

**BUILDING A MOSQUE IN AMERICA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE
EMERGENCE OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AMONG MUSLIMS IN GREATER
LANSING, MICHIGAN**

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is the result of ethnographic research conducted over the course of four years of participant observations that were held at the Islamic Center of East Lansing, Michigan, between 2013 and 2017. The scholarship details and analyzes the emergence and development of American Muslim institutions of religious authority, especially in the local context of the Greater Lansing capital area, which includes downtown Lansing, East Lansing, and Okemos, Michigan. The first section of the dissertation covers the history of the Muslim community of Lansing in the context of American and global history. The pioneering roles of MSU students and academics have profoundly contributed to the development of the East Lansing mosque, a milestone achievement in the emergence of Islamic institutions in the area. The report also presents the historical transformation of a local temple of the Nation of Islam (NOI) toward an alignment with mainstream Sunni Muslim doctrine. Next, the discussion focuses on the subjects of Islamic institutions, namely, the Muslim volunteers who devoted their economic, intellectual and social resources to support the improvement and maintenance of the new religious institution. The analysis in this section endeavors to elaborate upon the factors concerning the rise of certain individuals in the ranks of community leadership. The dissertation then transitions to exploring how individuals formed a number of collectives rooted in the traits shared among congregation members. In its formal organization, the collective union and the regularity of individual actions constitute an authoritative body, which operates the Islamic center to serve the interests of the community and deal with challenges on their

behalf. The following section addresses the embodiment of religious authority in the persons helming the institution of the imam, the religious leader of the mosque. The imam is described as a product and part of Bourdieu's *habitus*, a social process that plays determinative roles in training generations of this particular congregation. Ritual matters arising from the contextual implementation of traditional Islam within the secular environment of Lansing are then analyzed, in order to present the researcher's insights regarding the alleged objectification of the Islamic religion in the area. Following Robert Redfield's categorization of tradition, the research suggests that objectification has resulted in the maintenance of three traditions: the continuous, the local and the exclusive. Finally, the researcher proposes a definition of religious authority based on the body of research contained in this work.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

ACCESS	Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services
AD	Anno Domini
AH	After Hijra
ARDA	Association of Religion Data Archives
ASA	Arab Student Association
ASARB	Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies
BOT	Board of Trustees
CAIR	Council on American-Islamic Relations
EC	Executive Committee
FCNA	Fiqh Council of North America
GLIS	Greater Lansing Islamic School
ICEL	Islamic Center of East Lansing
ICNA	Islamic Circle of North America
IIT	International Institute of Islamic Thought
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
ISGL	Islamic Society of Greater Lansing
ISNA	Islamic Society of North America
IT	Information Technology
LCC	Lansing Community College
LSJ	Lansing State Journal
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MCW	Moonsighting Committee Worldwide
MGROW	Middle Grand River Organization of Watersheds

MPI	Migration Policy Institute
MSA	Islamic Students Association
MSU	Michigan State University
NAIT	North American Islamic Trust
NOI	Nation of Islam
OCC	Oakland Community College
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PBUH	Peace be upon Him
PMU	Prince Mohammad bin Fahd University
RDC	Refugee Development Center
SAW	<i>Sallallahu ‘Alaihi Wasallam</i> (Peace Be Upon Him, PBUH)
SWT	<i>Subhanahu Wata’ala</i> (may He be glorified and exalted)
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
UIUC	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
UM	University of Michigan
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WASC	Western Association of Schools and Colleges
WDM	Warith Deen Muhammad

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: EXPLORING THE EXISTENCE OF ISLAM IN AMERICA THROUGH AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LOCAL MUSLIMS

Studying Islam in the West

“Why study Islam in the West?” was the question most frequently asked of me by my Indonesian colleagues/countrymen/networks when I first began studying at Michigan State University (MSU) in 2008.¹ My American friends were similarly puzzled, often wearing a blank look when I explained that my research topic centered on their local Islamic center near campus. They perhaps wondered how one could study an Islamic matter in pursuing a degree from an American university. Initially, I myself catered to the conventional belief in the Muslim community that subjects related to Islam are best studied in the Middle East. To alleviate their curiosity, I told my friends that my situation was simply a result of scholarship selections in which I failed to secure any options to study elsewhere. Had my educational background in Indonesia made me better in Arabic and other foundational Islamic knowledge areas, I explained, I might have been studying in an Arabic-speaking country rather than in the United States of America.

With such a response, I wanted to agree, even if partially, with the common presumption that the correct place to study Islam should be in the so-called centers of the religion, such as the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Another besought destination would be Cairo in Egypt, where Al-Azhar University, the oldest and most prestigious university for Sunni Islam, is located. For topics pertaining to Shi’a Islam, one might assume that major universities in Iran are

¹ Since the number of Indonesian-Americans, according to the last US census, was around 70,000, communication among Indonesians between both countries has been relatively low. The number was still less than 100,000 even if children of mixed couples were included (see Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Hasan, 2012).

the best places to study.² However, the truth is that the geographical distribution of Islamic authority is far more complex. After more than 1400 years of expanding across the world, centers of Islamic learning have been founded in innumerable places in the West, including American countries, where Muslims are the minority. It is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the assumptions we have inherited regarding the production of knowledge in Islam. Every center of Islamic learning has its own distinctive merits. So, rather than asking, “Why study Islam in the West?” the question should be revised to: What aspects of Islam should we study in the West? Why? How? And so on.

By focusing instead on these aspects that should be studied in the West, a plethora of possible answers become available. That is because Islam in this sense will be understood as a complex phenomenon, just as I assert in this work. Today, studying Islam can mean anything from exploring the religion’s holy texts and artifacts, to analyzing its social and economic impacts on global society, to investigating the external factors behind its internal religious dynamics, and so on. With such a wide variety of possible answers, Islamic studies at this time should be available not only to Muslims, but to anyone interested in the field. In other words, Islam can be studied by insiders as well as by outsiders, either in Muslim-majority places or in the West, where Muslims are a minority. Actually, various Muslim and Islamic studies programs have been established in major Western universities in recent decades (and some are much older); these include Michigan State University’s Muslim Studies Program, which was founded in 2006.

Considering the reality of the growing number of Islamic study centers, alongside the fact that Muslims are a minority in the West, I encountered a surprising phenomenon of thriving Muslim

²In its inception, Al-Azhar University was an institution of a Shiite dynasty, the Fatimids, in the tenth century AD. After some changes in the political regime, however, this university became a Sunni institution. Until now, Sunni Islam is still the largest denomination, embraced by nearly 90% of the Muslims in the world. The Shi’a sect includes around 10% of Muslims all over the world. Additional minor sects make up less than 1% of the worldwide Muslim community. (Pew Research Center, 2009)

communities that are supposedly rarely found in the history of Christian-dominated countries such as the United States. My learning of world history has imprinted in my mind the perception that the Muslim world maintains bitter memories of events such as the Crusades, European imperialism, and the post-World War I demise of the Ottoman Empire. However, now I see that the millennium era has been marked with generous acceptance and an unprecedented, thriving growth of Muslim communities in America, despite the United States being culturally Protestant, Catholic or Jewish.

Despite the fact that the turn of the millennium was tainted by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and military violence involving Muslim nations took place in the following years, surveys nevertheless indicate a steady increase in Muslim residents living in Europe and North America. This increase consists not only of recent immigrants, but also of the offspring of previous immigrants and converts or reverts to Islam following their intensified exposures with the religion through mass media and international exchanges. Some analysts have even asserted that Islam could overpopulate the world and surpass the number of the Christians in the Western hemisphere by 2050 (Neal, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2015). This means the new communities of Muslims have been consistently growing regarding numbers and local varieties of Islamic practices, thus creating new developments in religious culture. Eventually, these two symptoms will form a Western version of Islamic culture that departs from its foreign characteristics. Given these developments, it should be undeniable that the study of Islam in the West has both abundant academic potential as well as social potential for improving mutual understanding between Muslim communities and the others in the U.S.

It is the enhanced understanding between Muslims and those of other faiths (or no faith) in the U.S. that my research on Western Muslims aims to foster. Toward that aim, this study will hopefully play a small role in easing Islamophobia, or the fear on Islam, which undermines the

cohesion among diverse peoples of the pluralistic U.S. A number of political and social agendas, both historical and contemporary, have worked to manufacture misinformation about Islam. The colonial-orientalist Western tradition of Islamophobia has been compounded in more recent decades, with political rhetoric implying that terrorism is both endemic and exclusive to the Islamic faith. While these political agendas that stoke fear must ultimately be confronted in the political arena, scholars have an important role to play in humanizing the “other” and shifting media discourse accordingly. As mass media begins to seek information from reliable sources, the availability in the West of scholars with regard to Muslims and Islamic topics becomes very important. With their eloquences in writing and speaking in public media, social scientists are supposedly able to provide a fair and balanced presentation of these matters, hence challenging prejudice and breaking down stereotypes.

Research on Muslims in America also serves to create scholarly multiplying effects within the academic communities to which researchers belong. My own home country of Indonesia is culturally a Muslim-dominated nation in which Christianity is the largest minority (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2011), while Muslim communities here in the United States live among a Christian-majority population. A report on the thriving life of Muslim minorities in America has the potential to foster discourse on the similarities and differences between the countries, specifically the ways in which each government applies the principle of fair implementation of religious freedom.

The Growing Popularity of Islamic Studies

Until the turn of the millennium, most Americans seemed unaware of Islam as an Abrahamic religion akin to the more popular Jewish and Christian faiths. The academy has only recently taken interest in the many Muslims living among the early settlers of America. While oral traditions and community-based scholars have consistently honored these histories, mainstream institutions have marginalized these Muslims' experiences. Their stories were either unrecorded, inaccurately recorded, or simply left untouched by historians of the African and American continents; hence, considerable work is needed on these topics of early American Muslims (Gomez, 1994).

The few examples of existing scholarship on early American Muslims centers on a few slaves of African aristocratic origins who managed to uphold their religious beliefs despite their white masters' efforts to convert them to Christianity (Curtis, 2009). For most African Americans, slavery ruptured their practice of the Islamic faith, but by the turn of the nineteenth century large numbers of them were joining Islamic organizations such as the Moorish Science Temple of America in Chicago and the Nation of Islam in Detroit. Among the members of these organizations, some of those who wanted to retrieve their original identities ended up discarding their last names and replacing them solely with the letter X, such as the well-known Malcolm X, because their original last names were untraceable. Realizing the urgent need to address this historical disconnect, today many Muslim scholars, especially African Americans, have framed their activism as a reintroduction of the Islamic faith, an integral and foundational dimension of American society that has been inadequately recognized in national narratives (Abd-Allah, 2006; Curtis, 2002; Muhammad, 2001; Webb, 1893).

The low rate of Muslims' migration was another factor in delaying mainstream American awareness regarding Islamic matters. Muslims had fewer reasons to migrate to America, compared

with Protestants and Jews, who fled in large numbers from religious prosecutions in Europe. Even after the invasions resulting in Western colonialism in the 1600s, most Muslim-majority nations, especially the Sian, still chose to stay and persevere in their respective continents. The first significant early wave of migration came out of the declining Turkish Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century, but the number of Muslims was still a fraction of those Christian migrants arriving from Poland, Italy, Ireland, and elsewhere. Another source of early Muslims' migration was the Asian population of British India, a geographical area encompassing today's India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These South Asian migrants were mainly workers on British merchant ships. When the merchant ships anchored in American harbors, some of these new arrivals jumped out of the ships and stayed in the New Land in hopes of a better life (Curtis, 2009). Although their experience cannot be directly compared to the enslavement of their African coreligionists, these early South Asian immigrants also struggled to preserve their Islamic traditions as they faced economic hardships in their roles as small farmers, peddlers, and manual laborers (Curtis, 2009).

The attention to Islam and Muslim citizens also came late in the American world of social research. At the turn of the twentieth century, Muslim immigrants were still relatively invisible in the context of American cities, and thus beyond the gaze of writers who instead took interest in the stories of the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities of this era (Herberg, 1983). Meanwhile, the anthropologists were still largely focused on projects concerning indigenous peoples, both in America or abroad. Overall, the research priorities of American social scientists in the late 1800s were shaped by political agendas of that time, such as the ongoing removal of Indigenous Peoples, the movement to abolish slavery, the post-Civil War efforts of political conservatives to structure and enforce segregation, and so on. In the 1900s, the two World Wars (1914-18 and 1939-45) were significant turning points, as numerous Muslims fought for the Allied forces as part of the British

and French armies. Some of these Muslim soldiers then returned to England and France as asylum seekers and refugees (Atkinson, 2016; Bradfield, 2016)

Islamic issues began to attract public attention when the Muslim immigrants' religion coalesced with the Blackamerican movement³. The foundation of the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1930 constituted a transformation of purely Blackamerican movements into a religiously-legitimized organization of social resistance as the result of their contact with a Muslim proselytizer. The founder, Wallace Fard Muhammad or Wallace D. Fard, had injected the minds of Black activists with an idea that their struggle had a divine legitimacy. Wallace Fard was not simply a peddler, as he utilized his daily interactions with neighborhoods in Detroit to spread his Islamic teachings. His customers became followers, and the followers became activists at the national level. Wallace Fard disappeared in 1934 after four years of leading the organization, but his successor, Elijah Muhammad, led the new organization into its next phase, characterized by social rebellion with separatist ideas. That was the point at which the American public started to realize that the racism in government policies eventually encountered similarly racist resistance (Beynon, 1938),⁴ which somehow emerged from the instruction of a Muslim preacher.

After World War II, research on Islam in America began to flourish. While many American and European anthropologists were spread across colonial territories to conduct research on “primitive” societies, Muslim anthropologists were among the new wave of post-War immigrants who conducted studies in American cities in an effort to make sense of their own communities’

³ As a term, Lerone Bennett, Jr. discussed the word Blackamerican early in 1967 (Bennett, Jr, 1967), but the most authoritative discussions about Islam among the Blackamericans have been written by Sherman Jackson (Jackson, 2005, 2009)

⁴ In this article, it is noted that both sides were racists, in which the White-dominated government had treated the Black people discriminately, and vice versa, the Blacks’ religious movement had begun to develop a culture based on an anti-Caucasian prejudice.

changing way of life. For example, one of the earliest social studies of this type was undertaken by Abdo Elkholy, a scholar who carried out participant observations and interviews with hundreds of Arabic-speaking Muslims in Toledo, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan. One conclusion reached by Elkholy asserts that, in order to survive and maintain their identities within the American context, many Muslims compromised Islamic rules in their workplaces but still fulfilled their rituals at home while supporting their mosques. According to Elkholy, this compromise constituted assimilation in the direction of full Americanization (Elkholy, 1966).

The peak of Islamic studies in America began to emerge during the 1970s. Following the Immigration Act of 1965, Muslim professional workers, scholars and students arrived with the next influx of immigrants. As their numbers increased, activism amongst Muslim academics in American universities began to thrive. This post-1965 wave of Muslim immigrants pioneered organizations such as the Muslim Students Association (MSA), which was founded around the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1963. After graduating, many of the former student activists who led the MSA remained in the United States and found permanent employment. They then turned their attention toward founding a number of broader-based organizations such as ISNA (the Islamic Society of North America), the ICNA (the Islamic Circle of North America), NAIT (the North American Islamic Trust), and IIIT (the International Institute of Islamic Thought).

