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THE TUNKU, *RAHMAH*, AND ISLAM IN MALAYSIA: RECONSTRUCTING TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN'S "MOSQUE MODEL" FOR MALAYSIAN MUSLIMS

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ABSTRACT

Tunku's relationship to Malaysia and Islam are frequently divorced in discussion, separating Tunku's commitment to Islam from his commitment to Malaysia. This paper attempts to bridge the gap, looking at Tunku's model for Malaysian Muslims and how this relates to Malaysia as a whole. The paper presents Tunku's 'mosque model', using the analogy of a mosque to reconstruct Tunku's four-part model for the Malaysian Muslim community. After an introduction and an overview of the theoretical framework, the paper examines the first dimension of the model, namely the role of *rahmah* (loving compassion) as the model's spiritual core. It then examines the model's conceptual foundation, dealing with the notion of brotherhood as discussed in Maulana Muhammad Ali's book *The Religion of Islam* and in Tunku's writings. This is followed by the model's structural dimension, looking at how Tunku's work at PERKIM involved creating structures that applied these conceptions of brotherhood to a Malaysian context. Finally, the paper analyses Tunku's personal example, a dimension that ultimately determined the model's success. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the key themes, a comment on the challenges involved in applying Tunku's model today, and a note of hope for the possibilities the model offers.

Keywords: Tunku Abdul Rahman, Islam, Malaysia, *rahmah*, compassion, brotherhood

INTRODUCTION

In an atmosphere in which extremes govern attitudes and political orientations, there is a tendency to think in terms of binary opposites. The intensification of Malay Nationalism and so-called 'political Islam' has produced a realm of discourse where false antitheses – *Bumiputra*/*non-bumiputra*, Muslim/non-Muslim, Islamic state and secular state – inform our thinking, and by extension our history. Tunku Abdul Rahman is a figure whose legacy has been caught up in this unfortunate state of affairs, with his depiction varying depending on one's political affiliation. However, Tunku's relationship to Islam transcends any simple analysis, with Tunku applying his Islamic principles to a Malaysian context in a way that can potentially be emulated by other Malaysian Muslims. This paper examines Tunku's model for Malaysian Muslims, showing how Tunku's life provided a 'mosque model' for Malaysian Muslims to follow. After a brief explanation of the overall approach, the paper uses the analogy of a mosque to examine four key elements, namely the spiritual, conceptual, social and personal dimensions of Tunku's life as a Malaysian Muslim. Throughout the paper, it is argued that Tunku's model is centred on the notion of *rahmah* (loving compassion) and brotherhood. However, the compassion and brotherhood in

question are not in any way restricted to one's co-religionists. Rather, Tunku's model is built upon a universal love for all, a love that has its roots in the One God and which Tunku learnt through the religion of Islam. The article also shows that Tunku's commitments as a Muslim and his commitment to Malaysia were not divorced from each other. Instead, I show that the two commitments were intertwined, with Tunku's religious outlook coinciding with his desire for a happy Malaysia. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the key ideas, but also draws our attention to some of the obstacles that lie in the way of applying Tunku's model today. However, the paper ends on a note of hope, arguing that Tunku's model remains a shining possibility for us in the midst of challenging times.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CONCEPT OF A "MOSQUE MODEL"

What exactly is the 'mosque model', and why adopt such an approach in the first place? By putting forward the notion of a mosque model, I am *not* in any way suggesting that Tunku had a definite program for Malaysian Muslims. However, Tunku's writings and activities demonstrate a particular attitude and approach toward the application of Islam in a Malaysian context. As analogies are often helpful, I have decided to use the analogy of a mosque to organize and explain the relationship between Tunku and Islam. The model is divided into four parts: the spiritual core, the conceptual 'foundation', the 'structural' dimension, and the role of the 'worshipper'. The first section does not pertain specifically to the analogy of the mosque, but refers to the spiritual core of *rahmah* (loving compassion) that lies at the centre of Tunku's model. The second section deals with the 'foundation' of the mosque model, namely the key concept of brotherhood that Tunku propagated and which informed his welfare work. The third section deals with the social application of brotherhood, with Tunku working to make this ideal a reality through the creation of structures that include institutions and programmes. Finally, the last section explores the role of the 'worshipper', examining how Tunku's personal example as a loving and compassionate human being is central to fulfilling the aims of the mosque model. This last section is not mere sentimentality or an attempt to simply restate Tunku's well-known characteristics as a kind and gentle man. Rather, I show how the personal realization of virtue relates to the Islamic conception of justice, which forms part of the ideal of brotherhood.

Methodologically, the article focuses mainly on reconstruction, with various sources being used to reconstruct the Tunku's approach to Islam in Malaysia. The article draws heavily upon Tunku's writings, as well as first-hand written and oral accounts concerning the Tunku. Authorised biographies of the Tunku are also used to supplement the secondary source material. These various sources are situated within the framework of the "mosque model", which categorises the sources and places them in relation to each other. In addition to reconstruction, the article interprets the source material in light of two concepts drawn from Islamic discourse: *rahmah* and "brotherhood". The concept of *rahmah* is understood to mean "loving compassion", for reasons that will be elaborated upon shortly. The term "brotherhood" – a term used by both Tunku and Maulana Muhammad Ali – has no gender-specific connotations, but is understood to refer to encompass the whole Islamic faith community, irrespective of gender or ethnicity.

