and self-development.

The important elements that would influence more in the transformational leadership are both personal and social identities, which later could affect self-esteem and self-worth of individuals. In that sense, individual-focused and group-focused is the most effected group as both being unique in terms of personality, vision, mission and objective; at the same time easy to be influenced or imitated by others.\textsuperscript{34} Based on these empirical evidences, RNGOs are the platform that offers individuals or group of people to enhance their ability into the next level by devoting themselves with arranged programmes. Engagement between leaders and subordinates, as well as the public are expected to be working greatly on a daily basis where zero bureaucracy are expected in the non-profit organisational setting like RNGO. For instance, one study reveals that NGOs with leaders who value similarities with peer organisations, grassroots approaches, diversity of strategies, dedication, professionalism and distributed organisational structures have

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 69-72
\end{footnotesize}
significantly higher reputations for effectiveness.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, the relationship between leaders and members within the organisation would indirectly enhance job performances.\textsuperscript{36}

**Servant Leadership**

There are numbers of interpretation on defining servant leadership. Since the term ‘servant’ is assembling the association of leaders with religious teachings or principles as devoting himself to God, Han \textit{et.al} has stressed the possibility that ‘servant leadership’ could be interpreted very differently according to official religions of the country such as Confucianism for China, Hinduism for India and Islam for Muslim countries.\textsuperscript{37} They had further identified that in China for example, prioritize the people’s interest, behave ethically, moral love, conceptual skills, building relationships, humility, be a dutiful person, devotion to Party policies and state laws and listening to public’s problems are the dimensions of servant leadership. These dimensions are a combination of components from Confucianism, Daoism and Communist ideology that bring forth the expression of servant leadership in China.\textsuperscript{38}

In another literature for servant leadership, for example in the United State of America (USA), the Enron and Worldcom scandal in the corporate sector has opened a lot of eyes, where they are proofs that servant leadership receives wide attention in the North American context; hence a great discussion and interpretation on it had occurred extensively since then. There are three dimensions that are workable in applying servant leadership to North American which are; work situation, followers or staffs and cultural judgments that are believed would be a parameter of the servant leadership effectiveness.\textsuperscript{39}

Servant leadership is a combination of two keywords: \textit{servant} and \textit{leader}. Robert K. Greenleaf was the first who questioned the possibility of both qualities in one person. Referring


to Hesse’s work, he said that ‘the great leader is seen as servant first’. 40 This statement was Hesse’s reflection when he was reporting to a figure named Leo in his Journey to the East. To him, Leo has shown a great personality as a servant, as well as the titular head of Order, a guiding spirit and a noble leader. 41 Later, due to his reading on Journey to the East in the time of leadership crisis, Greenleaf became aware of the importance of having more servants emerging as leaders and should follow only servant-leaders. 42

In general, scholars describe servant leadership as a behaviour or leader characteristics that includes humility, relational power, service-orientation, follower development, encouragement autonomy, altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom and organisational stewardship. 43 Other formulation that are available to explain the dimensions of servant leadership is a repetition and reflection of one’s understanding on the concept of servant leadership that is associated with a specific culture and religion. In other words, all traits that resembles servant leadership are within the following three major descriptions; service, humility and vision. 44 Additional to Greenleaf’s definition, Covey asserted that “the servant leadership concept is a principle, a natural law, and getting our social value systems and personal habits aligned with this ennobling principle is one of the great challenges of our lives.” 45 Hence, servant leadership is recognized as a valid and modern theory for organisational leadership including RNGO. 46

While most references on servant leadership denote Greenleaf’s works, the works of Badawi and Beekun are in the same degree for Islamic leadership framework. The idea of a leader as a servant, in Islamic literature, has been part of Islam since the beginning, which overturns Greenleaf’s finding. According to Beekun and Badawi, leaders are servants of their followers, therefore leaders seek the welfare of their followers and guiding them towards good and prevent from evils. This is in accordance with the sayings of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]:

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42 Ibid. 21.
“A ruler who has been entrusted with the affairs of the Muslims, but makes no endeavour (for the material and moral upliftment) and is not sincerely concerned (for their welfare) will not enter paradise along with them.”

In another Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] saying, he says:

“All of you are guardians and are responsible for your wards. The ruler is a guardian and the man is a guardian of his family; the lady is a guardian and is responsible for her husband’s house and his offspring; and so all of you are guardians and are responsible for your wards.”