More importantly, they took up essential roles in the building of mosques in the cities where they lived. Before growing to today's size, the ISNA and ICNA annual conventions used to be attended only by these mosques' representatives. Today, more than twelve thousand people regularly attend ISNA's and ICNA's conventions, travelling from across the United States and beyond. The IIIT, which was founded in 1981,⁵ could be considered to be simultaneously a think tank and

⁵ See www.iiit.org

research center, as it was internationally known for its reputed publications of books and journals on Islamic issues. Its current networks include several noted persons in the Middle East, with branches at a minimum in the United Kingdom, Pakistan and Malaysia. With this network, international donors have helped to build international Islamic universities in those countries, as well as sponsoring chairs or professorships in Islamic studies programs in major universities in Europe and America.

To meet the need for American centers of Islamic learning, Islamic colleges were established⁶. Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, could be considered the foremost of these efforts, as it was the first Islamic college in the United States to acquire accreditation from an academic association. Zaytuna was founded as a college by Hamza Yusuf, Zaid Shakir, and Hatem Bazian in 2009, after being founded as an institute in 1996. In 2015, the California-based organization, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), conferred upon Zaytuna College accreditation for its degree program, which was entitled Bachelor of Arts in Islamic law and theology. Soon after that, the college's website name acquired the extension ".edu", a sign of recognition by the American government's authority in higher education.⁷ This achievement was of course not merely a result of the individual efforts of Zaytuna's internal circle, but rather reflected a community-wide achievement, since the college had received financial support and promotion from many organizations and family foundations, including IIIT. Zaytuna College surely constitutes an example for the potential of founding Islamic colleges in other American cities, specifically, how to provide

⁶ There were at least four communities of Muslim scholars who were working toward the establishment of Islamic colleges in the US, such as American Islamic Colleges in Chicago (www.aicusa.edu), Islamic American University in Michigan (www.islamicaui.org), Cordoba University in Virginia, and Zaytuna College in California (www.Zaytuna.edu).

⁷ See: <https://zaytuna.edu>. Last accessed Nov 3, 2017, 11:04 pm

an authoritative institution for both Muslim and non-Muslim learners of Islam, and how to achieve recognition from the general public and governments at all levels.

Research Issues

This study will examine the formation of Islamic life at organizational levels, which means that descriptions of Muslim individuals aim to illustrate or explain aspects of collectivity. Muslim communities across the United States display similar inclinations toward officiating their collectivity as a legal institution. The American government, constitutionally, do not record the religious identities of individual citizens in the decennial censuses, but individuals could register their religious organizations if they wished to receive exempt status from taxes.⁸ Therefore, there was no official number of Muslim citizens in this country, while Islamic organizations such as mosques or Islamic associations were easily counted as they were openly declared. By 2010, there had been numerous estimations of Muslims in the US, but they differed widely—from as low as two million, to as high as seven or eight million.⁹ In contrast with this particular census practice, the counting of mosques has been less controversial since it could be done more scientifically. At the national level, Ihsan Bagby's scholarship has been the main reference for mosque statistics in America since his studies were conducted in 2001 and 2011 (Bagby, 2012). For the state of Michigan, this particular Bagby's 2011 work listed the number of mosques at seventy-seven, of which sixty-two of them were in the Detroit

⁸ The American public called these entities "501(c)(3)" institutions or foundations. The term came from the US Code on Internal Revenue number 26, in which section 501(c)(3) listed the types of non-for-profit organizations that were tax-exempt. This type included religious centers and religious associations. (Internal Revenue Code - Exemption - 26 U.S. Code § 501, 1986)

⁹ Daniel Pipes, on his watchdog website, cited those estimates in a supposedly updated list (Pipes, 2003). The Pew Research Center put the number at around two million, while Muslim researchers such as Houssain Kettani came up with seven million, and CAIR itself estimated there were eight million of Muslims by 2003 (CAIR, 2008; Kettani, 2010).

area. He mentioned that the average numbers were a significant increase from the previous counting. For the Detroit area, Bagby's numbers appeared to be supported by Sally Howell's report two years before (S. F. Howell, 2009), in which she mentioned that there were fifty-five mosques in the area. It is then necessary to expand his work toward an observation of "ordinary" mosques, such as those in the Lansing area.

Historically, many ethnographers revealed exotic tribes or extraordinary communities that lived uniquely distinctive lives, residing in remote places separated from those mainstream societies from which the ethnographers came (MacClancy, 2002). For those who are not aware of the thriving life of Muslims in America, this dissertation could similarly be seen as depicting an "exotic" and unusual phenomenon. However, for those living within the community being studied, or those who have seen such life in many Muslim communities in America, this study will come across as quite familiar. Indeed, this study represents an observation of practices of everyday American lives; it is a research practice that emerged during the development of social anthropological research (Ortner, 1984). For instance, Ortner quotes an explanation from Bourdieu's theory of practice, which takes place when a researcher:

... pays close attention to the little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing, as well as the little scenarios of etiquette they play out again and again in social interaction. All of these routines and scenarios are predicated upon, and embody within themselves, the fundamental notions of temporal, spatial, and social ordering that underlie and organize the system as a whole. In enacting these routines, actors not only continue to be shaped by the underlying organizational principles involved, but continually re-endorse those principles in the world of public observation and discourse (Bourdieu, 1977).

In keeping with Bourdieu's framework, this study set out to observe how activists from the East Lansing Islamic centers established a powerful system through the creation of service regularities following the formation of the center.

As a direct-contact study of a selected group through participant observation, the ethnographic exploration of American Muslims will reveal varied aspects of Muslims' lives in America, including a detailed and accurate analysis. As is the case with Muslims living outside the United States, there is a myriad of topics to explore within American Islamic life. The first topic to investigate is how the authority of Islamic beliefs spread and influenced people's religious behaviors in the US. This question will entail historical explorations of the development of Islamic culture and discourses in this country. This study will also require discussions on the emergence of Islamic institutions, which will include observations on the birth of leaders, volunteers and their respective networks, all of which eventually played roles in the formation of the collective. With discussions on these matters, the terms "authority", "religious authority", or "Islamic authority" will finally be characterized and defined. So, the study of the local community of Muslims will investigate three groups of questions: the existence of Islamic authority, its exercise, and its embodiment.

Regarding the existence of Islamic authority, we can question first the definition of an Islamic place. With this question, the research will explore the location of Islamic institutions by identifying the formation of a religious community among Muslim individuals who share the imagination of a place, interests, membership relations, and boundaries. How do individuals define an Islamic place? Where is their primary place of residence? How do Muslims create and maintain mosque membership?

Other than questioning the definition of Islamic place and space, the research will also question the meaning of religious voluntarism. Research on the formation of Islamic authority should recognize the role of subjects who embody a local form of voluntarism based on their understanding of the Islamic texts that they interpreted as urging them to contribute some objects or works for the

implementation of their religious teachings. With such discussions, we can understand and examine the backgrounds and purposes of mosque activism among Muslim citizens in this city.

Finally, the research aims to question the operations of the mosque movement, which can be understood through the elaboration of the Islamic center's constitutions and bylaws, and resulting in specific programs and policies. The study will review how mosque activists exercise their roles in the Muslim world through their actions; how they translate their religious understanding into activities within the mosque; and how they serve in the the public sphere, implementing certain strategies to deal with challenges they face. How do they implement the mosques' visions and missions in the form of policies and programs? How do they respond to the relationships of Muslims within a global world, given the local history of Muslim communities and the host society?

Considering the cultural traits of religious authority, studies on a local Muslim society need to pay attention to certain questions that include the concept of authority as a social structure. As Muslims are instructed to elect a leader even when they gather and pray, the research will examine the impacts of ritual routines on the structure of society. It will observe how the structure of religious community became more complex with the increasing size of the congregation. Secondly, a question can also be asked about authority as a form of legitimacy among Muslims, which means that to touch upon what can be called the resources or basis of authority, a study of local Muslims will examine the relationships between material resources and personal candidacies in the communities' programs of leadership recruitment. What are the traits and training that can empower Muslim agents toward higher levels of community leadership? How does authority interact with legitimacy among individuals who serve in the mosques?

Next, the line of questioning should turn to the assimilative capacity of Islamic authority in America. Regarding the possible limitations or restrictions against the practice of certain rituals in

the American mosques and in the public sphere, it is important to assess the capacity of leaders of mosque to adjust the rituals in compliance with civil rules and norms. Which aspects of traditional rituals and practices do local Muslims want to preserve and which do they want to change? Finally, we should examine the cohesive power of Islamic authority in intra-Islamic relations. Considering the range of cultural origins and Islamic sects present among community members, how do the activists in Islamic centers in the area embrace this diversity? How do they connect with one another and forge shared group identities with other Muslims who have different backgrounds?

The third group of questions pertains to the embodiment of Islamic authority. It includes two angles: discipline and habitus. Discipline is a concept proposed by Michael Foucault, while the concept of habitus is derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Questioning the embodiment of Islamic authority through these two angles, a study of local Muslims will examine how certain leaders and individuals embody a localization of Islamic authority as they experience the intersection between American secularism and religious commands. How do Muslims respond to the demands of a secular system? How do they manage to navigate between spheres of different religiosity in their daily activities?

Theoretical Framework

Considering the existing literature, most writings on Islamic phenomena in North America and other Western countries still discuss the reminiscences, or rejuvenation, of Islamic life in the immigrants' countries of origin. Following the studies of global Islam that expose the decentralizing proliferation of Islamic authority (Mandaville, 2007; Roy, 2007), there is a need for further studies that can reveal the authoritative representations of Islamic culture that are growing among the New World's Muslim communities. Furthermore, the influx of Muslims who came to the US after World

War II is characterized by a move toward an integrative adaptation of Islam into the Western way of life while simultaneously developing their own communities and cultural dynamics. Anthropological research will find these new communities fertile with cultural innovations that depart from their respective motherlands' traditions.

The issues of religious authority are among the first discourses to arise among American Muslim communities, as the questions about leadership and whom to follow are the basis of community development. The first point of this study's theorization of Islamic authority is that we cannot understand it apart from the process of community formation. Just as Islamic teachings instruct Muslims to pray five times a day, it is also popular among Muslim preachers to adhere to a teaching from the Prophet, who recommended the appointment of a leader when people are traveling in a group (Nawawi, 2014)¹⁰. This entails the selection of a leader when a group of Muslims meet and pray. As such, ideally at least, the formation of a Muslim social group necessitates the emergence of Islamic leadership.

It is in the selection of a leader that aspects of voluntarism come into effect. Islamic history has recorded that its exemplary leaders were chosen among the volunteers—those who voluntarily contributed what they had for the sake of *umma*.¹¹ In the context of American mosques and other Islamic institutions, many of the volunteers qualified for leadership positions, but at times certain persons were favored at the expense of others due to various factors or attributes, some of which this research will address.

¹⁰Riyad al-Saliheen by Abu Zakaria al-Nawawī (1233–1277) is a popular book used as one of the collections of the authentic Prophet Muhammad's sayings (*hadith*). The saying above is normally assigned to *hadith* no. 960 (on the Ethic of Traveling) found in most versions, including the translations in numerous Muslim languages, as well as digitized ones for online access and smartphone applications. A website of digitized books of Islamic traditions also is available. See: <https://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/8> or <https://bewley.virtualave.net/riyad6.html#travel> on March 27, 2017.

¹¹ The word *umma* is shared among the Semitic languages, meaning “nation”.

Having emphasized the importance of religious authority for Muslims, it is necessary to determine what we mean by the term “Islamic authority”. The most popular definition of this term comes from a political perspective. Scholar Mehdi Mozaffari explains that authority is the supreme seat of legitimation, which is sovereign and independent, and a source of legislation and annulment. It is the right to lead and command—distinct from power—that is meant as the supreme legitimatizing force. Power obliges people to obey the will expressed by authority (Mozaffari, 1987).

From a legalistic perspective, Peter Mandaville (2007) describes religious authority as “... the establishment and reproduction of particular forms of social normativity understood to derive from religion.” For this research, the intention is to incorporate both perspectives when discussing leadership and authority among Lansing Muslims. Based on the scholars’ views, this study proposes a hypothetical understanding that religious authority consists of such components as the claim over the right to lead, legitimation/recognition from other authorities, representation of religious instruction, and power to enforce. To discern the extent to which these components are present in the current state of research, field observations are needed to examine specifically how authoritative relations develop and occur among the administrative and religious leaders in the Muslim communities of Lansing.

This study aims to document the characteristics or the cultural traits of authority construction among Lansing Muslims. As implied above by the list of research issues, this study aims to explain Islamic authority in Lansing mosques by focusing its attention on five variables: location, subjects, objects, resources, and embodiments. Regarding the *location* of authority, a critical view is important to understand the emergence of an Islamic authority. Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 1991) has explained that the notion of community is imaginative, with members not knowing most of their fellows. The boundaries of a mosque community are probably imaginative as well. This is because

the scope of the community in question may include not only the physical building complex and parking lots, but also the places over which the mosque authority has control in certain times and ways. Therefore, there should be at least three dimensions to the location of an authority: the existing site with its physical boundaries, the imaginative locations where religious authority can exercise its jurisdiction, and the times during which that authority can work. If asked about the boundaries of mosque authority, it can be expected that the people's responses will fall into one or more of these categories.

The imaginative boundaries of the community also imply questions of membership. A field approach is necessary to listen to what the people say about the membership system, which differentiates insiders from outsiders. The narratives resulting from this field approach can also inform us about the levels of membership among the congregation. Muslims who happen to reside within the boundaries are not necessarily members of the community. As it is a modernly situated community, the mosque must have an administration for its membership. However, its administrative works may not be able to reach all members, and not all members may bother going along the formal procedure. The sense of belonging to the mosque, key to the notion of membership, may also broadly encompass those living within or outside the area. All these factors beg clarifications in order to gain a clear image of the territorial and personal jurisdiction of authority as it relates to the mosque.

Regarding *subjects* of authority, they are the individuals who commit their time and resources for the implementation of community duties. While the special category assigned by scholars of Islamic tradition for such behavior is the so-called *fard kifayah* (Kamali, 2008), this research places greater emphasis on the important role volunteers can play within a community of Muslims. That is because they are the people who will not only seek to fulfill their own personal spiritual interests but

will also seek to take care of what is needed to fulfill the spiritual interests of other members and the whole community. In the Islamic social system, such collective charges actually are the responsibility of the whole community. However, only certain community members with specific resources and a capacity for leadership would be lucky enough to have the chance.

Regarding the *objects* of authority, they are the measures by which the subjects of authority can work, produce and reproduce, repeat, and change or manipulate toward achieving certain purposes. Following the introduction of the term *objectification of Islam* (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996, p. 42),¹² we can observe how Lansing Islamic authorities work on their objects to make them what they perceive as Islamic practice. They include the mosques' institutional products such as vision, missions, programs and policies, which are supposedly set up to serve the community. We need to observe how far those institutional products would be oriented in the context of Lansing mosque authority, since the mosques have practically become more multifunctional and more consciously adaptable in the facilitation of religious and non-religious services, through the process of objectification. Objectification entails self-examination and judgment, which in turn allow American Muslims to create some improvisations in their religious practices rather than merely reviving the cultural heritages in rituals, arts, and language. Therefore, the uses of the mosque as an Islamic space would not only include prayers and sermons, but also activism, such as their participation in national organizations like ISNA, ICNA, CAIR, presentation of Muslims' interests in local and national politics, and so on.

Mosques also have been used as a place of democratic development, for example, through election of leaders, the foundation of women's organizations, and citizenship training (Metcalf, 1996).