In proposing such a model, one is immediately reminded of Tunku's desire to avoid exaggerated claims concerning his life. Speaking in 1989, he told a group of journalists not to "make …[him] out to have been a saint", adding jokingly, "You journalists are very creative, but that would take some doing" (Amin, 2017: 66). This paper does not claim that Tunku had reached the station of sainthood. Rather, it is an assertion that Tunku provided a model for being a Malaysian Muslim, applying universal Islamic principles to the unique context of Malaysia. It should be noted that we are speaking here of Malaysia, and not the 'Malay World' or the '*Nusantara*'. As the rest of the paper will show, Tunku was not merely seeking to recreate a glorious past, free from the effects of multiple colonial encounters. Rather, he was applying timeless and perennial principles to the particular phenomenon of Malaysia, a socio-political entity whose demographics and historical experiences present a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Due to the scope of this essay, I will limit my analysis largely to the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on Tunku's work with PERKIM (The Islamic Welfare Society of Malaysia) during that period. However, it should be noted that Tunku's model extends beyond this time period and his work with PERKIM, encompassing not only his international involvement in Islamic organisations but also his role as a statesman more generally. In examining this model, it becomes clear that the usual separation made between Tunku's civic and religious life is a false one, and that being fully Muslim can also entail being fully Malaysian. However, a thorough understanding of this model requires us to examine the universal principle that would shape the circumstances surrounding Tunku's birth: the principle of *rahmah*, or loving compassion.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER: *RAHMAH* AS THE MODEL'S SPIRITUAL CORE

At the heart of Tunku's model lies the spiritual core of *rahmah*, with 'loving compassion' serving as the key factor that originates and ultimately defines the model. As we shall see when examining the role of 'the worshipper', the effective functioning of Tunku's model is dependent upon good character, which is the realization of virtue within oneself. Yet even before discussing this point, we need to recognize the centrality of *rahmah* – loving compassion – and the role it plays in informing Tunku's perspective. The notion of *rahmah* is one of the central components of Islam, being identified with both God and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Though it is often translated as 'mercy', the word's trilateral roots (*r-h-m*) connect to "the meaning of love" (Shah-Kazemi, 2010: 94). Moreover, the Prophet (SAW) personally made a link between a mother's love and God's *rahmah* at the conquest of Mecca. Commenting on a mother who had been united with her baby in the midst of the battle, the Prophet (SAW) declared to his companions: "Do you think this woman would cast her child into the fire? … God is more lovingly compassionate (*arham*) to His servants than is this woman to her child" (Shah-Kazemi, 2010: 94). As Reza Shah-Kazemi points out, *rahmah* is here identified "by reference to a quality which all can recognize as love", with "acts of compassion and mercy stream[ing] from an overwhelming inner love" (Shah-Kazemi, 2010: 94). Moreover, love, compassion, and mercy are not *superficial* emotions, possessing existential and metaphysical implications that exceed the scope of this essay (Shah-Kazemi, 2010: 92). What must be borne in mind here is that *rahmah* – translated by Shah-Kazemi as "loving compassion" – is not merely a cosmetic exercise, or even a velvet glove upon the hand of justice (Shah-Kazemi, 2010: 94). Rather, it is a critical component in determining the effectiveness of any level of the model, be it conceptual, structural, or personal. As the following account demonstrates, the principles of love and mercy shaped Tunku early on in his development.

The principle of *rahmah* is strikingly evident in the circumstances surrounding Tunku's birth and in his upbringing more generally. These events would go on to shape Tunku's character and perspective, thereby influencing the model he developed. Tunku was conceived as part of a response by his mother, Menjalara, to an appeal for help. The Sultan of Kedah had imprisoned the Keeper of the Ruler's Seal on charges of corruption, a crime whose traditional sentence involved "[the] execution of the Keeper and the amputation of the right thumb of the Keeper's wife and children" (Sheppard, 1984: 27). In response to the desperate appeals of the Keeper's family, Menjalara lied to the Sultan by telling him she was pregnant. According to Malay superstition, disfiguring others would deform the child, and the Sultan chose to delay and eventually lighten the sentence in question. The child that was conceived in the midst of this incident was Tunku himself, and Menjalara maintained that "the compassion and mercy … associated with her son's birth … had a lifelong influence on his character" (Sheppard, 1984: 27). The incident is significant for two primary reasons. Firstly, it indicates the extent to which *rahmah* was a part of Menjalara's character. Menjalara did not merely stop at appealing to the Sultan for mercy. Instead, she risked her own marriage and status in the palace, placing her bets on an exceedingly risky gamble (Sheppard, 1984: 27). We can thus conclude that Tunku was shaped by a woman whose *rahmah* encompassed self-sacrifice, qualities that she would pass on to her son. Secondly, Menjalara's decision to continually repeat this story indicates the virtues she wished to cultivate in her son. As Tunku himself notes, Menjalara "never tired of telling" the tale, recounting it "even when …[he] grew up" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 354). This indicates a conscious attempt by Menjalara to mould her son in accordance with the quality of *rahmah*, instilling in him the reminder that loving compassion was an essential part of his nature. Moreover, Tunku's mention of this story is almost immediately followed by his mother's emphasis on service, with Menjalara continually reminding all her children that they "owed duties to …[their] people" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 354). The man was thus raised on the importance of duty, while always having the element of love clearly in place. Hence, we could say that love and service informed Tunku's perspective from an early stage in his life, eventually informing the conceptual foundation that he would lay down for Malaysian Muslims.