Based on the two Prophet’s sayings above, it is explicitly clear that in an Islamic perspective, a leader is both a servant and guardian to his responsibilities that has been entrusted on his shoulder. In fact, leadership in Islam is rooted in belief and willing submission to the Only Creator, which is Allah. Being a leader in Islam, one should encompass four domains that would ensure himself in the parameter of Allah’s will. The four are Iman, Islam, Taqwa and Ihsan.

Though in Islam there is no specific term referring to leader as a servant or guardian, even so different terms are available in Al-Quran or hadith such as imamah, khalifah, imarah or ra’iyyah, hence the principles of leadership that offered in Islam which was shown by the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] should be a major concern of Muslim leaders in whatever organisational structure, mainly Islamic RNGO type.

AN OVERVIEW ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIAN ISLAMIC RNGOS

An RNGO is a formal organisation that embeds identities and missions from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions. The characteristics of an RNGO, as

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47 Reported Ibn ‘Umar, Sahih Bukhari. 7.128
48 Abu Hurairah. In Sahih Muslim. Hadith no.4542
detailed by Berger, has to operate on a nonprofit, independent, and voluntary basis to promote and realise articulated ideas collectively about the public good either at the national or international level, or in another word a ‘moral’ identity. It is interesting to note that, there are a rising number of NGOs that has articulated themselves with the mission or teachings from ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ traditions, or ‘faith-based’ understanding that is embedded in social activism or works. By having missions and objectives that are divinely guided and recognized by the sacred nature of human life, it would definitely be an added value to the identity of an RNGO. Due to religious leaders being easy to get close with the public, influencing their grassroots to achieve a better life, as well as being a committed individual to their cause.  

Saliha Hasan insisted that the rhythm of Malaysian NGOs establishment in 1970s are much concern on the ranges of collaborative actions to confrontational results and may change due to specific issue and moment of the people with the government for specific interests. Due to that, earlier organisations have witnessed by having intention of serving the circle of ethnic or religious communities which often associated with mosques, churches, temples, and other religious centers are the priority. The scenario of separation are also affected in the establishment of RNGOs, including Islamic organisations where racial identity become the main concern. 

As dated on March 2016, there are 1,215 organisations that have entailed their identity to Islam, hence categorizing them as an RNGO. 67 of these organisations are inserting the word ‘Da’wah’ as their primary objective. Three of them are Chinese-Muslim organisations, 55 are Indian-Muslim organisations, while the rest are Malay-Muslim organisations. Despite the unity agenda promoted in Islam, in practices, however, Malaysian Islamic RNGOs are disunited racially due to undefined circumstances such as communalism, where it is so engrained in Malaysian lives. Additionally, there are also language barriers that complicate racial-communications.

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Makmor Tumin gave an insightful explanation on the definition of NGO in the current context of Malaysia. He said that ‘the term NGO is used widely and readily for all bodies in Malaysia except political parties, labour unions, freemasons, cooperatives, military organisations, government bodies, and private organisations including several other small bodies’. From this wide definition, he has set a degree of differences to all officially registered societies as NGOs. Those not mentioned above are mainly political parties, for-profit organisations and military purposes. Another category of Malaysian NGOs have been enhanced by the great works of Tan Boon Kean and Bishan Singh into an advocacy-oriented NGOs and government-organized NGOs (GONGOs). To them, these two types of NGOs, though basing their objective on welfare-oriented and issue-oriented NGOs, which are not continuously aired up in the mainstream, is to be believed that they are seemingly apolitical welfare groups at one point and adopting a political stance at another critical time. Hence, it could be argued about these two types of NGOs is certainly in Makmor’s NGO definition, or could be eliminated for the reason of adopting political stance.

In respect of Malaysian NGOs development, with the range of motives of civil society such as agricultural extension activities, skills development, credit provision for the earlier groups, which later is followed by equal rights in education, language, culture for the Chinese, as well as religious group, mainly Islamic, are the flux that colours the landscape of Malaysian NGOs. Yet, referring them into the category of RNGO in a Malaysian perspective is a new study.