¹² I meant by *objectification of Islam* as a way to practice this religion as a public, rational and adaptable system. In Eickelman and Piscatori's words, religious beliefs and practices are "seen as systems (*manhaj*) to be distinguished from non-religious ones."

Mosque life can also become an object of local politics when conflicts among members cause dispersions. Since their early development in the first decades of the twentieth century, mosques in Michigan have witnessed interpersonal and intergroup conflicts, resulting in community splits and the erection of alternative mosques (S. F. Howell, 2009). Supporting the finding on the communal splits, another study by Ihsan Bagby also revealed that the establishment of new mosques could sometimes be influenced by ethnic sentiments. So, despite the general image of Islamic expansion, there could be some exceptional cases, in which signs of curbed development could be indicated, such as lower conversion rates, lower rates of charity, and fewer activities in Islamic practice yet more in the area of politics (Bagby, 2004).

In regard to the *resources* of authority, it follows from the process of discursive emergence above that the resulting structure of Islamic authority will undergo open processes to maintain its public legitimacy. This depends on how subjects can utilize available resources to improve their service to the public. The first resource can be economical, which means that some authoritative subjects gain their legitimacy through their own access to outside resources such as government, universities, foreign nations, and so on. These outside resources enable them to fulfill their services to their congregants, which otherwise an internally-reliant structure of an Islamic authority cannot do. This subject concerns the structure of power on which the appointment of leaders relates closely to the utilization of resources to fulfill the community's mission. If we take professional occupations as a particular point of view, people may prefer to choose a leader based on what a candidate does outside the mosque. Professions such as medical doctors, IT professionals, university professors, and Islamic school teachers may, for instance, be favored over others, such as manual laborers or unemployed persons.

Another important resource may be intellectual, which means the mastery of authentic knowledge. Scholars of Islamic ethnographies have found that power relations can be seen among Islamic subjects who produce their own versions of the interpretation of Islamic authoritative texts, which constitute a form of instruction that demands that Muslims must comply with (Messick, 1996). Authoritative texts can also arise in the form of audio-recorded speeches, such as cassettes of sermons given on Muslims' disciplinary ethics, as observed in Egypt (Hirschkind, 2001, 2006). Today, authoritative texts and voices instruct the Muslim public not only with paper publications and pulpit performances in offices, courts and mosques, but also through the network of information technologies that reach people in their houses through television and the Internet.

The next resource can be cultural. The factors of rational, traditional and charismatic authority, as introduced by Max Weber (Weber, 1958) can influence the selection of members in the construction of mosque authority. This is how we can find a division of religious structure in mosques, given that previous researchers (Bagby, 2004; S. F. Howell, 2009; Metcalf, 1996) have found that there were at least two types of authority that manage American mosques: administrative and religious (Smith, 1999).¹³ Aside from this cultural influence, authoritative resources can also originate from social networks, which may increase the influence of certain Muslims on the selection of leadership. There are at least two bases of social networks that potentially influence Muslims through such a process: ethnicity and religious affiliation.

Ethnically, it has been widely known that kinship plays a decisive role in the selection of leaders, including in the Lansing Muslim community, where certain Arabs, South Asians and Africans seem dominant by number. Because they comprise a dominant group, they have a better

¹³ This is unique in the modern world, as in many traditional areas the leadership of mosques is still centered at the hands of imams. It is interesting to read that Jane I. Smith lamented how American imams were becoming busier, like pastors or rabbis. According to her, "The very word imam means 'the one who stands in front of the congregation and leads the prayer'" (Smith, 1999, p. 112)

opportunity to lead than do other ethnic groups in the community. Social networks based on Islamic schools or affiliations can also play a role in the matter of leadership selection.

Theologically, the Sunni Muslims are dominant in the city, which would marginalize the minority Shi'ites in terms of leadership opportunities. Within the Sunni group, there is already a variety of additional grouping, whose adherents would have the same opportunity for leadership in the mosque community. An activist in the center could come from any of the four major Sunni schools of Islamic law: the Maliki, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Shafi'i schools, or probably from a puritan derivation, a religious inclination originating from Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia's model of the orthodox Salafi movement. Lansing mosques also accommodate the participation of the members of the traditionalist Tablighi Jamaa, but their characteristics of ever-traveling and political abstinence have rendered them marginal in local dynamics.¹⁴

Lastly, the next issue to understand in relation to the nature and patterns of authority-making in American mosques is the individuals who *embody* religious voluntarism. We need to know what types of personalities arise from the cultural intersections among religion, secularism, and tradition. Theories of discipline (Foucault, 2012) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) show us that individuals are surrounded by social systems that supply them with knowledge, provide them choices for making decisions, and provide meaning for what they have done. Their power, access, and overall impact are controlled by social systems. This research needs to approach these individuals in order to explore their experiences as Muslims operating a mosque in the US. It will explore how Muslim volunteers view their positions or roles in the creation of Islamic authority. The methods by which

¹⁴ The Tablighi Jamaa movement originated in India. Its basic activities mostly consist of traveling between Islamic places, and the members are known for a strict daily-life regimen that holds to the early Islamic way of life, as well as their abstinence from contemporary political aspects of Islam (Masud, 2000).

they fill positions and play roles in the context of the institution of the mosque depend upon their understanding of Islamic existence in a given area, the productivity of interpersonal interactions among community members, and the dynamics of the social environment within the center.

Similar to other American mosques, the volunteers at Lansing mosques consist of the founding elders, the appointed leaders, professional workers, and ordinary members. This study seeks to examine how they perceive their roles and how they gained them in the first place. Among the results of this exploration is a review of Marcel Mauss' theory of gift-giving (Mauss, 1954) in the context of Muslim communities. Mauss argues that every gift can give back some advantageous values to the giver. Gift-giving is not merely an event of material exchange, but it is an exchange of influence. In this research, we might consider the contributions of mosque volunteers as their gift to the community, which in turn may simultaneously improve the giver's feeling of dignity.

Research Location

Historically, Lansing became the capital of Michigan in 1847 following the government move of the state's capital from Detroit in that year. Before that, the area of Lansing was an uninhabited forest regularly flooded for many months of the year by the merging of the Cedar River into the Grand River. The cause for the settlement of the area relates to the Anglo-American War of 1812-1815, which had proven the Detroit area vulnerable from an attack from the east. After the war, the then US rulers of the territory looked for an alternative place for the capital of a new state, farther to the west portion of the region. This area had been seized from the indigenous American tribes following their defeat in the war, together with their ally, the British.

Concurrent with the enforcement of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 in the southern states, by President Andrew Jackson, land investors and speculators in Michigan began to purchase settlement permits from the government to open new cities on the mainland. Among the attractive

areas for sale was the junction between the Grand River and Cedar River, because at that time that junction provided a source of energy. Speculators initially named the acreages “Biddle City” to attract buyers, but after years of difficult development the area was finally named Lansing, since the first settlers who came to the area were mostly from the city of Lansing in New York state.¹⁵ In 1837, Michigan was officially admitted as a state to the American Union, and in 1847 the newly built city of Lansing became the new capital of the state of Michigan. The new capital’s development was boosted even more when in 1855 the Michigan Agricultural College was founded, which grew over time to become Michigan State University, as people know it today.¹⁶

Looking at the demographics of the city, I still found that the official website of the city of Lansing stated rough figures, which estimated that there were more than 500,000 people living in the greater Lansing area.¹⁷ This estimate supposedly covers the whole population of Michigan’s capital’s metropolitan area, which includes three counties: Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton counties, plus the city of Owosso in Shiawassee County. But the number still looks like an overestimation, because the latest estimate of the population made by an official census did not reach more than 470,000 residents for the entire capital region.¹⁸ By 2015, the city of Lansing had a population of

¹⁵ Biddle City was not the only attempt of land sales that used a made-up label. There were other “paper” cities like “City of Ingham”, “Columbia”, and “Jefferson City”, all were made up just to attract buyers. Interesting story about the city’s early history can be seen in a book by Bert Darling, *City in the Forest: The Story of Lansing* (Darling, 1950). An opinion by Cowles regarding the city’s history was uploaded by MGROW (Cowles, 1905), a local agricultural group, which was then revised by Peckham and Votta in a magazine article (Peckham & Votta, 2013). About the political events related to the seize of the lands, see David Miller’s *The Forced Removal of American Indians from the Northeast* (D. W. Miller, 2011).

¹⁶ In 1907, the Eastern part of Lansing, the so-called “Collegeville” area where Michigan Agricultural College located, was chartered as a new city, East Lansing (City of East Lansing, n.d.)

¹⁷ This rough estimate is mentioned on the city’s official website (The City of Lansing, n.d.).

¹⁸ Probably, the city’s population estimate includes foreigners, students and their families who are living in the area. See: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml> accessed on Nov 6, 2017.

115,056 people, while East Lansing had 48,471 people, according to the same reference.¹⁹ These two cities could be called the core of the capital area of Michigan since they host most of the administrative offices for the state.

In the state's capital area of Lansing, where this study was centered, there was one small mosque in downtown Lansing, plus a large mosque in East Lansing – both of which were Sunni mosques – and a Shiite center in the neighboring city of Okemos. I chose the mosque community of East Lansing as the primary site for this research, without forgetting the position of the other Islamic institutions in downtown Lansing and Okemos. The first reason for this approach is feasibility, which I had to consider after visiting most of the mosques in the state of Michigan and a few others in other states. Secondly, the East Lansing mosque is the biggest one in the state's capital area and has become the main destination for local Muslims to conduct their religious practices between work times, evenings, and weekends. Third, this study will complement the works of Sally Howell, who has explored the mosque communities in the Detroit area. While her Detroit research subjects were typically ethnic-based groups, the community of East Lansing mosque is a multi-ethnic community. Thus, it stands out among other Islamic institutions in the capital area. Furthermore, it also provided a representative sample of diversely-attended mosques, whose number reached more than 80% of all mosques in the US (Bagby, 2012). To follow up on Bagby's records, more focused studies are needed to explore individual communities to produce more detailed descriptions. For this purpose, the best discipline by which explore the varied aspects of local Muslim communities is anthropology, especially through its use of ethnography.

¹⁹ The link: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/BZA115214/2624120,2646000,2661940,26045,26037,26065> on March 26, 2017, shows the population numbers for the three counties, Lansing, East Lansing and Owosso, as recorded on the website of the U.S. Census Bureau.

With this thesis, my intention is to employ a method of social anthropology on the development of an authoritative religious body in the Muslim community of Lansing, Michigan. This work is the result of at least four years of my participant observation in the Islamic Center of East Lansing (ICEL), the official home of the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (ISGL). Living among the people and working within the community's organization, I myself felt firsthand how religious experiences of Muslim in the city were connected to the activities taking place in the Islamic Center of East Lansing. This religious center consists of a mosque and a regular Islamic school whose gymnasium was often used for public gatherings; all are situated in a neighborhood strategically located near the campus of Michigan State University (MSU). The objective of the study is to reveal the factors that contribute to the establishment of the organization as a point of reference in local Islamic affairs. This center was not the only place of Islamic gatherings in the city but offered a venue for social gatherings and community service; as such it had become the most prominent in terms of popularity and influence with its various constituent parts.

Thesis Structure

Following this introduction, the next chapter will explore the dissertation topic from a historical perspective. My observations regarding the development of a location for a religious authority among East Lansing Muslims will be assessed alongside the historical, political and demographical particularities of the area. This assessment aims to identify the characteristics that constitute the potential for the growth of Islamic place-building. While reporting on the building and establishment of the Islamic Center of East Lansing (ICEL) as an achievement of university students, the thesis begins to introduce Omar Soubani and his fellow students, including Daniel Masters, as the pioneers of the movement. This chapter also touches upon the historical development of the Wali Mahmoud Mosque in the western downtown of the city. Describing the mosque as part of the

heritage of the Nation of Islam, the report is written to present its transformative integration from NOI toward mainstream Sunni Islam. The chapter ends with a section that strives to connect some attitudes of mosque members with national and global politics.

Chapter three presents my observations on the emergence of individual volunteers and the formation of volunteer groups. In this part of the dissertation, I will describe several ways in which individuals became leaders of the community and how they formed collective identities based on a variety of similarities that connected each one with others. Chapter four explains the embodiments of religious authority developed from the position of the imams. Indicating the incompatibility of the perspective of discipline, the two imams in this chapter are described as part and products of habitus.

Chapter five presents my analysis on rituals as an object of Islamic authority. In this chapter, I will describe numerous rituals of the mosque of East Lansing that have been adjusted or improved with innovations to reach a state of harmony with the environment. Analyzing the objectification of ritual matters as observed in the mosque of East Lansing Islamic Center, I will divide these rituals into three categories of traditions: the continuous/great, the local/supplementary/minor, and the suppressed/exclusive. With this categorization, I would like to challenge the frameworks through which both Peter Mandaville and Olivier Roy estimate the impact of globalization on the spread of Islamic institutions. Finally, based on the characteristics described in the previous chapters, my concluding chapter will propose my own definition of authority.

CHAPTER 2

EAST LANSING'S ISLAM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICA

Particularities of Islam in East Lansing

Over the past forty years since its foundation in the end of 1970s, the Islamic Center of East Lansing has transformed into *the* local face of Islam. From its humble beginnings as a simple prayer space, the Center became an institution of Islamic authority to which the city's people look for guidance on most matters related to Islam and Muslims. While its original function as a place of worship remains unchanged, the Center has grown to become a facility for community services, social activities, and learning. The Center's founding generation – who are now senior in age – would come here five times a day mainly for prayers, but their children and grandchildren began to use the space to study, play or organize sporting activities.

Very often, especially on the weekends, family gatherings such as birth celebrations, marriages, and graduations were held in the center's gym. Occasionally, the weekends in the center would be enlivened by public events, including fundraising initiatives, health campaigns, political education opportunities, and organizational visits. Numerous politicians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, have visited the Center over the years to introduce their policy programs. Congregations of other faith traditions would frequently grace the space as well: sometimes they came for interfaith meetings, while on other occasions they arranged to borrow the gym for their own rituals. Perhaps most importantly, the Center became a reputable educational facility after it opened an Islamic primary school, weekend classes for Qur'anic and Islamic studies, and language courses. All of these services were rare among Islamic institutions even in the late 1990s.

Several factors characterizing the Lansing area bolstered the Center's steady development, despite the fact that it was started by a minority community. One of these factors was demographic:

the Lansing area gained a small but steady influx of immigrants over the first two decades when the Islamic Center was growing. Michigan overall has experienced zero population growth since the 1980s, and the number was even negative in some years due to economic crises.²⁰ The government tried to alleviate the problem by receiving refugees: Lansing thus became one of three “free case cities” in the state of Michigan, meaning that refugees were permitted to settle there without having a sponsoring family.²¹

Based on a report by Refugee Development Center (RDC) that has operated in Michigan since 2002, between 400 and 700 refugees were resettled in Lansing area each year, and by the time this research was ended, between 10,000 and 13,000 of them live in mid-Michigan.²² Another report by Migration Policy Institute (MPI) of the period between 2007 and 2017 mentioned that around 32% of the refugees admitted to the US reported themselves as Muslims by origin, meaning that we can estimate there were between 3,000-4,000 refugees within the general Muslim population in the mid-Michigan region.²³ Other than refugees, the Muslim population was also augmented by an increase in college students studying at Michigan colleges and universities. For example, in just a little more than two decades, Michigan State University doubled its number of students admitted from Muslim majority countries.²⁴

The second factor was political. Being the biggest mosque, plus being located in the state capital, the Islamic Center turned into a hotspot as public debates over the relationship between Islam and America escalated. A few incidents occurred in which people vandalized or defaced the

²⁰ See: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/states/michigan-population/>

²¹ See: <http://legalnews.com/macomb/1005977>

²² See: <http://www.refugeedevlopmentcenter.org/about/frequently-asked-questions-about-refugees-in-lansing/>

²³ See Figure 6 in a report by MPI: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states>

²⁴ From the MSU’s record found in URL: <https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/ReportView.aspx?Report=UE-GEOForeign> at (07/29/2018), I counted that in 1994 there were 353 students, and in 2018 there were 713 students coming from 28 and 36 countries, with at least 50% of the populations being Muslim.