A STRONG FOUNDATION: BROTHERHOOD AS THE MODEL'S CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

The conceptual foundation of Tunku's model is centred mostly on the concept of brotherhood, which involves loving those in one's faith and human beings in general. Forging these bonds of love requires the recognition of equality and the fostering of acceptance, elements that place certain demands upon us in relation to society. The 'conceptual foundation' refers to the core concepts that form the base of the structure, determining its overall pattern and supporting the building. A foundation's significance lies in its ability to support the structures built thereafter. A building with a strong foundation can be rebuilt in the wake of disaster; a building with a weak foundation is a disaster waiting to happen. Thus, the ability to lay a strong foundation affects the safety of both the inhabitants and those in the periphery. The foundation also places certain limits upon the structures, for the building cannot deviate too far from these pre-existing limits.

In examining Tunku's life, one could say that he created a conceptual base in two ways. The first was through the active dissemination and publication of certain works, specifically

Maulana Muhammad Ali's *The Religion of Islam*. Tunku wrote that he had "made a thorough study" of the work, saying that he "learned something about Islam from his [Ali's] writing" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 122). We also know that Tunku distributed the work "at …[his] own expense", photocopying more when he "could not get enough copies to distribute" and giving them for free "to people who want[ed] to know about Islam" (Das, 2001: 8-9). Secondly, Tunku promoted certain ideas through his writings, with a number of themes consistently recurring over a variety of articles, speeches and conversations. Tunku himself made clear that "[his] writings and speeches … laid stress and emphasis on peace and goodwill among men" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 131-2), with the hope that his words would "help to benefit posterity" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: Foreword). We should note that Tunku's statements did not exist in a vacuum. They were set within the political, social, and cultural context of the period, and were often responses to specific events. Tunku himself made this clear when speaking of religious violence in Baling, saying that he had prayed to God for guidance in order to "pour out my heart to the people in the hope that they will pay more attention to good reason" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: Foreword). However, these writings remain relevant today as they pertain to the essential dimensions of Islam. Rather than writing from a high intellectual standpoint, Tunku maintains a simple style, making these ideas accessible to a wide audience. One thinks of Adibah Amin's comment regarding his oratorical style: "He talks simply, sincerely, unadorned save for dashes of gentle humour" (Amin, 2017: 63).

In Tunku's model, brotherhood involves the forging of bonds of love between human beings, both within one's faith community and with humanity as a whole. This process involves both the recognition of equality before God, and the ability to embrace others in acceptance. According to Maulana Muhammad Ali, the "living brotherhood of man" is one of Islam's greatest achievements, with the '*qiblah*' (the focal point of the canonical prayer) representing the "unity of purpose …[that] forms the basis on which rests the brotherhood of Islam" (Ali, 1990: 282 & 286). For Tunku, the religion's "claim to the brotherhood of Islam" is one of its "greatest assets", with Tunku repeatedly discussing its importance (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 114). However, both these men defined brotherhood in wider terms than merely community membership. Brotherhood involves recognizing the equality of all human beings, whose souls are from God and whose bodies are but clay. For Maulana Muhammad Ali, the congregational prayer is one of the principal means whereby social differences are levelled. By prescribing a prayer that requires human beings to stand "shoulder to shoulder" in ranks before their Creator, Muslims are regularly reminded that they all stand equal before God regardless of worldly differences (Ali, 1990: 267). This produces a "levelling of social differences", with "[d]ifferences of rank, wealth and colour vanish[ing] within the mosque" to produce "brotherhood, equality and love" (Ali, 1990: 267). Speaking of a conversation he had whilst studying in Britain, Tunku asserted that Islam provided a "brotherhood of men of faith, irrespective of race and colour" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 113). However, the lessons derived from the prayer extend beyond the mosque "as foundations for the unification of the human race and of the lasting civilization of mankind" (Ali, 1990: 267). Speaking of the significance of the five daily prayers as a "break" from one's "daily routine … [to] have communion with God", Tunku expresses a similar sentiment: "Unless man is reminded of his duty to God he will never think of his fellowmen" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 130).