**Malay Muslim NGOs**

Prior to independence of Malaysia, Malays have witnessed new forms of associations emerging around the turn of century, mainly literary, social, religious and political. Meredith has given a brief topography of these organisations which in the first place was led by Malayo-Muslims (Arabs, Muslim Indians and Peranakans) rather than Malays. Due to economic competition from the Chinese led these Malayo-Muslims to involve in the administration like in...
NGO platform. For the Malays, it changed and encouraged gradually by the time of awareness in appealing to pursue economic development and cultural survival as Roff describes:

“Perhaps the most notable feature of the cultural welfare and progress associations was the way in which, despite their almost invariably local origins and circumscribed membership and their lack of direct contact with each other, they all practically without exception recognized the larger Malay society of which they were a part and spoke in holistic (if not necessarily nationalistic) terms of the task of improving the educational and economic status of the Malays within the plural society.”

With the cause of modern and educated Malays taking the lead in the main administrative sections in both government and private sectors, they has witnessed the emergence of ‘progress associations’ that encompasses social, recreational or welfare orientation, political associations with nationalist objective and economic associations as categorized by Meredith. Yet, all of them are not recognized specifically as (Islamic) NGO, though by definition in Malaysia Federal Constitution, the Malays are those who are profess Islam, speak the Malay language and practice the Malay customs.

Saliha Hassan has opined the idea that NGOs that are associated with Islamic principles and teachings as ‘Islamic and/or Islamic-oriented NGOs or IONGOs.’ This NGO specifically, IONGO is believed to appear to enjoy substantial grassroots goodwill among the Malay Muslim community that makes up 45 per cent of Malaysian population, which today has rose up to 59.3 per cent. In that sense, despite dominant Malay political parties like United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), Saliha has categorized IONGO into two dimensions which are government-sponsored Islamic NGOs and the da’wah movement.

Persatuan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (PERKIM), Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam (LKPI), Yayasan Dakwah Islam Malaysia (YADIM), Pergerakan Puteri Islam (PPI) and Institut

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62 Ibid.
Wasatiyyah Malaysia (IWM) are examples of the former, whereas Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM), Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia (IKRAM) and Sisters in Islam (SIS) are in the latter group.

The difference of the two can significantly be seen in enjoying the greater access to policy-making bodies, financial assistance and other facilities from the government like office, staffing and resources for the government-sponsored Islamic NGOs. In another word, it constrains them within the framework of what is politically correct for the ruling government, compared to non-government-sponsored Islamic NGOs who has got more freedom in making decisions, fund-raising, volunteerism and organisational objectives – which is a matter in this article, not the former.63 Currently, there is a new type of organisation which is acting as a think-tank to the government, and it operates seemingly like an RNGO. Let us take IKSIM and IWM for an example. They receive funds from the ruling government to conduct and publicize research that favours to government policies. Acknowledging the establishment of (Islamic) RNGO in Malaysia is due to promoting goodwill and preventing evils at large generally, yet the specific vision, mission and objectives of each organisation are diverging to different available target market.

ABIM and IKRAM are among the prominent and active RNGOs in the Malaysian context. Their presence in voicing out to seek equality treatment among Malaysian, to protect religious affairs, to defend educational system, to promote goodwill and to prevent evils are well known and has received wide attention from both national and international level. Both RNGOs work out to reach the public, as well as maintaining the relationship within the internal employees, which is based on organisational vision and mission statement. This paper seeks to explain on ABIM as a sole representative of the Malay-based Islamic RNGO in Malaysian context.

**Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)**

Established on August 6, 1971 and officially registered in the following year, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia or Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), makes it their objective to coordinate Muslim youth activism, with its outreach focusing primarily on educational activities in the early years. Later, ABIM began developing several vehicles for both
missionary and economic agenda as its primary activism, locally and internationally. Recognized as a youth organisation at the height of the global Islamic resurgence, ABIM was very much a product of its time. Against the backdrop of a staunchly secular government or in a modern term, a kleptocracy, ABIM sought to fill the gap by providing an avenue for the expression of Islamic ideals among Malaysia’s Muslim majority community. ABIM managed to enhance its religious legitimacy and gain international recognition by maintaining excellent relations with Islamic countries regardless of differences that exist in the Muslim world. As a pressure group in the domestic sphere, ABIM is actively working with all parties such as the government, NGOs and the public — Muslims and non-Muslims — to bring good and peace to all Malaysians.64