Center's property to express a negative opinion of Islam or Muslims in the global political scene.²⁵ However, most public relations were positive toward the mosque community. Over these years, the incidents made the Center become an even more obvious symbol of Islam in the area. For example, during this time period the Islamic Center and the cities of Lansing and East Lansing established the Ramadan Dinner. This tradition might have been inspired by a similar feast held at the White House each year, after it was initiated by First Lady Hillary Clinton in 1996. Such a courteous gathering with respect to an Islamic holy month implied that the federal government recognized and appreciated Muslims as citizens of the nation. With that in mind, the Center's other events, such as blood drives, refugee events, and student welcome parties would also strengthen the image that the Center was the ideal place in the area to see Islam and interact with Muslims.



Figure 1. Photograph: Lansing and East Lansing Mayors' Ramadan Unity Dinner of 2015.

²⁵ In September 2010, a burned Quran was left outside of the East Lansing mosque. A subsequent police investigation and pledge to apprehend the culprit led to the doer's surrender. A judge fined him for littering. See: http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-09-14-mosque14_ST_N.htm

The third factor contributing to the Center's steady development was the NOI's transition to Sunni Islam. Following the death of NOI leader Elijah Muhammad in 1975, his son Warith Deen Muhammad, the new leader, dissolved the organization and instructed his followers to embrace mainstream Sunni Islam. Minister Louis Farrakhan tried to revive NOI a few years later but the organization has remained marginal. Former NOI members in the Lansing area proceeded with converting their temple into a Sunni mosque; as a result they were converging their activities with the mosque community of East Lansing. With this development, the city's Muslim community expanded, and the Islamic Center of East Lansing's role as the center of Islamic growth was further enhanced.

Geographically, the growth of Lansing's Muslims' population was also influenced by the prior development of two major Midwestern economic hubs: Detroit and Chicago. In the Detroit area of the 1970s - especially the city of Dearborn- there were already-established communities of automotive workers who since the early twentieth century had immigrated primarily from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. The Muslims among them contributed to the growth of Islam in the area, including building mosques as early as the 1920s (S. Howell, 2014).

Meanwhile, Chicago also had many neighborhoods that consisted of Arab, Caucasian, Indian and Pakistani Muslims' businesses whose employees used to be workers and peddlers from the same time as the early Detroit Muslims periods.²⁶ Being in between the two hubs, the Lansing Muslim community included South Asian, Arab and East African immigrants who came to the area either via Detroit or Chicago. As those who stayed in Detroit and Chicago, Muslims of the Lansing area also maintained religious traditions rooted in their geographic origins. This meant that for more than

²⁶ A Bosnian Muslim organization was founded in 1906 in Chicago ("MONOGRAFIJA 100 GODINA BOŠNJAKA U AMERICI," 2006), indicating that the city already had a significant number of Muslims in the early twentieth century.

three decades Sunni Islamic practices were the dominant force in shaping the early development of Islam in the region. The demographic foundations of the Muslim community ensured that Sunni practices would likely prevail for years to come, leaving the minority Shi'ite community of the area to consolidate their religious culture within their own circles.

Overall, the establishment of an Islamic center in an American city during these decades indicates that it was a momentous period for the spread of Islam in America. This trend was a natural consequence of specific political decisions. Long before the turn of the third millennium, the influx of Muslim immigrants that began in 1965 was caused by the Immigration Act of that year, which aimed to end the discriminatory policy of national origin quotas that had been in place since 1924. This influx increased even more when the Immigration Act of 1990 further eased immigration requirements. The next major phase relating to the increasing visibility of Muslims in the United States started in the aftermath of the 9-11 terrorist attacks. Previously marginal from the media perspective, suddenly all things about Islam and Muslims became the center of global attention after the tragic and highly televised attack.

It is without question that these and other violent events intensified interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims around the world. The resulting attitudes toward Islamic issues varied between shunning the community and seeking out contact with the community. Sometimes the impact appeared paradoxical because the aftermath generated more interest in the religion and, in turn, more conversions to the faith (P. D. Bowen, 2009; Esseissah, 2011).²⁷ Many people converted into Islam after they found out that, contrary to the Islamophobic narratives, Islam brought positivity to their life. Many converts claim that what they found in Islamic beliefs reflected what they already

²⁷ Other than these scientific works, opinions written in public media also echoed this trend, such as in an article by Omar Sacirbey in *The Huffington Post* (Sacirbey, 2011).

had in mind or were already looking for. Thus, embracing Islam was not perceived to be a new conversion, but rather a return to original belief. Hence they called the process “reversion.”²⁸ Therefore, this increase in conversions could be understood as part of a global increase of Muslims in European and American cities, including Lansing.²⁹

However, looking at the fact that the current number of immigrant Muslims is larger than the number of converts, it must be acknowledged that the increasing presence of Muslim in American cities has more to do with political events happening abroad than the attractiveness of the belief system itself to American citizens. Since 1990, a significant number of new Muslim-majority states were founded or gained independence following the breakup of the USSR (Soviet Union) and Yugoslavia. Both countries had suppressed religious freedoms in order to protect the authority of the state communist party system.

To include the birth of other countries in other continents, the number of new countries reached 34 states by 2011 (Rosenberg, 2017), aligned around religion and ethnic borders. Civil wars following the breakups and births of the countries, generating millions of refugees, who brought their religious traditions with them on the road. Once settled in the United States, many revived their traditional beliefs or religions and sought to connect with their coreligionists. In the case of Muslims, The Pew Research Center roughly estimated that from 1992 to 2012 as many as 1.7 million Muslim immigrants legally entered the United States (Pew Research Center, 2013). As a result, sheltering

²⁸ In this thesis, Esseissah refers to his own interviews and the works of Kate Zebiri (Zebiri, 2014, p. 15) and Akbar S. Ahmed (Ahmed, 2010, p. 304) to convey the recorded confessions of numerous converts saying that they had identified with Islam before their *shahada* (declaration of faith), that every person was born with *fitra* (natural goodness), that Islam was foreign and familiar at the same time, and that they had been Muslims even before embracing Islam.

²⁹ An over-dramatized media report had cited a record in the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) to create an image of the increase of Muslims in the US since 9/11. But it was not very accurate since ARDA's report (ASARB, 2010b) of Muslims' population increase from 2000 to 2010, especially for the county of Ingham where Lansing is the largest city, showed just over a twelve percent increase. The increase for whole state of Michigan was indeed high, at 49 percent (ASARB, 2010a). See Meghan Neal's report in the New York's Daily News (Neal, 2012).

cities in Michigan, including Detroit, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, and Lansing, witnessed a significant increase in the number of mosques built since the 1970s. In state capital areas such as Lansing, Muslim began to be more visible with displaying signs in public and occasional observance of certain religious traditions.

Number of Muslims in Lansing

Regarding the number of Muslims in East Lansing, it is difficult – if not impossible – to know the exact number of Muslim in any city in the United States, let alone specific details about those numbers’ shifting dynamics year by year. In the case of the Lansing area, all we can state is that there were definitely some Arab immigrants by the end of the nineteenth century among the settlers who came to develop the city, and thus there might be a certain number of Muslims within this Arab population. Rosina Hassoun (2005) authored a pioneering work that provides a description of the early presence of Arab immigrants in the area of Lansing, as part of a larger history of the Arab-Americans in Michigan. Based on her interviews with the remaining Arab families, she writes:

“The first (Arab) immigrants to the Lansing area were overwhelmingly Syrian/Lebanese Christians. ... The total Arab-American community in Lansing may number as many as two thousand people, but no clear local numbers are available ... In the late 1800s, Lebanese Christians from the village of Deir Mimas in the Marjayoun district of Southern Lebanon began immigrating to the United States and found their way to Lansing to work in the Oldsmobile Plant and the Diamond Reo Truck Company. Perhaps the first Arab American to immigrate to the Lansing area was Sam Solomon in 1897...

Some of the prominent Arab-American families in the Lansing area include the Saad (Saad Furs), Rahail, Shaheen (automobile sales), Adado (Adado Riverfront Park), Kalouch, and Toubia families. Wadih (Woody) Zamel ... of Woody’s Oasis restaurant. ... Another Arab-American family has opened the most upscale Arabic restaurant in East Lansing, Sultan’s restaurant.

The village of Al Bassa was north of Acre and until 1925 was part of Lebanon... (it) was about 40 percent Muslims and 60 percent Christians, ... Israeli forces destroyed the village, ... Their camp

suffered severe damage during the war and this sent waves of Al Bassa refugees fleeing, and eventually a group of families came to Lansing, Michigan. ... (Hassoun, 2005, pp. 33-37)

Thus, we deduce that there were some Muslims among the early Arab immigrants who came to Lansing at the turn of the last century, but the bulk of Muslim immigrants certainly came after World War II. These later newcomers would become the main supporters of the construction of a mosque in East Lansing in the 1970s, long after the construction of mosques took place in Detroit, built by the earlier immigrants of the early 1900s (S. F. Howell, 2009).

As is the case nationwide in America, there is no official record of the number of Muslims in Lansing. A report by Sperling, a digital information compiler of people and places, estimated in 2014 that the percentage of Muslims in Lansing and East Lansing cities was 1.44%, which was larger than the average of 0.87% in the entirety of the capital counties, but still lower than its percentage in Detroit, 3.72%. For the whole state of Michigan, Sperling estimated the percentage of Muslim at 1.22%, or 120,747 out of 9,897,264 total population for the state. These percentages also mean that there were 4,041 Muslims in the three counties, which included the majority of 2,922 in Lansing, East Lansing, and Meridian Township. In the entire United States, The Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, 2011) estimated that Muslims numbered 3.3 million, or 1% of the population. Although this number represents about one-half of the estimates made by Islamic organizations, the percentage nevertheless shows growth since the Pew's estimation in 2010 was 0.8% (Pew Research Center, 2011). Comparing the number of Muslims by states, one estimate (Barooah, 2012) suggested that Michigan has 1,218 Islamic adherents per 100,000 people, which is ranked sixth after Illinois, Virginia, New York, New Jersey and Texas.

My own observation of the number of Muslims routinely attending the Friday prayers in the Islamic Center of East Lansing seems to agree with Sperling's estimation. After counting the number of the attendees several times, I can say the full capacity of the mosque, both in men's and women's

prayer rooms, is around 700, in which men are about 550 and women approximately 150. As prayers are usually held twice in a single Friday, there should be at least 1400 Muslims attending the Friday prayers each week. The current chief imam of the mosque, Imam Sohail, estimated the actual number of Lansing Muslims could be ten times bigger, which I thought too optimistic. During Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha annual prayers, the number of attendees reached five to six thousand, filling one exhibition hall of the biggest venue of the city, the Lansing Center. They are probably just half of the actual number, because many Muslims were unable to attend due to work, or just failed to come for some other reason. So, if we do not count as Muslim the people who do not longer attend prayers, the resulting number of Muslims in this city is around 5000.

Counting Muslims based on the attendees of Friday prayers, however, may miss quite a significant number of community members who could not come to this weekly gathering due to scheduling conflicts or work obligations. Friday prayer times are working hours, and according to mainstream Islamic teaching, this prayer is obligatory only for adult males.³⁰ So, the actual number of the community's population could be double the number reported for Friday attendees if we consider that attendance at the large Lansing Center venues took place during the annual rituals of Eid Fitr and Eid Adha, the largest two Islamic celebrations.

Muslims in Lansing consist of immigrants, refugees, black African Americans (including both intergenerational Muslims and recent converts) and white converts. In terms of numbers, the immigrants are larger than the other groups. The immigrants also are economically better off than the refugees. This is why the development of Islamic organizations in the area had more to do with the immigrants' roles than was the case for the other the groups. The roles of refugees could also

³⁰ Females are free to join Friday prayers or just hold the noon prayers. Moreover, Shi'i Islam also views this weekly prayer as an optional obligation. See Al-Sistani's view at: <http://www.sistani.org/english/qa/search/29889/> on March 27, 2017. Besides, Shi'i Muslims were mostly reluctant to join Friday prayers with the Sunnis.

not be ignored, since they had a significant impact on the presence of Muslim in general. The annual report of the Refugee Development Center (RDC) (“RDC Newsletters and Annual Reports,” 2016), a collaborative service facilitated by a variety of social organizations, revealed that it had been serving 1,691 clients.³¹ The percentages of the country of origins showed that 48% of them seemed to come from Islamic enclaves of the world, which gives us the number of 811 Muslims solely for the refugee population. If we count this number against the number of Muslims in the three counties, refugees account for as much as 20% of all Muslims in the area.

If a person needed to assess the presence of Muslims in America, then the available entities to count are the identifiable existence of their religion, which includes Islamic institutions and public population figures. Islamic institutions include the mosques, the congregational organizations, the schools, public events, and so on. Public figures are the Muslim leaders and members of those Islamic institutions who declared or expressed themselves as Muslims in public sphere. While the institutional ones could be counted, the membership number was of course unclear. An individual’s choice of religion in the secular West today is not available to count, which is contrary to the most Muslim-dominated countries where a person’s religion is still printed on one’s personal identity document; those were the countable ones because they are the entities that had been claimed as Muslims by Muslims themselves. We could no longer count the number of Muslim individuals in the West the way we counted them in their original countries. In Lansing, the available entities to count regarding the existence of Islam are the organizations and activists of the two mosques, as previously described: the Islamic Center of East Lansing near Michigan State University (MSU)

³¹ The last report made by RDC was from 2016. See its URL: <http://www.refugeedevlopmentcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/RDCAnnualReport.pdf> on 4/5/2017

campus and Wali Mahmoud Mosque in the western neighborhood near downtown Lansing. The following sections recount the stories of their beginnings.

The Islamic Center of East Lansing and Muslim Student Activism

The story of Shaikh Omar Sobani reflects how Middle Eastern students were instrumental in funding and developing the Islamic Center in East Lansing. Back in 1972, young Omar Sobani came to America to conduct a short mission. He had to visit American cities in order to study the educational system of the country, after which he had to return to Jordan to continue his work as a chief officer in the education ministry of the Jordanian government. However, he ended up staying with his family in the Michigan city of Lansing as a US citizen. He decided to spend the rest of his life in America and probably to have his last breath here, under the care of his wife and children, who joined him in 1989. Later, he was joined by his grandchildren, who were mostly born in America, and the beloved community of Lansing Muslims who would not forget the devotions and contributions he put forth toward the establishment of the Islamic center, dating from his first arrival in the city in 1973.

Many people I met with in the mosque to talk about the history of the Center would recommend that I first speak with Shaikh Omar Soubani before contacting other sources for more information. There were indeed two features of Shaikh Omar's roles that his fellow activists did not have. First, he was the only person who had dedicated his main activities for the Muslim community development programs, whereas others had secured their own jobs before allocating their spare time to participate in mosque works. Shaikh Omar's main job was to work for mosques, and he was not known to ever have another job as his main occupation. Second, he also was the one who had become an ambassador that connected Lansing Muslim community with national networks of

Islamic movements. Shaikh Omar used to travel to other states either to represent Lansing Muslims or to assist with events of national-level organizations such as the Islamic Society in North America (ISNA).