However, both men were aware that though Islam had made the ideal of brotherhood a reality through prayer, Muslim communities often created other obstacles to the realization of that ideal. Speaking of "[t]ribal and sectarian mosques", Ali makes it clear that "no one has the right to

prohibit Muslims of a certain persuasion or sect from entering it", citing the Qur'anic verse "And who is more unjust than he who prevents men from the mosques of Allāh, from His name being remembered in them, and strives to ruin them?" (2 : 114). Ali also raises the issue of *pardah* that prevents women in some Muslim countries from entering mosques, using evidence to show how "[t]here was no such question in the Prophet's time, when women freely took part in religious services", forming "a line behind the men" that was unseparated by "any screen or curtain" (Ali, 1990: 278-8). Tunku covers similar areas, but uniquely deals with the difficulties faced by Malaysian converts in terms of their inclusion in the Muslim community. Speaking of PERKIM's work, Tunku maintained that it was "very necessary … to separate Islam as a religion from …any particular race", in order that converts might "reserve their racial identity … without fear of losing that identity" (Abdul Rahman, 1976b: 3). He adds by way of an aside: "In the past our Malay people have not been able to do that" (Abdul Rahman, 1976b: 3). The notion that new Malaysian Muslims could not enter into jobs "reserved for bumiputras" was bewildering to Tunku, who saw this attitude as "completely contrary to the teachings of Islam" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 247). These attitudes produced a double alienation, with new Muslims being "[n]ot only lost in the society to which they once belonged" but "also lost in the society where they now belong – the Muslims" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 247). Tunku was adamant that he "would carry out a lone crusade to fight for these new Muslims, whose cause I will take to the end of my days" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 247). This was not mere rhetoric. As the rest of the model will show, Tunku would keep his word, caring for new converts, other neglected Muslims, and humanity more generally.

This emphasis upon *humanity* is critical, for accepting the principle of equality also involves the recognition that "mankind is but a single family" (Ali, 1990: 342). Islam's "[u]nification of the human race through Divine service" is not merely a confirmation, but an affirmation of the fact that all human beings are the children of Adam (Ali, 1990: 267). Ali asserts that there is a link between the Islamic doctrine of Divine unity and the unity of mankind, rooting human fraternity in a metaphysical truth. The Unity of God does not merely cut human beings off from various forms of slavery (Ali, 1990: 114). It also reminds human beings of the fact that God is ***Rabb al-'Alamin***, Lord of the Worlds (Ali, 1990: 115). Ali takes this to mean that God gives "equal care" to "all the nations of the world … bringing all to their goal of completion by degrees" (Ali, 1990: 115). This care is not merely physical, but encompasses "spiritual sustenance" granted to all communities (Ali, 1990: 115). As Ali notes, God has provided all communities not only with physical sustenance, but also "His spiritual sustenance, His revelation" (Ali, 1990: 115). This is not a modern relativization of religion, but merely a recognition of the truths contained in the Qur'an, with Ali quoting the following verses: "And for every nation there is a messenger" (10:47) and "There is not a people but a warner has gone among them" (35:24) (Ali, 1990: 115). Moreover, Ali asserts that God "hearkens to the prayers of all … is equally merciful to all and forgives the sins of all" (Ali, 1990: 115). Ali reminds his readers that God created human beings "all alike, in the Divine nature", and reminds them that the Qur'an asserts: "Mankind is a single nation" (2:213) (Ali, 1990: 115). This perspective may explain why Tunku had little difficulty accepting that other religious traditions could benefit humanity, saying, "all religions teach mankind to do good and do no evil" (Abdul Rahman, 1987: 2). Elsewhere, Tunku asserted that Islam's values – "peace, love, co-operation" and many more – are "human virtues" that "are accepted by all decent men, irrespective of race or religion" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 97-8). As shall be seen later, Tunku was insistent that his organizations not engage in religious chauvinism, and that they recognize the principle that humanity is but a single nation. We can thus see that the 'brotherhood of Islam' is not a communalistic and arrogant elevation of one's own faith community above the needs of

others. Rather, it is a recognition that humankind is but one community, and that "religions are intended to work for the good of man" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 130). Brotherhood in Islam is not about being a card-carrying member of a religious group; it is about realizing that "Islam stands for peace and goodwill among men" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 125).

Hence, the notion of brotherhood that lies at the foundation of the model is one rooted in love, a universal love that encompasses one's faith community and all of humanity. However, there is also an implicit imperative that these principles must be applied on the social level. Just as prayer "awaken[s]… the latent energies of the human soul", the notion of brotherhood demands the need to act upon that brotherhood (Ali, 1990: 279). The foundation is ultimately the base for the building above, for as Maulana Muhammad Ali notes: "Without the mosque, the mere teaching of the brotherhood of man would have remained a dead letter" (Ali, 1990: 282).

BUILDING TO LAST: THE 'STRUCTURAL' DIMENSION AND THE SOCIAL APPLICATION OF BROTHERHOOD

The mosque model's 'structural' dimension involves the application of the principle of brotherhood to the social sphere through organized and coordinated efforts. The 'structures' created encompass both institutions and programs, designed to address specific social needs in a systematic manner. Speaking of the prayer's function, Maulana Muhammad Ali notes, "no idea can live unless there is an institution to keep it alive" (Ali, 1990: 269). For the social application of brotherhood to be effective, structures need to be devised. Though the foundational principle of brotherhood is universal, the structures need to be fashioned according to the particular social context of the time in order to be effective. Traditional mosques in the Muslim world clearly demonstrated this principle; while they shared common aspects, they always took on a variety of forms depending on the context. Tunku's writings demonstrate his awareness that the application of Islam required an understanding of the situational context. In particular, Tunku criticized the inability of religious departments to effectively evaluate the social contexts around them, a flaw that led at best to ineffective communication, and at worst to harsh interpretations of Islamic law (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 125). By contrast, each of the structures developed by Tunku addressed particular welfare needs, applying universal principles to the demands of the present. As the following examples demonstrate, the principle of brotherhood was understood as applying to Muslims in particular and to humanity in general.