However, different views were seen by scholars on the process of ABIM establishment. For example, Mohd Fuad Mohd Salleh insists that some Malay Muslim scholars and supported by teachers, university students and government staff which all are inclined towards practicing Islamic teachings in daily life, are the cause to ABIM establishment on the early days.65 According to Shaharuddin Badaruddin, the British imperialism on Tanah Melayu that left them with dualistic thinking has resulted to the secularism understanding on the separation of religion and government, and it is a key factor as to why ABIM came into existence and was easily supported and accepted by the Malays, especially those with good education background.66 With their clear vision and mission statement, as well as their tagline, ‘agenda pembudayaan Islam’ (Islamic cultural agenda), ABIM is considered to be the most influential and significant national Muslim youth in the 1970s, claimed by Osman Bakar.67 He wrote that ABIM successfully embedded its organisational structure and members within five key elements that really shaped itself. There are inclusivity, pioneering, intellectually oriented, taking a middle position, and a hybrid of Eastern and Western ideological and worldview, which they brought down into a local context. Hence, the presence of ABIM as an Islamic NGO in the Malaysian context is really on time and it is believed that it could change the understanding and practice of Malay Muslims to follow according to Syariah law, in hopes to have a better living.

Prior to 46 years of ABIM’s existence, there is some evidence suggesting that ABIM has strong leadership characters until today. Started recruiting members and leaders from its university student platform called Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (PKPIM), it is proven that ABIM has the mechanism of organisational strength to be organized and is skillful in management. Referring to ABIM’s presidential line-up, there are seven people who have been the president; with the latest being Mohd Raimi Abdul Rahim. However, ABIM’s leadership was truly felt during the time of Anwar Ibrahim, the second president in 1974 to 1982. Despite receiving a very high reputation as an Islamic movement locally and internationally during Anwar’s time, his decision to join politics under the banner of UMNO has twisted ABIM’s direction then. Mohd Fuad emphasized that Anwar’s decision to join politics has indirectly sunk ABIM’s presence as jurubicara ummah or the voice of Muslims, and slowing down its participation in the national arena due to disbelief on Anwar’s decision. Apparently, this bitter situation faced by ABIM has indirectly made ABIM more mature in making decision on their leadership process.

Considering ABIM’s vision, “Membina dan memimpin tamadun dan khayra ummah”, the contribution of ABIM in developing national building process is significant. With a clear position to act as a non-partisan entity – neither to ruling nor opposition parties in Malaysian democracy system, ABIM has marked its presence by voicing out the interest of many in economics, education system, environmental issues, religious affairs and unity. Therefore, it can be seen under the current presidency, ABIM actively participate in numerous platforms to help government and its agencies by offering ideas, solutions and affirmative actions in order to solve and curb problems that exist today. For example, ABIM’s president is one of the committee member of Jawatankuasa Mempromosikan Persefahaman dan Keharmonian Antara Penganut Agama (JKMPKA), under the Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia for the next two years. This steering committee is developed to discuss and find a way to integrate Malaysian multiracial and multireligious people to unite, and the same time respect the differences. Through this platform, ABIM is actively organizing community programs, inter-faith dialogues and forums to promote a better understanding among the religious adherents. ABIM’s roles in Friendship Group Inter-
faith Services (FGIS), an inter-religious platform consisting six main religions in Malaysia – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sai Baba, Sikhism – is a proof that ABIM’s leadership is a step ahead within the circle of Malay-based Islamic NGO.

In 2015, ABIM’s leadership has been recognized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) as a youth NGO that has reached a high standard of organisational management and administration with ‘five stars’ scale. This is a big achievement for ABIM as an Islamic NGO, compared to other competitors that have more capabilities to win. This recognition is undoubtedly a reflection to leadership characters that enshrined from ABIM’s leaders as well as how they really lived with their vision and mission statement which can be translated into charismatic, transformational and servant leadership as the main characteristics.

**Chinese Muslim NGOs**

According to Hicks, Chinese organisations were developed in a wide range of locus since in the time of colonial Malaya such as clan organisations, commercial and industrial organisations, cultural bodies, political parties and privately funded organisations. Being actively involved in mining, plantation, agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, and retail and distribution sectors, are the key in shaping Malayan Chinese leadership that was led by successful merchant entrepreneurs. As time passed by, to sustain a leading group in the economic sector, these organisations were gradually turned into a political setting in response to nationalist and revolutionary group that occurred in China such as the Communist and the Kuomintang party. However, these groups excluded the minority group especially Chinese-Muslims who were converting from their original religion into Islam.