When I started my research, Shaikh Omar was already too old to take part in the administration of the complex daily affairs of the Center, but nevertheless he was still the person whose attendance could indicate the level of importance of a given public event. He would come to the mosque venues only for Friday prayers, fundraising banquets, the two Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha feast prayers, or certain private parties. Mosque committees always followed the news about his health condition, especially each time he did not appear for an important gathering. Beyond important gatherings, he would spend most of his time taking rest in his duplex apartment unit situated two and a half miles south of the mosque that he used to take care of. To get from one place to another, Shaikh Omar relied on his faithful son, Khaled, who would drive him everywhere. A couple of my interview appointments with him were also cancelled due to his illness.

Omar was born in Palestine in the early 1930s. At the age of 15 he was sent to Cairo to study at Al-Azhar University, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the world. He graduated from Al-Azhar after nine years of studying Sharia, teaching skills, and Arabic literature. Within this period, he once went back to Palestine; he found out that his home had been destroyed, and subsequently he migrated with his family to Jordan as a refugee. After settling for a while in the Jordanian city of Amman, he decided to return to Cairo to continue his studies for a master's degree at Al-Azhar University. The dean of the Syari'a College of the university was a relative of Omar's family. This man helped Omar by letting him stay in his house for a while until he was able to find his own accommodations.

Omar finally finished a master's degree in Shari'a and Arabic language in 1955. After a few years working in the city, Omar went back to Amman, the capital of Jordan. In Amman, he was first appointed as a teacher of Arabic literature for middle and high schools. Later, he was appointed to hold a variety of positions, including a school supervisor in the province of Karak, then chief supervisor in the same province. He then moved back to Amman to become a superintendent in a major district of the capital city, and superintendent in a city in the province of Balqa. During his employment in the Jordanian ministry of education, he received additional training, including taking an English language course in England for a couple of months, and international training for higher educators in the Arab world, in Beirut, Lebanon. In general, Omar had spent about 17 years serving a variety of positions in the Jordanian Ministry of Education before his journey to the United States. By the time of his travel to the US, he was a 39-year-old man with six children, dating from his marriage in Amman in 1959.

Then in 1972 Omar went to the United States, leaving his country and family with a special task to explore and study the educational system of America, after which he was supposed to go back and submit report papers. However, after some explorations that included visits to the University of Michigan and Wayne State University, he said he got the feeling that he needed to stay longer in order to develop his own educational career. He extended his stay in the US and decided to enroll at Michigan State University in 1973 for an additional graduate degree.

His first adviser at MSU was Dr. Archibald Shaw, a professor of administration and higher education in the college of education. He completed all required classes and continued to prepare his research for a Ph.D. degree. Unfortunately, Dr. Shaw became ill when Omar was still trying to complete his doctoral candidacy. After nine months struggling with cancer, Dr. Shaw died in 1978. Shocked by Dr. Shaw's death, Omar still tried to continue his studies under the supervision of

another professor of the college, Dr. Philip Cusick. However, Omar's activities in the nascent Islamic Center were on the rise. For several more years, Omar kept extending his stay despite the protests of his family and his Jordanian office. Finally, he ended his contract with the Jordanian government in 1986. He then applied for American citizenship, which he was granted in 1989 under the category of religious scholar. In the following year his wife and children joined him.

As Omar acknowledged himself, he was just one among many without whom the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing would not be as established as it is today. The most important entity in this context was the local branch of Muslim Student Association (MSA), the Islamic movement that had existed in the city before Omar's arrival. The activities of MSA members in the campus had created a circumstance of awareness by which Islamic phenomena were becoming familiar among the people on campus. MSA stories in MSU are interesting in and of themselves, but Omar's next life chapter pertaining to the Islamic Center establishment deserves to first be continued.

In terms of memorable personalities, Omar always recalled the roles of several persons without whom we may not have seen the Islamic Center of East Lansing as it is today. Among them was Dr. Mohamed Abouelseoud, an Egyptian professor who taught science in the college of engineering. Abu Su'ud was instrumental in the early development of the Center, as he provided the young men with information and guidance toward finding the items on sale for the future construction of the Center. Another Muslim professor most remembered by Omar was Muhammad Ashraf Dayyumi, an Egyptian professor of science, whose Friday sermons often touched upon political affairs, mainly with regard to the then-current situations in the Middle East. Lastly, for Omar and others who attended the first Friday prayer to celebrate the opening of the mosque in 1979, the most remembered figure was Salah al-Ayyubi, an older Lebanese man who was appointed to deliver the

sermons. Salah's emotional tone while delivering the sermon made Omar himself and many of the congregants burst into tears.³²

Omar also remembered Dr. August Benson, Foreign Student Advisor at the International Center. Omar said he felt lucky since Dr. Benson was very friendly to foreign students. Dr. Benson gave the MSA permission to use one of large rooms in the International Center for Friday prayers for a few years until the mosque was built and ready in 1979. Omar could not forget that Dr. Benson had actually tried to arrange the attendance of Michigan's state governor and the MSU president at the opening ceremony of the mosque. Unfortunately, their attendance was cancelled due to increasing political tension following the news about the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979.³³

Other fellow activists whom Omar also could not forget were those who had worked in the organization of the students' Islamic activities at MSU during a time before the mosque was built. The first of them was Abdurrazzaq Bashier, a graduate student from the Republic of Sudan. Abdurrazzaq was Omar's collaborator for the program of weekend lectures that took place in the Spartan Village apartment units, as the room in the International Center was used only for Friday prayers. When the mosque was being built, the Islamic student activities were moved to a house located next to the construction site. Then Omar mentioned two students, Daniel Masters and Mar'ie al-Amry, who used to live in a house next to the mosque since its initial construction, and therefore watched the building grow brick by brick. Daniel Masters now lives in Kuwait following his marriage with a woman from that country, while Mar'ie al-Amry returned to his country of origin, Saudi Arabia.

³² Two separate interviews with Prof. Khalil and Shaikh Omar Soubani confirmed this incident.

³³ August Benson's earned his Ph.D. degree in 1969 from MSU with a dissertation in which he studied the function of the foreign student advisor as perceived by knowledgeable MSU faculty members who had foreign students in their classes. This dissertation topic led Benson to a position as foreign student advisor in the Office of International Studies and Programs at MSU, in 1964. Benson died in 2011 ("Remembering August 'Jerry' Benson," 2011).

Construction projects

A construction project is best described by a person who was directly involved in the process from the time of group discussions, to the growth of concrete walls, brick by brick: Daniel Masters. I got in contact with him via Facebook. Daniel Masters was one of the students who lived in the Muslim House, a house next to the site where the mosque was being built. I saw a comment that he had posted in 2014 on the Facebook page of the Islamic Center, as follows:

“East Lansing has a special place in my heart. It was where God guided me to Islam back in 1976. At the time, the Islamic Center was only a dream in the minds and hearts of our small Muslim community. I was fortunate to witness the fulfillment of that dream from the purchase of the land to the re-zoning of the land, to the planning and donation phase, to the actual construction of the mosque. I was living in the house next door and watched the Center go up brick by brick (and have tons of pictures to prove it!) It was truly a groundbreaking event for Muslims in America. I feel so blessed to have been a small part of that monumental project. For those who came and found it there, pray for the brothers and sisters who worked so hard to make it a reality and thank Allah for making their dreams come true.” (July 19, 2014)



Figure 2. Photograph: Daniel Masters (left) on the construction ground. Facebook, ICEL, August 21, 2014

Although this Facebook comment was posted in 2014, I became aware that Daniel was one of the early witnesses only after Shaikh Omar mentioned his name in one of our interviews two years later. So, I had an uncertain feeling when sending him an introductory message with a request to be

a Facebook friend. But surprisingly, he replied enthusiastically and described his story in detail regarding the mosque construction, as if he had known me before through other connections in the city of Lansing. As Daniel recalled, he said he was not there when the MSA was first established. But he did remember how the Islamic Center got started. He remembered discussions about the need for a center as soon as he embraced Islam in May 1976. At the time, the Friday Prayer was usually held in a room on the ground floor of the International Center. Daniel noted that the room was quite cramped and the congregation kept growing. As far as the five daily prayers were concerned, the only congregation on campus was a group of Muslim students in Owen Hall, a dormitory around two blocks to the East. They prayed in a study hall room on one of the floors of the building.

Daniel described that when talks of finding a more permanent place for prayers were brought up, the people were divided into two opposing points of view. One group suggested a conservative proposal, which was to rent a building that they would convert for the intended purpose. The other proposal, which was supported mainly by younger students from the Gulf states, wanted to purchase a piece of land on which they would build a proper mosque. The reasoning behind the conservative proposal came from a pessimistic view of the future. According to this reasoning, the community of students, who were mostly foreigners, one day would go back home to their respective countries and the mosque would be abandoned. So, the idea of having a permanent building for Islamic prayers would seem a bit naïve and too ambitious. But the younger students thought about the future worship place more optimistically. They wanted to have a proper mosque, a building that was to be built permanently, and dedicated especially for prayers. To support their proposal, they even pledged that they would be willing to collect money for the project from generous donators from their countries in the Middle East.

Putting their differences aside, both sides agreed that they needed money to realize the idea upon which they would agree. So, they started intensive donation collections among the Muslims then residing in the city and began to pursue financial resources through parents' connections in the countries of the students' origins, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates. At this point, Daniel's story seemed to emphasize the instrumental roles of the younger students in the establishment of the Islamic Center since they tended to take optimistic attitudes to deal with almost all challenges. "I don't like to get into differences, but it was the young students who were instrumental in the establishment of the Islamic Center," Daniel remembered in an online chat with me. "Some others were skeptical at first and extremely cautious," he added. According to him, most of the donations for the Center came from generous donors from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Very little of these countries' governments money was involved. He said he actually preferred it that way. He did not want any donations with conditions, in order to make it an independent center.

To complement Daniel's story, there is a fragment of Shaikh Omar's story that describes how the early fundraising effort included unforgettable moments. Omar remembered that two sibling sisters were in charge of keeping records of money collection: Nafis Khan, the general secretary of MSA, and Anis Khan, its financial secretary. Both were the daughters of Dr. Muhammad Khan, a local resident. After one year of fundraising, they were happy to report that about \$11,000 had been collected from all sources. With that amount of money in hand, their initial decision was to find a large room to rent. But when such place was found, they had difficulties, as they had to move items away from the rooms before prayers could take place, and afterward put those items back when the prayers finished. Meanwhile, good news came from those who were doing the fundraising from abroad. One of the students, Muhammad Fe'l, was blessed to have received a \$50,000 check donated by a Saudi Arabian businessman named Salih Kamil. Never expecting to receive a donation

that large, the students shouted “*Allahu Akbar*” (God the Greatest) when they heard the information during a routine announcement after one particular Friday prayer.

So, the new community decided to upgrade the plan of buying a building instead of renting one. At that time, there were a few properties on sale on South Harrison Road on the western side of the MSU campus. Supporters were interested in acquiring a place in this area because the section of the road was already known as Church Row due to the presence of three churches directly across the western side of the MSU campus. These supporters were looking at a piece of land with a house on it next to a Baptist Church, which was situated at 920 South Harrison Road, East Lansing. Here, the difference between the old and the young members actually again arose. Shaikh Omar told me that some of the elders, including Dr. Muhammad Khan, the father of Anis and Nafis Khan, advised the students to buy a building located one block to the north from the location of the young group’s preferred location. He suggested buying the building in order to open up the first floor as a place of worship and to rent out rooms on the second floor to fund eventual maintenance costs. The students did not like the building because it was designed for commercial apartments. They wanted to have one specially dedicated for a mosque, a spacious place where more people would come to pray and socialize. They were becoming more optimistic now because the fundraising had reached in excess of \$100,000. Finally, they were able to purchase the property next to the Baptist Church, which consisted of a piece of land and a small house on it at 920 S. Harrison Rd., for around \$35,000.

According to Daniel, Omar Soubani started out in the conservative camp, but very soon became enthusiastic about building the Center. Once he jumped across the line to support the youngsters, Omar definitely became a major guiding force. He was able to convince the doubtful members on board to realize the dream. One of the moments of this burgeoning enthusiasm happened after they purchased the small house on 920 South Harrison Road; many of them immediately wanted to start praying the five prayers in this small residence. There were still some people who told them that before holding worship sessions in the house, they might need to wait for

some time to obtain a rezoning permit to build a non-residential building on the site. Until the permit could be issued, they were not supposed to use the house as a place of worship. But with the excitement already having spread, and, now believing that they owned the land, they believed that they could establish regular prayer there. So, they began praying in the house despite the fear that prayer activities in the house could jeopardize their attempt to receive a permit from the city. That is, prayer activities could bring unnecessary attention to the fact that an Islamic center was going to be built. Some pessimistic members warned that if there were some outsiders who would not like to see an Islamic site in the city, such persons could arise to oppose the building of the Islamic center. That might happen because there had to be a hearing before a zoning change could be made. These anxious Muslims wished that no one would come to the hearing sessions just to challenge the application.

Daniel recalled the feeling of rejoicing among the students when all fears of opposition to the Center eventually came to naught. When the hearing took place, only two people from the community stood up to speak. One was a history professor at MSU of a Lebanese Christian background who enthusiastically welcomed the Islamic Center as a great cultural asset to the community. The second was the neighbor who lived directly behind the property who very politely asked that people dim their lights as they drove into the back part of the parking lot. Therefore, the permit was smoothly granted.

According to Shaikh Omar, the plans for the building were drawn up by a Muslim architect, Mokhtar Khalil, from Chicago. He had to change the construction's designs a few times to adjust the future building details with several requirements and in line with the community's financial prospects. The first design, standard building with a basement for a kitchen and two apartment rooms, would cost around \$900,000. After three years of fundraising they did not have that much

money available and had actually already exhausted much of their financial resources. So, the design had to be adjusted to a lower construction cost while maintaining the restraints of noise, traffic and light exposure, as demanded by neighbors. In one point the architect had to sketch a design to respond to some students who were wondering about creating a type of movable building. These students were also afraid about the future of the mosque, namely, that they thought it might be better if they built a mosque that could be moved to another location. Regarding this idea, the architect's estimation of the cost of constructing this movable type showed a lower price, but was still unaffordable. The architect then redesigned the first plan toward even a lower cost. The final plan did not include a basement, so the main prayer hall, a multipurpose room for social activities, a library, an office, a kitchen, bathrooms, and a living quarters for a manager or imam would be built on the same floor. The hearing at the city office also approved the final plan, thanks to the efforts made by an attorney, the architect and the majority of the neighbors.

The students had used the small house for prayers for about a year when they had to leave to allow for demolition and subsequent mosque construction. Indeed, they had prepared for the transition to keep their religious activities running while the construction was ongoing. While the mosque was still being planned, they had decided to buy another house at 908 S. Harrison Rd., which is next to the first property. Omar remembered that it was Dr. Mohamed Abouelseoud who led them to buy the house, which was finally procured for around \$50,000. After remodeling that added expenses approaching \$79,000, the youths named the second building "Muslim House". So, just before the construction activities began, the students had moved their activities to the Muslim House and continued their prayers and weekend studies there.