Tunku's welfare structures encompassed systematic ways of providing assistance to others, both within the Muslim community and to the wider Adamic family. Tunku's work amongst Muslims was largely connected to PERKIM. PERKIM had been founded in 1960 as part of Mubin Sheppard's response to the absence of a Muslim missionary organisation in Kuala Lumpur, with the Irish convert being intent on spreading Islam throughout Malaya. However, PERKIM's missionary activity was not merely about increasing formal religious membership. Rather, PERKIM saw Islam as a solution to attaining *national* unity, convinced that "the Muslim religion, if effectively explained and introduced with a liberal outlook, would prove to be the best and probably only genuine unifying factor in Malaya" (Sheppard, 1979: 241). Tunku was involved with PERKIM from this early stage, encouraging Sheppard to obtain "support … from prominent

Muslims in other parts of the Peninsula", and using his old Selangor Residency to hold the organization's foundational meeting (Sheppard, 1979: 240). However, it was only after he had left the political arena that Tunku was able to fully dedicate his energy to increasing PERKIM's effectiveness as an organization, assuming the role of president in 1975 (Gill, 1990: 98).

On the one hand, Tunku helped to increase the organisation's welfare involvement with the marginalized segments of the Muslim community, particularly with regards to Muslim converts. Sheppard had already been aware of the challenges faced by converts, noting that a Chinese convert would often be "ostracised by other members of his community", and would potentially lose employment if he worked in a Chinese firm (Sheppard, 1979: 241). The problem lay in the fact that entry into Islam was synonymous with becoming Malay, due partially to "the insistence by Religious Affairs Departments that a convert should be registered with a Muslim personal name and that the words *"bin Abdullah"* ", eliminating the Chinese family name that was part of a convert's family legacy (Sheppard, 1979: 241). PERKIM's early solution to this phenomenon had been to issue conversion certificates that kept the convert's original surname, and asking the heads of Religious Departments to follow suit. These efforts demonstrate an attempt to deal with the alienation problem on a *systemic* level, altering aspects of the existing system that reinforced misconceptions. Nonetheless, name changes were only a start, and Tunku attempted to deal with the economic hardship of new converts by seeking employment for them. However, the comments quoted earlier suggest that Tunku lacked success in this arena, due to the stubborn insistence that the jobs he sought were reserved for *bumiputras*. As the rest of this section will show, Tunku's Islamic welfare work was marked by a firm stance against the notion of racial superiority, and a belief that Malaysian Muslims needed to separate religious life from racial identity.

The other issue faced by converts was education, with newcomers often being given very little in the way of guidance once entering the faith. The lack of information and guidance given to converts was a major concern for Tunku, who stated in 1983 that the State Government should assist their organization "by providing religious classes …[and] religious teachers " through the funds collected for religious purposes by the state (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 121). PERKIM had been doing its best to provide classes, but had been unable to do this in more accessible areas due to a lack of funds. Consequently, converts often had to fend for themselves, potentially rendering "their conversion to Islam … meaningless" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 121). Regardless of whether the official religious departments heeded the call, Tunku had already placed a great deal of effort in providing alternative means of education for converts. PERKIM's publications had not been restricted to Malay, but had included a range of languages, publishing books in English, Chinese, and Tamil (Abdul Rahman, 1976b: 3). This reflected a nuanced understanding of 'accessibility', with Tunku asserting that there was a need to "transmit Islam through the language of those people [i.e. converts]" (Abdul Rahman, 1976b: 3). PERKIM's efforts at education extended to opening a bookshop that "stocked [books] dealing with religion", which had titles available in Malay, Indonesian, English and Chinese (Abdul Rahman, 1976a: 2). However, providing materials was no substitute for guidance, and Tunku took the initiative to set up a "club for converts" in Penang (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 121). Other than Tunku's stated aim of providing religious classes, these clubs would also have provided converts with a support system, allowing them to forge bonds with fellow Muslims without feeling out of place (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 121). Tunku also made a proposal that all PERKIM members "adopt, as a friend, a new convert and enlighten him on the religion of Islam as best he could" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 122). Such a plan would have not merely have allowed converts to have a personal guide, but would also have provided a means for them

to be connected to the larger Muslim community. Though it is unclear if this final proposal went through, Tunku's efforts demonstrate that he did not provide blanket solutions to complex problems. Rather, he examined the particular struggles faced by Malaysian converts, and sought to remedy them through carefully tailored solutions.