**Malaysian Chinese Muslims Association (MACMA)**

Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA) is the oldest organisation that represents the Chinese-Muslim community in Malaysia. Prior to its awareness, it is important to have an official organisation that understands well about the sociocultural background that is embodied in Chinese Muslims in the Malaysian context. MACMA officially registered on

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73 Meredith L. Weiss. 20.
September 8th, 1994. There were huge efforts given by some early Chinese Muslim professionals in order to register MACMA as an official NGO, especially in gaining strong support from then Minister in the Prime Minister Office, YB Dato’ Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman due to the increasing number of Chinese who reverted to Islam (or some called it converting) year by year. Therefore, the presence of MACMA was really helpful in promoting Islamic teachings towards new Chinese Muslims in the context of Chinese sociocultural understanding, as well as in the realm of Syāri‘ah circle directly. At the same time they would be more sensitive among Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims, and Chinese communities indirectly.

With strong support by many, it became imperative for MACMA to extend their accessibilities not only to the central of Malaysia such as Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, but to expand their offices. Due to enthusiasms that have embroiled within their volunteers, as well as their leadership, today, MACMA has expanded into 19 branches that cover all 13 states of Malaysia in five districts. One branch in Batu Pahat, Johor is currently waiting for approval from the Registrar of Society (ROS). Statistically, the members of MACMA in 2014 have increased to 2,586, from 2,560 in 2013 and 2,432 in 2012. However, there is no updated data for 2015 onwards.

Leadership in MACMA is divided into two segments for national and state level, as stated in MACMA’s new constitution. In every two years in their Annual General Meeting (AGM), members have a right to vote the new leadership and those who got elected, will be in position for the next two years. In 2015, Prof. Dr. Taufiq Yap Yun Hin became the third president of MACMA on the national level. The first president was Hj. Sulaiman Hon, followed by Datuk Dr. Mustapha Ma. The third president of MACMA, Prof. Dr. Taufiq Yap Yun Hin, was a well-known chemist and is recognized by International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), an international chemist union. He then received an award as a Fellow of Academy of Science Malaysia. As stressed by one of MACMA member, it is hoped that under the third president, MACMA will transform its presence into a global key player who has great mind

75 Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar and Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail. (2016). Sumbangan Organisasi Cina-Muslim Dalam Keharmonian Beragama di Malaysia: Tinjauan Terhadap Cabaran dan Peranan PERKIM dan MACMA. There is no updated data on MACMA’s membership as shown in the website.
settings that contributes to the development of Islam and be part of the world’s Muslim communities, not only as Chinese Muslims in Malaysian context.\textsuperscript{76}

Another contribution from Chinese Muslim leadership in Malaysia could be seen from how they develop their identities in the context of multiracial environment. To date, there are four mosques that were built on Chinese architectural and identities; all popularly known as ‘Masjid Cina’ or Chinese Mosque. The location of these mosques is in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan; Ipoh, Perak; Seremban, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka. The initiative to build these Chinese Mosques in Malaysia was originally inspired by the Niujie Mosque in Beijing, aging more than 1,000 years. The aim of these mosques is to act as translocal agent to the community where religious and social activities intersect. However, in terms of mosques’ management, it falls under the state law which it has to follow all related enactment such as the language of sermon, appointment of imam (prayer leader) and funds, which falls directly under the order of Sultan.

Contextually, the notion that MACMA leadership has to actively participate in the Malaysian development is really in time. It can be seen clearly from the recognition that MACMA’s members receives every year. For example, one of the members and volunteers of MACMA had received the Anugerah Tokoh Maal Hijrah, a special award given to those actively contributing in the da‘wah field in promoting goodwill and preventing evils, as well as effortlessly calling people to Islam, including leadership skills that entails along the process, neither state nor national level. This year, 1439 Hijrah, four of MACMA members have received numerous awards from the state of Kedah, Kelantan and Pulau Pinang.\textsuperscript{77}

In this sense, leadership characters in MACMA as one of the respected Islamic NGO is important to adopt and should be a central principle in delivering good services towards the community. Charismatic, transformational and servant leadership is well embedded in the works of MACMA leaders, volunteers and members. These characters are aligned with the vision and mission statement of MACMA since its establishment, and has reflected on the organizational effectiveness and achievement, not individual.