In their plan, the Muslim House would also become a future source of income for the Center. The house would be rented out to Muslim students and the income would go toward the upkeep of the upcoming center. Despite being used by other students for daily prayers, the actual tenants of

the Muslim House were Daniel Masters and Mar'ie al-Amry, both of whom were leading MSA members. That is how these two young men had the opportunity to closely watch the construction going up brick by brick. As Daniel remembered it, the building started in the fall of 1978 and most of the construction took place during the winter. Meanwhile, Friday prayers were still using the room in the International Center because the Muslim House's capacity was too small to accommodate all congregants that now numbered more than one hundred.

When the first phase of the construction was completed in the fall of 1979, the project's committee had spent around \$750,000, which included land purchase, administrative preparations and construction. The opening of the mosque was planned to be a grand ceremony on October 16. Shaikh Omar said that Dr. Benson of the International Office had actually prepared to help by inviting the MSU president, the mayors of Lansing and East Lansing, and even the Governor of Michigan. The courage to celebrate the opening was high because the success of building a mosque by a community of students was regarded as a great achievement, particularly at a time when Islamic phenomena in America was barely visible. Unfortunately, the friendly political situation changed unfavorably toward Muslims immediately after the siege of the US embassy in Tehran broke out following the 1979 Iranian Revolution.



Figure 3. Photograph: The main building of the Islamic Center of East Lansing has been the same since its opening in 1979. Facebook, ICEL, August 21, 2014.

The official opening was finally held with a simple ceremony with the attendance of Dr. Benson as the honorary guest. In the first Friday prayer following the opening, out of respect the congregants appointed an older member of the clergy, a Lebanese man named Salah al-Ayyubi, to deliver the sermon. Salah was known as a person who often officiated marriages among local Muslims, and he had been living in Lansing long before Omar had come to the city. In the first sermon, Salah delivered an emotional tone while praising the sacrifices of the young people, bringing many of the congregants to tears. Omar also happened to be a member of the mosque's board of trustees.

Finished with the construction of the first building, the students continued working to provide supporting facilities. In 1981 they purchased another house at 933 Daisy Lane, which also used to belong to the Baptist Church, which was the right-side neighbor of the new mosque, for the price of \$35,000. After spending another \$18,000 for remodeling work, the new owners named it Muslima House, as it was rented to the Muslim sisters. In 1986, the Baptist Church building itself was sold to the Muslim community for around \$80,000. The building was renamed Dar as-Salam, and it was mostly used to accommodate the Sunday School and Farouq School, an education program with

mixed curriculum sponsored by the Saudi Arabian government. In 1992 the community implemented a \$61,000 remodeling project to convert the manager's apartment into meeting rooms and a women's bathroom. The original women's bathroom on the east side of the center was converted into a conference room. In 1996, the community purchased the house at 921 Daisy Lane for \$106,500 and used it for the Greater Lansing Islamic School (GLIS), a full-time private school then in its first two years. This home is currently dedicated to house the imam and his family.

Before the 911 tragedy, donations from the Middle East flowed into the community through a variety of fundraising programs. Omar himself made three trips especially intended for this fundraising task to four countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. In one of his travels to Saudi Arabia a fellow senior member, Yusuf Sulayman, joined him. After his 2000 fundraising travel to Saudi Arabia, Omar stopped traveling abroad due to his health condition. The 911 tragedy generated a negative impact on the Center's development, since many pledges by Arab donors could not be realized or were greatly reduced. The fundraising programs now relied mostly on the donors within the US.

The largest proportion of the monetary outlays for construction expenses were spent when the Center expanded towards the building of GLIS's second floor and the women's prayer room. The school building now included a gymnasium, two stories that included twelve classrooms and two offices, and a full-size basement prepared for future underground expansion. Omar said that the Center had spent around five million dollars over the previous fifteen years, which included \$600,000 for the construction of the women's prayer room, which was completed in 2012. He estimated that the project in the basement would need at least another \$900,000 to make the space legally usable. That was a plan that had been waiting to be realized.

The construction of the women's prayer room had something to do with the increase in women's attendance at certain times. The Islamic Hijri calendar, abbreviated AH (for After Hijra), was among the lunar version, which moved ahead 11 days every year over the Anno Domini (AD) calendar. Ramadan is the month of ritual feasts for Muslims, and the congregation of the East

Lansing mosque would try to come to the mosque with entire families if Ramadan fell on off days such as weekends or holidays. In 2009 the month of Ramadan began on August 21, which was still part of summer vacation, until September 7 (the first Monday of September, Labor Day). This period allowed members of the congregation time to flock the mosque for at least seventeen days, or two weekends. The mosque became crowded every night because approximately one thousand people attended every evening. The stress this caused overwhelmed the workers and volunteers from before sunset occurred at about 8 p.m. when they were preparing meals to break the fast, until midnight, when the night prayers were finished. The need for additional rooms was pressing, because when women came their children would join and create noise the entire evening. The women's prayer room was finally completed three years later, in 2012.

Since the completion of the women's prayer room until I left the community in 2017, there had been no construction expansion. Using the Google Maps' distance measuring tool, I counted the entire area of ICEL site, which turned out to be approximately 90,600 square feet. Of this number, the prayer areas occupied 11,300 square feet, which connected with the school area of 14,000 square feet for a total of 25,300 square feet of main building. Outside of this main building, there are two houses: one for the imam's family and the other, the Muslim House, is rented out commercially. The remaining space is reserved for parking lots and a playground. That was the situation at the time this work was written.



Figure 4. Photograph: Public display of the plan during the expansion project in 2012.

Permits and certifications

The Center has been granted permits and passed certifications from a variety of governmental authorities. A foundational certificate was quite obvious as its letterhead was calligraphic and sealed with a gold color. It was issued by the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, which reads:

Lansing, Michigan.

This is to certify that **THE ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF GREATER LANSING** was validly incorporated on December 8, 1980, as a Michigan nonprofit corporation, and said corporation is validly in existence under the laws of this state.

This certificate is issued pursuant to the provisions of 1982 PA 162, as amended, to attest to the fact that the corporation is in good standing in Michigan as of this date and is duly authorized to conduct affairs in Michigan and for no other purpose.

This certificate is in due form, made by me as the proper officer, and is entitled to have full faith and credit given it in every court and office within the United States.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, in the City of Lansing, this 11th day of October 2006. (signature). Director. Bureau of Commercial Services.

It should be noticed that this particular certificate of incorporation was dated October 11, 2006, which was quite close to the issuance of the society's constitution of January 6, 2006. However, the actual date of its incorporation was stated to be December 8, 1980. The government record about the organization seemed to have begun the year after the opening of the mosque, and it might only have been after the submission of the constitution, and probably other complementary paperwork, that the certificate of the institutional incorporation of the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing was finally issued.

The certificates below were taken from the wall openly displayed in the mosque office. Other than the incorporation certificate above, there was also a license of occupancy, two certificates of boiler inspection, a statement of tax-exempt status from the IRS (Internal Revenue Service), an employment equality statement, and so on.

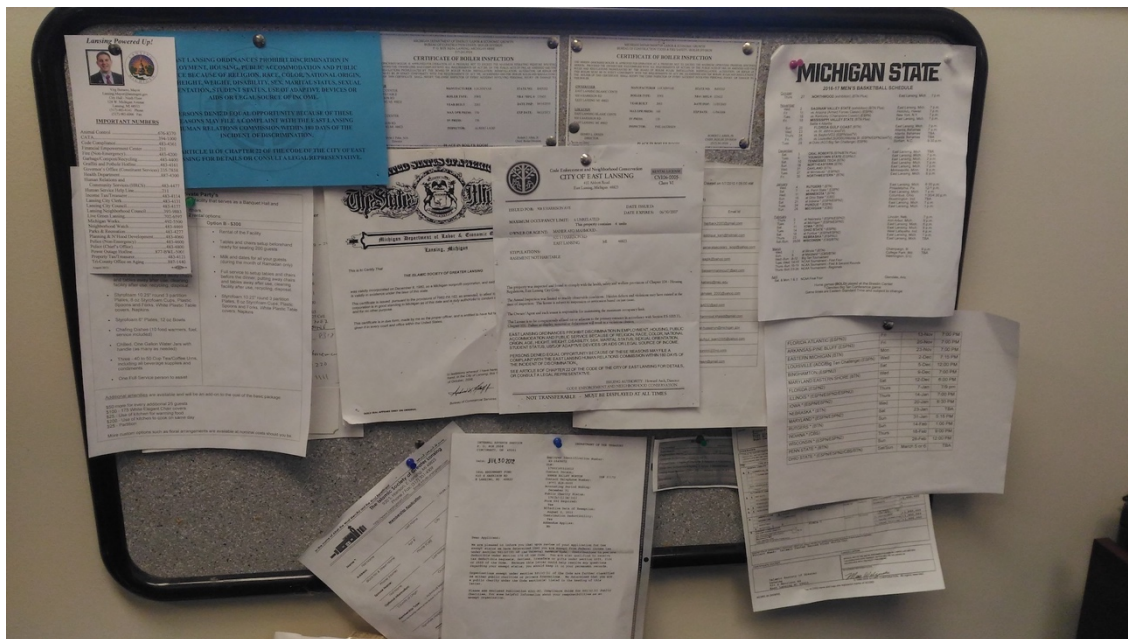


Figure 5. Photograph: Certificates of the organization and the building displayed publicly in the mosque office.

In conclusion, these certificates indicate an important recognition from an existing authority. They were issued by the most powerful political authority: the American government. A previous recognition of the Islamic Center came implicitly from the MSA and ISNA/NAIT because they took part in the foundation and maintenance of the institution from the very beginning. ISNA accepted ISGL as one of its affiliates and recruited at least one of its members, Omar Soubani, to sit as one of the members of the board of trustees of the national body. The ISNA magazine, *Islamic Horizons*, was routinely sent to the ISGL office, which indicates that the largest Islamic place of worship in the city is the audience listening to the messages of ISNA.

NOI and Black Muslims in Lansing

The development of the Islamic center in East Lansing took place concurrently with the dynamics happening among the community of Nation of Islam in the area. The big difference between them was in the makeup of their pioneers. Whereas the initiation of the Islamic Center of East Lansing was pioneered by MSU students, this particular mosque was truly a grassroots movement that resulted from the great transformation within the NOI in 1975.



Figure 6. Photograph: Wali Mahmoud Mosque frontside.



Figure 7. Photograph: Wali Mahmoud Mosque backside.

Masjid Wali Mahmoud used to be the Nation of Islam's Temple No. 16 of NOI. This name was a variation of "Masjid Wali Muhammad", which was previously Temple No. 1, now located on Linwood Street in Detroit.³⁴ The names "Mahmoud" and "Muhammad" had been popular among the black Muslim movements in America even before NOI's time. The father of Elijah Muhammad, the greatest leader of NOI, was renamed "Wali" for his real name, William Poole.³⁵ "Wali" was also a short form of Wallace in Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, the founder and first leader of NOI (Beynon, 1938). Elijah named his son (who would later replace him) Wallace Muhammad, to honor the mentor. Finally, one of his nephews was also named Wali Muhammad.³⁶ Among the languages of Muslim countries, "wali" is similarly meant for noble attributes like sponsor, close associate, patron, guardian, a man close to God, holy man, or saint. The word "Mahmoud" has a similar meaning to "Muhammad," "Ahmad," "Hammad," or "Mohamut(d)," the praised one.

The establishment of Masjid Wali Mahmoud (Temple No. 16) had something to do with the activism of Malcolm X's family. He, with his original name Malcolm Little, came to Lansing in 1929 as the four-year old son in the family of Earl Little, a field organizer of a black movement under Marcus Garvey, the head of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). One year later, in Detroit, Wallace D. Fard Muhammad, a South Asian peddler, began his mission and founded the NOI, whose complete name actually was *The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America*. NOI's Temple No. 1 was the first to be established, albeit in different place from the current location.³⁷ The spread of NOI finally came to Malcolm Little in 1948 through his brothers. Malcolm at that time

³⁴ Masjid Wali Muhammad information can be seen on its Facebook site: www.facebook.com/historicmwm/ accessed on April 6, 2018.

³⁵ See: <https://www.noi.org/hon-elijah-muhammad/> accessed on April 6, 2018.

³⁶ This younger Wali Muhammad was a popular NOI journalist and radio host who died in Chicago in 2015. See: http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_102515.shtml accessed on April 6, 2018.

³⁷ The first location of Masjid Wali Muhammad was on Hasting Road, then it moved to Linwood Street in 1954. See the UMICH's website regarding Building Islam in Detroit: <http://biid.lsa.umich.edu/2011/06/masjid-wali-muhammad/> accessed on April 6, 2018.

was serving time in prison the state of Massachusetts for a variety of petty crimes. After going through a time of persuasion, Malcolm repented, joining NOI when he was released from jail in 1952 (French, 1994). Soon he simultaneously became a famous NOI speaker and a notorious public figure. Next, in 1955, Temple No. 16 in Lansing, Michigan, was founded; its ministry was mostly in the hands of Malcolm's brother, Philbert X, a.k.a. Abdul Aziz Omar. Malcolm was never a minister for Lansing Temple but visited it many times. He mostly lived in New York to lead Temple No. 7 in Harlem, which is now known as Malcolm Shabazz Mosque. When Malcolm was shot to death in 1965 in New York, Philbert was working Temple No.1 in Detroit, whereas the Lansing Temple was not in operation. Philbert finally moved back to lead the Lansing temple in 1969 when it acquired a new location at 235 Lahoma Street, a former corner store one mile from his home in the western neighborhood in the city's downtown. Philbert passed away in 1993.³⁸

The new location of Lansing Temple underwent a new development following the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975. Warith or "Wallace" Deen Muhammad, one of Elijah's sons who was appointed as the new leader of NOI, launched a series of fundamental reformation to his father's theological legacy, more in alignment with the doctrines of mainstream Sunni Islam, as predominately embraced in the Muslim world. Subsequently, the beliefs in W. D. Fard as God and Elijah Muhammad as His Messenger were abolished. Worship was to be observed as instructed by the Islamic texts, especially of the Sunni school, which required removal of chairs in the temples and the placement of carpets and *mihrab* directed toward the Ka'ba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. All temples were to be renamed mosque or *masjid*. Finally, Warith Deen Muhammad dissolved the NOI and

³⁸ Among the brothers, Wilfred X (who died in 1998) seemed to be the person who played the major role in the foundation of Temple No. 16 in Lansing. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/21/us/wilfred-little-78-brother-of-malcolm-x.html>, accessed on November 6, 2016.

gave it a new name, the World Community of Muslims in the West.³⁹ Most temples complied with W. D. Muhammad's instructions. Quite a few others, however, balked, and instead followed Louis Farrakhan, a former NOI minister, when in 1977 he revived the Elijah Muhammad's creed.⁴⁰ The Temple in Lansing was among those choosing to follow W. D. Muhammad's reformation in terms of embracing the Sunni Islam, but it stopped short in that regard, as it was then not listed in the Mosque Cares network. This meant that many mosques chose to operate independently and maintained their communications as neutral to either the Mosque Cares or the Louis Farrakhan's NOI.

The mosque building's size was about the same as the houses in the area, as it was 25 feet wide and 65 feet long and was built on a plot sized around 100 by 70 feet square. What might have set it apart was the full rectangle shape of the front part of the two-story building, minus a porch. The front door was always closed, was unpainted, had no light above it, and was not doubled by a storm door, something that could be seen on every other house in the neighborhood. With such a dull front, the main entry was accessed from the back door through a deck, painted white and higher than ground level. Without being able to see the sign with the name of the building, a sign sometimes placed on at ground level, a passerby might not know that the building was a mosque.