However, Tunku's work in the Muslim community was not limited to the needs of converts alone. Due to the wide-ranging scope of the help he provided, what follows can only be a preliminary sketch of Tunku's social involvement. One critical area that PERKIM tackled was drug addiction, with Tunku personally visiting a rehabilitation centre in Ipoh and creating solutions to help addicts reintegrate into society. To provide spiritual guidance to the boys, Tunku asked permission to bring in religious teachers, who "answered all questions they were asked about religion and other social matters" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 280). The positive effects of this initial move lead to PERKIM's greater involvement with the boys. One of Tunku's choices indicates his sensitivity to the situation. Tunku found a teacher who had been a former addict himself to "work and live with the inmates and be a permanent member of the Centre's staff", thus placing the boys in contact with someone who could identify with their struggles on an experiential level (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 282). In addition, he also worked to build a PERKIM "work centre" to house ostracized converts and recovering drug addicts (Amin, 2017: 65). Tunku also assisted their economic re-entry, working to "build a petrol station and a car wash" near the work centre that would "provide employment for the people living in the work centre" (Amin, 2017: 65). We also know that by October 1976, PERKIM had a Drug Centre, which the government was planning to take over (Abdul Rahman, 1976a: 1). Tunku also expressed concerns for the youth, whom he felt were losing their way and "discarding the custom of religion to the wind" (Abdul Rahman, 1976a: 1). Hence, there was a plan to open up "a club for youth in the fashion of the YMCA, to take care of the youth in Kuala Lumpur". This club was to be run by Encik Yakob bin Abdul Rahman who had already "done much work in the rehabilitation of drug addicts" (Abdul Rahman, 1976a: 1). However, it is unclear if this last plan materialized.

There were also attempts to deal with the issue of living conditions. Though the documents make the exact context unclear, it seems that, around August-September 1974, Tunku delivered a speech for the official launch of *Syarikat Kerjasama Perumahan dan Kebajikan Islam*. It seems that the organization planned to open a *perkampongan* (village) consisting of Malay and Chinese Muslims, with a school, market, mosque, and playground (Abdul Rahman, 1974a: 2-3). This was to be a Muslim neighbourhood, with an important qualification: there had to be an equal percentage of Malay and Chinese Muslims living in the area (Abdul Rahman, 1974a: 5). Hence, it seems that this project was a trial attempt to forge a multi-racial Muslim community by beginning on a small scale. Here, the unifying factor would not be ethnicity or culture, but faith. This aim is made clear in the September speech, where the stated intention is to bring born Muslims and converts together in an area where they will jointly worship, socialize and take care of each other, and in which their children will grow (Abdul Rahman, 1974b: 2). This is seen as a road (*jalan*) that will bring multi-racial inhabitants (*pendudok yang berbilang kaum*) together in a spirit of understanding and respect, destroying the barriers that had been put in place by colonialism (*menghapuskan perbatasan antara kaum yang telah dibina oleh penjajah*) (Abdul Rahman, 1974b: 2). This last statement presents an interesting perspective. Rather than viewing the Muslim village solely in relation to his diverse faith community, the Tunku also sees the village as an opportunity for removing a national problem, namely Malaysia's colonial legacy of racial division. We thus see

a complex relationship emerging, one in which the Tunku's commitment to the Muslim community becomes intertwined with his commitment to the broader Malaysian public.

The sheer range of these projects may provide the impression that Tunku was merely interested in serving the needs of Malaysian Muslims, even if Malaysia was never divorced from this aim. However, Tunku's Islamic welfare work extended to all of humanity, with many of PERKIM's services and structures catering to people irrespective of faith. Two examples are worth mentioning in this regard. The first was the opening of Tasputra PERKIM, an organization that has now become well known for its efforts at providing care to handicapped children. Described by Tunku as "the first Islamic non-profit making day care centre", the organization was meant to cater to "handicapped children of all nationalities and religion[s]", thus assisting the tasks of working parents who found themselves in that situation (Abdul Rahman, year unknown: 1). From its inception, the organization has not merely housed the children, but cared for them using a variety of therapy methods (Norman, 2018). Though Tunku did not provide the bulk of the financial contribution, his decision to support the project and to allow it to bear his name indicates his clear support for the organisation's cause (Abdul Rahman, year unknown: 1). However, Tunku's priorities can also be seen in the free clinics provided by PERKIM. Other than inviting patients to make a donation, PERKIM's clinics paid for all expenses, including "the medicine and … allowances" of those attending to patients (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 120-1). In keeping with the Islamic spirit of helping all humanity, these free clinics were "open to all irrespective of race or religion" (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 120-1).

However, it is also interesting to note that those who worked at the clinics were not necessarily Muslims, with Tunku specifically mentioning a lady named Dr. Puan Manjit Gill in relation to her contributions to the clinics (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 120-1). Hence, this was not merely a volunteer club open only to Muslims, providing services to present an *image* of social responsibility. Rather, Tunku's priority was to provide the best possible health care to the surrounding society, regardless of where that help came from. This reflects a community-driven rather than communalistic mentality, in which the benefit of the larger community takes precedence over all other considerations. We may also note that Tunku's initial and continued involvement in the welfare of drug addicts was in a multi-faith context. Having catered to "the welfare of Muslims", Tunku was working to "[take] into consideration the fate of others, … seriously in need of help" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 282). While it seems PERKIM was mainly involved with providing the Muslim boys with religious guidance, the impetus for this came about when Tunku was approached by Datuk Dr. M. Mahadevan in or around 1975, who was the consulting psychiatrist of the Rehabilitation Centre for Drug Addicts in Ipoh (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 278). Moreover, the centre was also run by a German nurse, Brother James M. Scholer, whose welfare work had largely taken place within a Christian missionary context (Dong, 2010: para. 7). Scholer eventually became a Muslim that same year, adopting the name Yakob Abdul Rahman W. Scholer in honour of the Tunku (Dong, 2010: para. 16-17). Nonetheless, Tunku's willingness to work with people of other faiths reflects his perspective as to what 'Islamic welfare' meant: a commitment to God, and therefore a commitment to humanity. This commitment was clearly acknowledged by those of other faiths, with Tunku thanking those from other religious persuasions for their substantial contribution to PERKIM's income (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 150). As such, Tunku's Islamic commitments did not merely exist alongside his commitment to Malaysia. Rather, the two commitments informed each other, with Tunku's spiritual aims as a Muslim coinciding with "the

building of a happy society in Malaysia", the last phrase being Tunku's stated goal for PERKIM (Abdul Rahman, 2007: 123).