\textit{Indian Muslim NGOs}

\textsuperscript{77} \url{http://macma.my/main/} Accessed on 27th September 2017.
The Indian community has established themselves in an organisation since the time of colonial Malaysia. Caste, linguistic, economic and educational divisions are the parameter that defined their movement establishment, not homogeneous view of cultural identity or sense of belonging.\textsuperscript{78} Yet, the western-educated and professional minority has maintained prominence as an elite within the community, mainly in the aspect of income and access to power. According to Meredith, the earliest organisations within the Indian community are in the nature of religious, youth, social and guilds. In contrast, Rajoo then found that Indian organisations tend to stress on in-group identity and highlight differences across sub-communities. For example, the Indian Muslim community is well associated with the Malay Muslims rather than the Indian Hindus.\textsuperscript{79} Like Malay and Chinese communities, upon post-independence, Indian community has also became a key member in nation building process through their involvement in the political-based organisation. Yet, the Indian Muslim community was segregated from their agenda due to difference in religion and belief system. To date, there are 700,000 of Indian Muslims scattered in different fields such as businesses, restaurants, retails and religious affairs management.\textsuperscript{80}

**Pertubuhan Persekutuan India Muslim Malaysia (PERMIM)**

In the spirit of pooling different interests under one official umbrella instead of living in differences, as a minority Muslim in Malaysian context, early generation of Indian Muslims took a very good initiative by establishing *Persekutuan Pertubuhan India Muslim Malaysia* or Federation of Malaysian Indian Muslim Associations (PERMIM). PERMIM was officially registered in 1973, and acted as a sole NGO that represents the interests and rights of Malaysian Indian Muslims. Prior to its establishment, 40 social and religious organisations have been merged under PERMIM and fought for the interest of many.\textsuperscript{81}

Referring to PERMIM’s mission statement, there are three points that will lead this organisation to move forward. One of them clearly mentioned to be a research facility by offering services to envisage, as well as organise and implement activities to promote the

\textsuperscript{78} Meredith L. Weiss. 22.


religious, educational, economic, social and cultural well to its members and public.\(^{82}\) Considering the mission and programmes that is conducted by PERMIM along its establishment, it can be said that PERMIM is a type of Islamic NGO, which is not only driven by ethnic interests per se, but religious motives and teachings are implanted within the organisation and its members.

The current PERMIM’s leadership is led by Hj. Dhajudeen B. Shahul Hameed, President of PERMIM for 2016 to 2018. However, detailed information about this president was not made available in any channels including PERMIM’s official website. Despite such limited knowledge and report, the presence of PERMIM leadership is very much felt in the Indian Muslim development process in Malaysia. According to Budiwanti, building a mosque within their circle is a must and the first step to be taken was to unite all Indian Muslims under the spirit of Islam.\(^{83}\) Budiwanti further explained that six mosques has been identified that were built with Indian architectural; with the oldest one located in Malacca, *Masjid Tengkera* and *Masjid Kampung Klling*, followed by *Masjid Kapitan Keling* in Penang and *Masjid Sultan Kelana* in Klang, Selangor. Surprisingly, in Kuching, Sarawak, there is one Indian Mosque that it is believed to be built on 1837. In 2014, according to reports, the Sarawak state government agreed to relocate and rebuild this historical mosque to a new venue, sitting on the Sarawak River along the Sarawak Waterfront Esplanade. The project will take 18 months to complete and would be ready by 2018.\(^{84}\)

Thus, these huge contributions from PERMIM and its involvement in spreading out the teachings of Islam and all its principles are undeniably driven by a strong leadership that encroach all leadership characters as discussed earlier. Nevertheless, a deeper and focused study has to be conducted in the future since information on PERMIM is very limited and not well-studied academically.

**CONCLUSION**

This writing is intended to re-conceptualize the understanding of leadership characters accordingly in the new landscape and presence of Malaysian Islamic NGOs. All three selected


\(^{83}\) Budiwanti, Erni. (2012). “Malaysian Indian Muslim’s Oscillating Identity: Swinging Between Home and Host Countries”.

Islamic RNGOs are chosen on the basis of different racial backgrounds, years of establishment, clear vision and mission statement, contribution towards Islamic development, as well as having a strong leadership line-up. It is proven from the literature review that the leadership characteristics which are charismatic, transformational and servant leadership, is well adopted and practiced by these Islamic RNGOs. Thus, it was traversing the racial limitations, but raising the values of Islamic principles and reaching in organisational and leadership arrangement.

In respect to the disputable and no end discussion on defining the meaning of leadership, these three Islamic RNGOs, however, is well managed and constructively executing all vision and mission towards its members and the public. The best explanation on the application of those three leadership characters can be seen from the outcomes, contributions and recognitions that the organisation and its members have received, which will benefit people at large regardless of their origin. Therefore, the three leadership characters as discussed could be proposed as a yardstick to effective RNGO leadership development in the future.
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