Being unattractive and lacking newsworthy events, this mosque tended to be apart from public attention and hence forgotten. I actually missed the location in my first attempts to find this mosque. When I thought I found the building—as I saw a board laid on the ground against the wall that read “Masjid Wali Mahmud”—I still felt doubtful because the door was locked, there was no bell button to press, and no one responded to my knocks on the door. It was only after a friend

³⁹ The new organization changed its names a few times, and now it is known as The Mosque Cares, led by his son, W. Deen Muhammad II. See: <http://www.themosquecares.com> accessed on April 6, 2018.

⁴⁰ This organization was centered in Mosque Maryam, Chicago. See the website: www.noi.org accessed on April 6, 2018.

drove me to the place later on a Saturday, at noon, that I could finally enter and meet many people who had gathered for a lunch party. This mosque had activity schedules that fell mostly at noon on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Beyond those particular times, no one was there and the door was locked.

A headline published by Lansing State Journal (LSJ) on Sunday, April 15, 2012 (M. Miller, 2012), reported that the Muslim community was evolving. The mosque was now attended not only by African American Muslims, but also African immigrants. The LSJ's front page of the Sunday edition cited above continued to another page and a half in the back section. The reporter, Mathew Miller, described the story with details, including a time line provided in a side column. The newspaper's headquarters was located just a mile away in the downtown area, a proximity which created in my mind the impression that the mosque had been known for so long, and the journalist published the story just to remind the public of its continuing existence and all of its interesting aspects. His main respondents represented all of those of concern, such as Imam Anthony Weatherspoon, a retired forest specialist who came during the mid-1980s and is the current leader of the mosque. Or Muhammad Qawwee, a retired correctional officer who still frequents(?) the mosque, ever since his time as an MSU student in 1967. Both were former members of NOI, so they were among the worthiest to talk with about the mosque's history. The other respondents were Kareemah Hasan, a Lansing resident, and Elam Muhammad, who no longer lived in this city but willing to come to share with the LSJ correspondent stories of their life-changing memories of NOI and its transformation into Sunni Islamic path. And finally, the interviews were taken with the likely future activists of the mosque, the immigrants. One of them was among its youth, Marwa Adawe, a former Somali refugee who had graduated from MSU, and is now teaching Islamic studies to children on Saturdays in the mosque. She was among those who began attending prayers a few years

ago without necessarily being aware of the mosque's history. Finally, it was Mohamud Sheikh, an elder of the Somali community, to whom the leadership of the mosque would count on for his help in maintaining rituals and planning future events.

I have my last memory with the mosque community from when I spent the summer months in 2016 in an apartment located two blocks from the mosque. I had visited the mosque in previous years for Friday prayers, but I missed the schedule many times. So, living near the site provided me with a fruitful experience for my observation. Between our relaxed talks after Friday prayers, I talked with Imam Anthony Weatherspoon and Muhammad Qawwee about the history of the mosque. Muhammad Qawwee, the most knowledgeable person regarding that historical matter, still kept the particular edition in the mosque cabinet. He confirmed the information that had been reported in the newspapers.

Diversity and Tensions amongst Lansing Muslims

The student pioneers of the East Lansing mosque were not homogenous. In the 1980s, during the rage of the Iraq-Iran wars and power competitions among different political movements in the Middle East and the Arab world, a possibility of losing such a hard-earned mosque was lurking. That is because the students came from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, and some of the groups were not happy with the amount of or type of spending for the establishment of a mosque. A special fear came from the student activists of Arab nationalism; their actions and aspirations were mostly oriented toward the political struggle in their respective countries. So, they did not agree to the idea of a permanent place, such as a mosque, that would make it easier for Muslims to settle in America rather than return to their home countries. According to Omar, the students who held this point of view were known as the Ba'thi, Nassirist, Qaumi or leftist Communist students. They had

a tendency to trigger violent debates which often misused religious argumentations to validate their interests. Those politicized students also had spread false rumors, alleging the mosque activists corrupted the donations received from abroad. Such a danger led Omar Soubani and his fellows to secure the mosque by formalizing the ownership of the Islamic Center's property to the trusteeship of the NAIT (North American Islamic Trust), an autonomous body of the ISNA. So, the pro-mosque activists did not want the ownership to be put into their hands to secure the very existence of the Islamic Center's properties from any future misuse of the mosque. By associating the ownership of the institution and the property to the trusteeship of ISNA and NAIT, they had created the idea that there was nothing of worth in the Center to control.

The fear of having this mosque occupied by an opposing group also led the Islamic Center's organizers to set up a restricted(?) membership recruitment. During the annual convention, a conspiracy could have been formed in order to seize the leadership body by means of a democratic election. So, to make sure that the Islamic Center's members consisted of students having the same aspirations, a new membership application required two signatures of two existing members. That procedure remains in place in the Islamic Center of East Lansing to the present.

After all, the development of the Islamic Center was progressing steadily despite the political turmoil happening in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world. While a bitter war was raging between Iraq and Iran, the Islamic Center was expanding through the purchase, in 1986, of the Baptist Church building directly across from the front of the mosque. The building was used for Sunday School for almost ten years before being razed and replaced by a parking lot. In 1992, at the same time of the Bosnian War and the US invasion in Iraq, the community renovated the Center's building to convert the manager's apartment into meeting rooms and a women's bathroom. It also converted the original women's bathroom on the east side of the Center into a conference room. In

1996, the community purchased a house behind the mosque and used it for GLIS (Greater Lansing Islamic School) for two years. After the erection of a two-story building especially assigned for GLIS, this home was now dedicated to house the imam and his family. So, the congregation was aware of the events in the Middle East, but the impact was too slight to be felt by the community of the East Lansing mosque. That is, those events did not impact the peaceful time at the East Lansing mosque, as of its members from that time did not remember anything special, except for continuing construction to accommodate an expanding community.



Figure 8. Photograph: Lansing Muslims demonstrate following the Israeli declaration of Jerusalem as its capital in 1980. (ICEL office album)

It was very rare for Lansing Muslims to launch a public demonstration for a Middle Eastern cause. The only public action regarding a Middle Eastern issue was one centering on the Palestinian cause. In a photo album dated “the 29th of June 1980” on its inner cover, I found the photos shown above. I inquired about speaking with those who might have been members of the community in that year. The only answer I received came from Hassan Khalil, who had not attended the protest and who responded to me by using the Google website. In July 1980, the Israeli government declared

Jerusalem as its capital, which spurred protests around the world, including the Muslims of Lansing mosque.

In relation to Wali Mahmoud Mosque in downtown Lansing, tension could be felt between the indigenous (Black) and immigrant Muslims due to differences of socioeconomic level. The area of western downtown, where the mosque was located, was near abandoned former complexes for automobile assembly, by then razed to the ground, leaving residents unemployed and poorer when compared to those living in the eastern part of the city. Still, the people of Wali Mahmoud Mosque, under the direction of Imam Edward Witherspoon, persevered. He often said that they needed to keep the mosque open in spite of the challenges, by commenting, “We don’t know who would come to the door.” Indeed, when some Somali families could no longer afford the East Lansing Center’s Sunday School and Darul Qur’an that were no longer free after 2010, they began to gather their children at the Wali Mahmoud Mosque on Saturdays and Sundays. They held their own Sunday School and Qur’anic studies. In addition to the spillover of students, Wali Mahmoud mosque also received other types of goods, such as the older carpets that were sent from the East Lansing Islamic Center when new ones were installed there.

The setup of the interior at the Wali Mahmoud Mosque was indeed different. It was as typical as what was said by Jamillah Karim, an African American Muslim who was raised in a former NOI family, and who wrote about the differences challenging a total integration between immigrant and African American Muslims. In one of her articles, she highlighted the survival success of former NOI members, who then became the Warith Deen Muhammad (WDM) community: “... because not only did it resist early Sunni immigrant leadership, but in presenting Islam, it privileged American culture over immigrant Islamic culture” (J. Karim, 2005). An example of how they privileged American culture was their donning of bow ties and having shaved faces, different from those who

wore Arab clothes and beards. In terms of gender segregation, she also pointed how in the mosques of the WDM communities, men and women sat separately, but there was no curtain separating the two groups. She also identified a discriminatory gesture that occurred when immigrant ladies in a mosque avoided a conversation with an African American newcomer (J. A. Karim, 2006). This was contrasted by what Karim said, that the Wali Mahmoud Mosque indeed accommodated men and women in the same room, in which the two sexes were seated separately without any curtain between them. So, the arrangement was Islamic and American at the same time.

CHAPTER 3

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EAST LANSING MOSQUE

The Birth of the Volunteers

Being a newcomer in a place not of my own like East Lansing, I had anxieties, which created constant wishes for help; and at the same time I developed the courage to help others if I knew I could help someone with something. The process would go smoothly if I spoke the same language, and difficult if we spoke different languages or even had a different level of English. So, if it is agreed that the formation of communities and nations originates from crowds of different people with shared imaginations (Anderson, 1991), Muslim immigrants in any city have much potential for forming viable communities because their shared beliefs already consisting of certain goals.⁴¹ With this pattern, in an environment friendly to international students, such as in the neighborhoods around Michigan State University, and in many other campuses in America, it seems inevitable that foreign Muslim students who came to study here would soon get together and crystallized their activities into regular, institutionalized programs. Then, with the good fortune of the Middle Eastern oil boom of the 1970s,⁴² eventually they could build their own worship places within a few years.

Once the university students began to hold regular Friday prayers, the new community of Muslims began to have a visible structure. Here, the Saussurean approach in the identification of

⁴¹ In his critique of Anderson's theory of imagined community, Edward A. Tiryakian of Duke University proposed the factor of religion as a significant appeal toward a new social order beyond the boundaries of everyday life (Tiryakian, 2011).

⁴² As widely known, there was close relationship between booming oil industries in the Middle East and the establishments of Islamic centers in the West. In the case of the Lansing mosque, the largest donation in its early fundraising effort came from Saleh A. Kamel, a Saudi Arabian billionaire. (Jeddah Economic Forum, 2016)

social structures⁴³ can be used to draw a simple understanding of the construction of the mosque community of Lansing. An observer could sketch a few binary structures within the community, depending on the viewpoint used to see the phenomenon. For a religious event, for example, one could discern that a few persons among the attendants move more actively than the main crowd; these are the active participants and supporters of the community, the persons who would always be active in taking care a variety of actions, so the religious and social gatherings continue operating as planned. The founding fathers, such as Shaikh Omar Soubani and Daniel Masters (mentioned in the previous chapter), represent the true embodiment of helpers and mentors. With other fellows, they volunteered some of their labor and time to keep the rest of the students informed about their programs and to assure them about coming again to gatherings. These activists carried out all these actions voluntarily even before they had a proper mosque building. What was the reason for this? The reason was the awareness of shared interests, as mentioned above. Shaikh Omar and his fellows kept trying to ensure that their services were fulfilling common interests, and the fact that the gatherings had grown into a lasting city-wide community was proof that their community efforts were coming to fruition. So, the social construct of the new community had at least two structures to identify: the crowd vis-à-vis the activists, and the common interests vis-à-vis their fulfillments.

From what the respondents told me about the profiles of their own and past volunteers, the activists' success in the fulfillment of common interests was not much related to who the volunteers were when they came to join the community, but rather, what they could do to support the community's programs. Nowhere in their stories was it mentioned that any of those activists were financially influential in the formation of the Lansing Muslim community because he or she came

⁴³ Ferdinand de Saussure proposed structuralism based on his linguistic background. He offered a binary perspective that would understand concepts through the identification of their diametrical parts. The foremost example is that, for instance, in every *sign* there is both *signified* and the *signifier*. (Blackburn, 2005)

out of aristocratic families or clans in their place of origin, or were a descendent of any clerics from the centers of the Muslim world. Shaikh Omar was himself originally a Palestinian refugee whose village is now part of Israeli territory. He never mentioned in the interviews any notable name that would have had an influence on his charismatic ascendance in the mosque community of East Lansing. His leadership in the mosque was based on three professional aspects: Islamic knowledge from his previous education at Al-Azhar University, Egypt; his prior experience as an officer at the Jordanian Ministry of Education; and his full commitment to work for the welfare of the Muslim community in Lansing and nationwide networks. The priesthood title of “Shaikh” that people often attributed to him was more of a result—an appreciation or recognition of what he had done since he had joined the movement rather what he was before coming to the city.

But it would also be wrong to say that Shaikh Omar did not receive any benefit while serving this community. He had lost his land, and despite his later living in Jordan, he was still a wanderer, as he still held the status of refugee. He had done good job in Jordan, and basically, Jordan had become his new home when he was still there. Now he had moved to the US, a country that cultivates very different culture from his previous society. While moving from Palestine to Jordan did not require as much adaptation in terms of religious and social culture, moving to America after having lived 40 years in the Middle East was a big shock to him. He missed his previous life and wondered if he could continue the same way of life in this new land. He found many fellows—hundreds of them—in this university city of East Lansing, who had the same level of anxiety. So, he saw the possibility for reproducing the former way of life by working together with his colleagues in this city. Recalling Deleuze and Guattari’s theory (1977), Shaikh Omar and his fellows were trying to *reterritorialize* their Islamic tradition to practice their way of life, which had been suppressed due to the impact of *deterritorialization*. He said he felt the call to solve the problem, and he found out he

could handle the challenge, given that he had the intellectual resources at hand from his prior education in the Middle East. With his mastery of Islamic knowledge, he took part in teaching and training fellow students by holding regular classes in the MSU campus neighborhoods, and later in other cities all over America when he made more acquaintances from the MSA national chapter; hence, his role rose to the countrywide level.

And that is exactly what he did. He has accomplished much for the movement during the past three decades prior the turn of the century. He said he felt that being part of the society of American Muslims after making enormous number of friends in the city and at the nationwide level made him feel at home once the mosque was established. That at-home feeling was even more anchored in his mind after the arrival of his family, in 1989. From his savings and retirement monies from his previous work in Jordan, he could afford a simple house of his own in which to live and guide his children toward a stable life in this new country. Although there was no salary for volunteering at the Islamic center, Omar said he felt its peace because he could continue his Islamic way of life, and he could continue to serve as a role model for the younger generation and diverse diaspora overall.

We can take another example from the experience of Daniel Masters, who began joining the Muslim students' gatherings around 1976 after his conversion to Islam during the second year of his undergraduate program. He viewed joining the Muslim students' gatherings as his second Islamic circle because his first circle, through which he was introduced to Islam and to which he eventually converted, turned to have a different conception of piety than that of his own. Daniel's wording was as following when he summed up his answer to my question regarding the story of his conversion:

"I guess that will have to wait. A very long story! In a nutshell, I met a group of Qatari students my freshman year of college, befriended one of them, was exposed to Islam through them (although weren't very devout) and nine months later, embraced Islam. But of course, there's much more to it than that." (Daniel Masters, May 30, 2016)

So, Daniel's situation was different from Shaikh Omar in terms of social and cultural background when he joined the mosque community. On Daniel's side, he was looking for an alternative social circle more suitable to his new spiritual needs, but on the other side, the host circle was itself still struggling to establish a place for worship. Facing the challenge, Daniel chose to go deeper by taking part in the main arena. He became the general secretary of MSU's MSA chapter under the presidency of Abd al-Rahman al-Yami, another undergraduate student. According to Shaikh Omar, al-Yami was still 21 years old when he was appointed as the first president of the Islamic Center of East Lansing. Being Al-Yami's secretary, Daniel did not deserve any less credit since he was just the second person in the organization, a position in the middle of the movement that made him experience the same risks as did other new fellows. He told me about some of his experiences of witnessing the hatred against Muslims following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Answering my question whether there was a kind of Islamophobia during those days, he said that there were some incidents, but overall the situation was not so bad. Daniel Masters (2016) said:

"I don't remember an Islamophobia being much of a problem then. Like I said, there was no campaign to stop the building of the Center. People were generally open or indifferent to the idea. There was an incident when the first walls of the Center went up where someone spray-painted 'Arabs Go Home' on the wall. After the Center opened, I was once yelled at to "Go back to where I (sic) came from" by a driver passing by as I was coming out of the Center. 1979 was the year of the Islamic Revolution in Iran so after that, there were more incidents like that. Once they blew up the mailbox of the Muslim House with a firecracker for instance. Remember, we were living in a university community, so people were a lot more tolerant."