The structures created by Tunku were not merely vehicles for religious pamphleteering and making boasts of cultural or civilizational superiority. Rather, these institutions were characterized by a sincere effort to give the best care to all members of society, both within one's faith community and to Malaysians as a whole. Given our mosque analogy, the umbrella dome of Masjid Negara is a fitting image when thinking of the structures Tunku worked to establish; they are enveloped by an overarching desire to provide shade, comfort, and help to all. The structures of Tunku's mosque model created a space for people to worship through acts of virtue; acts which define this model, and which Tunku himself embodied.

A PERSONAL TOUCH: LOVING COMPASSION, JUSTICE, AND 'THE WORSHIPPER' IN THE MOSQUE

The last level of the model – 'the worshipper' – concerns the realization of loving compassion and virtue within oneself, qualities that are essential to true brotherhood and which are essential to the functioning of the model. A mosque, however strong and beautiful, does not serve its function without the presence of those who pray within it. With the exception of the three sacred mosques at Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, it is the presence of the pious who determine a mosque's luminosity. Similarly, Tunku's model of love and brotherhood is dependent upon the ability to realize virtues pertaining to brotherhood within oneself. Though many virtues could be mentioned, the heart of all of these virtues is 'loving compassion', the ability to lovingly identify with the pain of others. It is this quality that lies at the root of other virtues – kindness, generosity, bravery – and which thus infuses all action with love, a love that is rooted in the origin of love, namely God Himself.

Such an argument is likely to trigger the skepticism of modern minds, who may regard such talk as more suited to a pulpit than an academic paper. However, as Shah-Kazemi has pointed out, Islamic civilization never divorced its ethical discussions from the spiritual world. Virtues were not merely connected to one's personal moral behaviour, but were central to the realization of justice. In the ethical discourse of Islam, justice is not a lone virtue but "the perfection or sum of the other virtues" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 77). If the various dimensions of the soul are " 'filled out' by their respective virtues", these dimensions acquire their proper places, rendering the soul 'just' (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 77). Hence, the spiritual conception of virtue "not only encompasses one's duty to all, but also engages all that one is", requiring a human being "to *be* good before one *does* good" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 77). However, Shah-Kazemi points out that justice is also connected to the remembrance of God. The Arabic word *ihsan* means not only "excellence, virtue, [and] goodness", but also literally refers to "doing what is beautiful" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 77-8). When asked by the archangel Gabriel what *al-ihsan* (virtue) meant, the Prophet (SAW) replied, "It is to worship God as though you see Him, and if you see Him not, yet truly He sees you" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 78). Thus, it is "the vision of the divine beauty that inspires virtue, which is beauty of soul" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 78). Consequently, there is a relationship between "worship and virtue,

spirituality and ethics, … [and] devotion to the Creator and goodness to creatures" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 78).

If an aspect of God's beauty is His *rahmah*, being inspired by the quality of *rahmah* engenders virtue within oneself, thus enabling the facilitation of justice. Given the centrality of *rahmah* in Tunku's perspective, we could say that Tunku's model demands the realization of virtue by its very nature. Moreover, if brotherhood involves forging bonds of love between human beings, it necessarily encompasses this spiritual conception of justice, which involves rendering the *haqq* – right – that is "due to each person, indeed to each and every thing in existence" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 77). As Tunku's model is oriented entirely around brotherhood, it thus follows that it is dependent upon the realization of justice to achieve its goal. As the realization of justice involves the actualization of virtue within human beings, embodying virtue is not merely important but *essential* to Tunku's model, with brotherhood being the model's foundation and aim.

Tunku's ability to show loving compassion was a key component of his character, informing his actions and giving real life to the structures he helped create. Compassion originates from a Latin word meaning "suffer with", and is thus rooted in the ability to identify or empathize with the suffering of others ("Compassion" 2018). This ability enables one to assist one's fellow human beings with a deep level of understanding and care. An enlightening comment comes from Singapore's second Chief Minister, Lim Yew Hock, who credits Tunku with his "rebirth" into Islam in 1972 after experiencing great political and personal setbacks (Gill, 1990: 101). Speaking of his many virtues, Lim remarks that Tunku's "greatest virtue is that he is human and humane with a great understanding and sympathy for human frailties" (Gill, 1990: 101). Consequently, his work was imbued with a depth of consideration for others that went beyond formal frameworks. We have already seen how Tunku's work with drug addicts went beyond mere sermonizing, with Tunku selecting suitable religious teachers, building living quarters, and providing them with the economic tools to help them rebuild their lives. However, these measures were a reflection of genuine concern for those recovering from drug addiction. In reading Tunku's account of his initial involvement with drug addicts, one is struck by the level of consideration he has for the feelings of the boys. When initially made aware of the Rehabilitation Centre for Drug Addicts in Ipoh, his desire to meet the boys was complemented by an unwillingness to "force … attention on these unfortunate people", who may "be very sensitive about their affliction" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 278). Indeed, one wonders whether Tunku would have gone had it not been for a letter of invitation from the boys themselves, written by a struggling boy's father (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 278-81). Similarly, Tunku found speaking to the boys "a most difficult thing to do" on account of an unwillingness to "[add] insult to injury" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 279). He was aware of "how sad they already felt over getting themselves into their present predicament", and thus did not desire to "[make] matters worse by hammering on their mistake" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 279). One is conscious of a man who embodied loving compassion in the true sense of the word; he loved others and suffered with them, and his judgment was based upon a desire to help them out of this suffering. Hence, these considerations informed what he eventually said to them, with Tunku telling them that "self-affliction" can only be overcome by bravery and strength, and that "complete and absolute faith in God" provides one with "the will-power and strength necessary to fight this evil" (Abdul Rahman, 1977: 279).

Another indicator of Tunku's sincere concern is his ability to relate the stories of the boys in detail. From the heroin addict from a rich family who kept bad company to the Government servant

who "came into contact with drug-smugglers", Tunku's ability to relate detailed stories of these men is an indication that he was truly listening to the problems of the boys. Although only three cases are mentioned in *Looking Back*, the work seems to indicate that Tunku heard more stories from the addicts than he relates in the book. His knowledge of these details indicates that he did not merely deal with the problem of drug addiction at arm's length. Rather, he was emotionally invested in their lives, seeing the physical and emotional effects of the affliction upon them. Thus, his involvement with these men was not merely institutional or financial, but personal and emotional. Rather than simply coming to them as the head of an organization, he approached them as a loving and concerned friend and father, emotionally invested in their stories and pain. Hence, his determination to secure a better future for them sprang forth from a place of genuine love, with his hopes of improving their lives being not merely a social project but a sincere concern. The same could be said about his concern for refugees, converts, and any of the other disenfranchised groups that he encountered and aided. It was this loving compassion that informed Tunku's service to others, involving not merely his finances but his talent, time and energy. Though this characteristic extends to almost all of his Islamic welfare work, the most striking example of this quality came from the mid-1950s, before his premiership. Whilst supervising the construction of Stadium Merdeka, a beggar approached Tunku, who gave the man a substantial sum of money. When the man complained that he could not afford money for a new shirt, Tunku "promptly unbuttoned his own shirt, took it off, and handed it to the beggar", rendering the beggar speechless and inadvertently causing him to run away (Velappan, 2017: 152). Dato' Peter Velappan, who was present at the time, attributed his friend's act of charity to "the kindness … [and] the heart of Tunku", adding this simple but moving comment: "He always cared for the people" (Irfan M., 2015: 4:34).

Loving compassion and the willingness to sacrifice one's own well-being for others; such characteristics remind us once more of Menjalara and the events surrounding Tunku's birth. In discussing Tunku's personal example, we have come full circle, returning once more to the significance of *rahmah*. In actualizing virtue, one fulfils the model's purpose, namely the forging of bonds of love between human beings. The result is a society in which justice is established, bearing in mind that, to quote Imam Ali (RA), "Justice puts everything in its right place" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006: 77). However, this is not merely justice tempered by mercy, but justice that originates and is defined by the essential quality that lies at the heart of the model: *rahmah*, loving compassion.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tried my best to reconstruct the 'mosque model' that Tunku presented for Malaysian Muslims. Each of these levels is informed by the elements of *rahmah* and brotherhood, and are motivated by a love for not merely Muslims but humanity as a whole. My intention was to show that there is no conflict between Tunku's religious commitments and his vision for Malaysia. Rather, the two inform each other, with Tunku applying his understanding of Islamic principles to a Malaysian context. We can thus say that Tunku provided Malaysians with a pathway that made the vision of a happy Malaysia not merely a civic obligation, but a religious and spiritual one.

However, it would be a mistake to think that following this pathway is an easy task. Within Tunku's own lifetime, communalism and harshness were being propagated within the Muslim community, largely with the aim of securing political power. The rise and development of this phenomenon, along with the obstructions it created in the development of Tunku's model, are possible areas for future research. Nonetheless, it is possible to conclude here that these movements have created long-lasting effects upon the discourse concerning Islam in Malaysia, a discourse informed by a world of false binaries. Over time, these binaries have created alternate structures of their own, presenting us with a landscape with some significant differences from the environment in which Tunku lived.

Are these setbacks a cause for despair? The answer is emphatically 'no', for a model rooted in timeless principles will, God willing, withstand the test of time. With a spiritual core and a strong foundation, Tunku's model has stood firm, and remains a concrete possibility for Malaysian Muslims. In the midst of forces that seek to divide through hate, a model that seeks to unite through love is like the "new Malaya" Tunku spoke of just prior to declaring independence: "a beacon of light in a disturbed and distracted world" (Abdul Rahman, 1957: 3).

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