To some extent the community should have also gotten some benefits from the involvement of a white American citizen like Daniel. Whereas most of the community members had come as strangers from the Muslim world, Daniel was not. Contrary to the challenges that had to be endured by most of the Middle Eastern Muslim immigrants, to be regarded as Americans (Haddad, 2004),

Daniel's personal identity made Islam and America no longer an oxymoron. So, his very presence in the community gave a legitimacy to the notion that the growth of Islam at a locale in the US had been accepted. His work had helped not only with operating running the administration of the Islamic Center, but also raising a cultural sign through which the rest of the community members would feel the pride to have him present and involved.

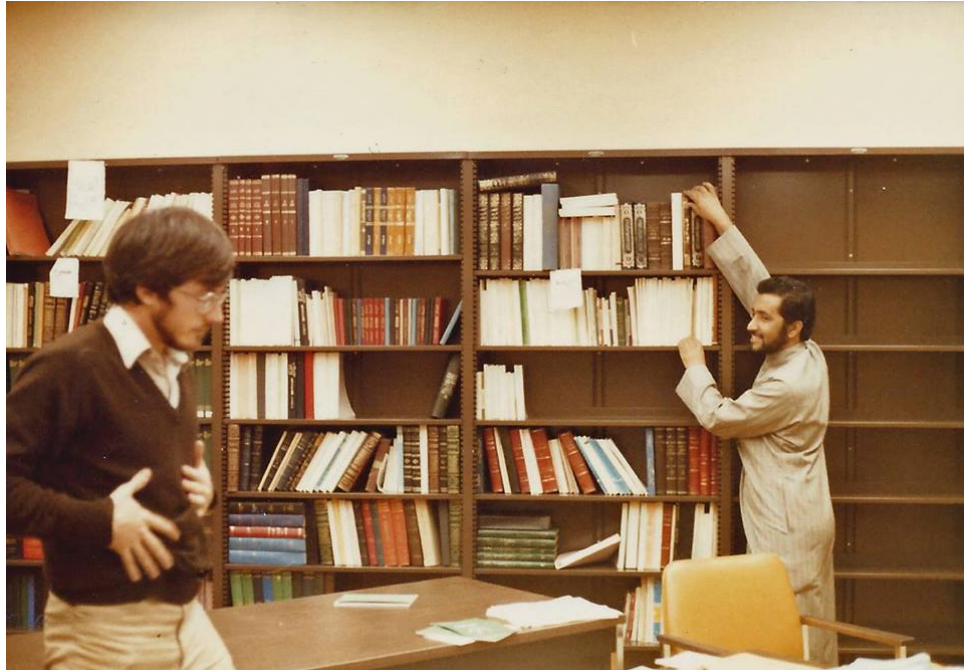


Figure 9. Photograph: Daniel Masters (left) in the mosque library. Facebook, ICEL, August 21, 2014.

The cases of Shaikh Omar and Daniel Masters are two examples of how mutual relationships had helped to form a social foundation for the Muslim community of Lansing. Among the lessons of this observation is that we can review Marcel Mauss's theory of gift giving in the context of Muslim communities. Mauss argues that every gift can give back some advantageous values to the giver (Mauss, 1954). In this case, gift giving turned out not merely to emerge in the events of material exchange, but also in the exchanges of social influence and community welfare. In this research, we can consider the services of mosque activists such as Shaikh Omar and Daniel as their gift to the

community, and the community in turn gave back a counter-service to those persons' feeling of existence or security.

Other than Shaikh Omar and Daniel Masters, there were more persons who deserved to be noted for their contributions in the subsequent years of development in East Lansing's Islamic Center. The names mentioned by Shaikh Omar were mostly from the generation of those coming to the city in 1970s, after which their number kept changing dynamically out of those who came and left the city: the old who died and the young who grew into leadership positions. The time range had spanned more than thirty years now, so the number was so great that I could only mention a few. The stories below present my auto-ethnographical effort to describe the human component of mosque activism. I compare the roles of the interviewees with the role of my own, based on a characterization of our involvement in the mosque programs.

To Be Cultured, to Be Authorized

Since the time of my time of arrival in East Lansing, I had been missing spiritual experiences that used to be easy to indulge in back in my home country of Indonesia. I was not worried about finding basic needs like food or a room in which to stay, but I was feeling unsure whether I should first take whatever was available before finding something better, according to my religion. Such better things were probably available although I did not know how Muslim existed in this non-Muslim-dominated city. So, when at the airport I was picked up by a student volunteer who introduced himself Mamood from Nigeria, I asked him if he was a Muslim. I asked because I thought his name came from an Arabic word "Mahmood," a popular name among Muslims, which meant that he probably was a Muslim. He responded to my question positively and I was able to even ask for some more information about Islamic places in the city. However, he replied that he

used to be a Muslim and that he did not go to mosque anymore. That was not an answer I was looking for, so I concluded in my mind that this man was not the right person to ask about Islam, as his information about it might be weak.

A few minutes later, while Mamood was still driving and talking about the city and the university (Michigan State), I glanced to the left and saw across the street a gray building with the words “The Islamic Center ...” with some Arabic around it. That jolted my heart, as I immediately thought that building might be a mosque. Although the sign was partially covered by trees and we were just passing it, it was enough in my mind to assume that the place with the minaret must be an Islamic place and that I should visit that building one day to find out if it really was a mosque. I did go there a couple of days later, and that was the moment when I began to become involved with the community.

As a newcomer to the city, like any other newcomer, my concern would be about such basic needs as a place for worship and the availability of *halal* foods. So, when I found a building publicly open for Islamic worship, I would give much respect to those who were instrumental in founding that place of worship. Moreover, when I found out that the way in which the host congregation worshipped was mostly the same as the rituals with which I was accustomed, I felt at home with this mosque. I could feel the ritual affinity, which in turn also brought me a feeling of social affinity, every time I joined dawn prayers and the imam happened to be a person who used the Shafi’ite way of rituals, which were ones I practiced. Praying here was felt off course in contrast to praying in another Islamic place such as the Shi’ite center, which I visited a few years later. There, I felt like a stranger due to ritual differences so obvious to me and the host congregation. Those differences were actually accessorial, but they were enough to make a person uncomfortable, being unfamiliar with Shi’ite practices of worship.

In the midst of common mosque-goers who seemed to have nothing to do other than passively attend the public worship and other gatherings, I observed those who spoke. I saw that these people were special in certain aspects. First, they were garbed casually but were highly intellectual, able to talk in simple but simultaneously meaningful speech. Secondly, as regards education, their levels were relatively high. It turned out some of them were IT professionals (with master's degrees) in the city's offices; some others were professors at MSU and local colleges; and still others were medical doctors, dentists, officers at a correctional facility, and the like. Third, every one of them seemed able to carry out different roles in the Center. And fourth, they always pledged some amount of donations during fundraising. They were Arab, Pakistani, Palestinian, Egyptian, Nigerian, and all sorts of people with foreign identities like me. But these people were above my level of understanding, and probably above that of the common congregation. These people spoke Arabic and Urdu, but their English was perfect. They recited the Qur'an and the Prophet traditions from memory. They seemed to know so much about things going on in the US and the city, and they told their audience how to behave positively in their now-current nation. From the beginning I wish I could have taken part in the mosque organization, but I could not compete with them in all of these aspects. Anyway, I would eventually become involved in the Center's organization, the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (ISGL).

So, following Geertz's definition of culture,⁴⁴ I perceived the Center's leaders were cultured to serve the city's Muslim community. With that, I recognized some shared conceptions among these leaders about the purpose of the Center's existence in the city, a purpose they implemented through the symbolic openness of the Center for the Islamic public of all backgrounds, an openness

⁴⁴ In Geertz's definition, culture is defined as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973).

they expressed in their peaceful and constructive speeches at the gatherings. Not resting on symbolic presentations, however, their shared ideas were turned into programs that were sincerely dedicated to serve the community and the surrounding society. Of course, that meant that not all members of the community had the resources and the capacity to carry out leadership activities. In general, senior leadership positions were mainly held by permanent members of the community, and students were encouraged to be part of the second cadre leadership.

The early group of these dedicated leaders included Shaikh Omar and his own generation. They were successful in initiating the erection of a decent building for worship, education and social gatherings near a major campus, actions through which these pioneers earned the respect of the community. In the 1970s, to have a decent place for Islamic worship and other social programs for Muslims, was a dream hardly achievable for foreign students and new immigrants to the US. Shaikh Omar and his fellows understood the challenges, but finally managed to overcome such hardships through hard work and sacrifice for a period of at least ten years. Moreover, since the Center was opened to all Muslims and welcomed outside visitors, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, from Lansing and surrounding cities, flocked the Center. The mosque community was expanding, and its leaders were gradually obtaining more trust to represent local Muslims and take care of Islamic matters.

The coming of Dr. Anis Ahmed and his wife Dr. Sajida was an example of individuals who moved to the mosque neighborhood and ascended toward leadership roles. Dr. Anis and I knew each other quite early as active members of the mosque, but we became closer after an accident in 2014 that prevented him from driving anymore. He shared me his story mostly while we were sitting in the living room his house after we did some errands around the city. With Dr. Anis and Dr. Sajida's residential move to the neighborhood behind the mosque, they were noteworthy in regard

to the expansion of the mosque community. Dr. Anis came from India as a student in 1964 with the help of a Fulbright scholarship, and now lived with his wife, Dr. Sajida just five houses west of the mosque. After receiving a Ph.D. in 1970 he went home and got married, then came back with his family in 1974 to work as an officer at the state correctional center in Ionia, situated one hour northwest of Lansing. Once he heard about a mosque being constructed in East Lansing, he began helping by sending a donation. Finally, the couple moved in 1994 to East Lansing, aiming solely to settle and spend the rest of their retirement time near the mosque. So, he sometimes drove by and attended the gatherings in the Muslim House (a single students' residence, next to the mosque) and witnessed the construction process of the mosque. At present, before dawn he is the first person who arrives, to open the mosque doors, and he is probably the most diligent in attending daily prayers. I remember one time I came by to pray the *fajr* (dawn) prayer and I found myself and others stuck outside for a while because Dr. Anis was out of town, visiting his son in Ohio. We had to wait until the imam came with a key for one of the doors to let us in.

Dr. Anis did not purchase just one house; he also bought a few other houses in the neighborhood, then resold them to other mosque congregants with an agreement, a so-called land contract. I knew that one or two of these deals faltered when the purchasers lost their jobs, but Dr. Anis seemed fine about those situations, and the rest were fruitful and advantageous for everyone. Among those who was fortunate in receiving Dr. Anis's help was a Nigerian American, Muhammad Sani Abbas, once a president of the Center, who purchased a house, located farther away, along the same lane from Dr. Anis's home. This also was done as a land contract. There were about ten houses in the mosque neighborhood that belonged to Muslim, including the imam's house. This number was very small compared to more than the approximately hundred houses in the neighborhood, but the existence of those ten was enough to make them feel not alone where they lived.

Not only was he adept in property business, but Dr. Anis also had a wide social network due to his moderate stance on religious matters. Almost every Wednesday I drove him to eat pizza in a restaurant where one of his friends was working. We ate only those pizzas not containing pork, of course, although a strict Muslim would still not go there. He sometimes said hello to his neighbors, but he still liked to hear Indian traditional songs. For small children, he was a favorite grandpa since he usually brought candies in his pocket. I also often drove him to a fitness center for a spa, to a senior club to play with other seniors, to dinner parties of Indian and other ethnic groups, and so on. But after all, his number-one place to go was the mosque, to which he kept giving his full support, and the keys of which were entrusted to him.

Reflecting on him, I was convinced that his personality represented the type of character that was needed by a Muslim community in this city. To follow his example, however, I had my limitations. His house's proximate distance and his diligent attendance at daily prayers were among the reasons that the mosque's access keys were entrusted to him. I could not fully follow his example because I lived in an apartment quite a distance from the mosque, and my work times coincided with some of the prayer times there. However, I happened to like to have a wide network of friendship, as he did. As an Indonesian with a public education background that normally mixed students of different ethnicities, religions and languages, to maintain a plural network with friends of different backgrounds in America was really rewarding. The maintenance of wide network required cultural moderation, and by keeping the friendship network active, a person's cultural understanding of other social groups would enhance that experience. I accomplished this through my attendance at events held by friends of different backgrounds, which included Indonesian youths and families of un-mosqued Muslims, Indonesian non-Muslim families, Muslim families of other national origins, American colleagues and families, black Muslims, Jamaa Tablighi groups (Masud, 2000),

African immigrant families, and so on. I earned the trust in different ways from different types of people, and my appointments consequently took much of my time. Finally, I had to give up when I had to leave the US. For me, to be cultured meant to be connected, and the cultural connection would begin to fade once people were separating. The connection became a memory, which would revive only when we would again meet.

The Essential Service of the Skillful

Telling the story based in the order I was experiencing it, the first name I should mention is Thasin Sardar, a professional IT (information technology) worker who had devoted much of his off-duty time for the Islamic Center's cause. He came to the city as a budding IT professional in 1996, around the time when the IT boom was taking off. When he moved from Wisconsin to East Lansing, he rented a room in a house near the mosque, so he made connection with the Islamic Center almost immediately. He volunteered a lot of his time for the Center right from the start. After his marriage in India, he brought his wife to the US in 1999; both became US citizens ten years later, 2008. They have two sons who were born both in Lansing.

I became friends with Thasin through mosque activities, where, on most occasions, he was noticeably the one who played many important roles, at least in the technical parts like sound systems, electrical, Internet, chairs and tables and stage set-up, parking, and so on. I began routinely helping him in the Sunday School office in the spring of 2011. At that time, he was the coordinator of the education committee as part of the Center's management. In April, he asked me to teach as a substitute teacher for a boys' class, and that was the beginning of my involvement with Sunday School and the executive committee of the Islamic Center. In the following year, Thasin's position rose to become the Center's president, and I continued teaching under the leadership of another principle, Sani Abbas.

My first motivation for volunteering in the Sunday School was to help Thasin in parts of the mosque's positions that were understaffed. Thasin was sometimes alone in the school's office and the teachers' numbers were lacking due to absences or simply arriving late. In the beginning I just wanted to drop off my then six-year-old daughter and make sure she got into her class. But then I sometimes helped to calm down a boy in class who became frantic while waiting for teacher who was still on his way there. I also helped Thasin in office work, such as photocopying and registration of Sunday School students. He taught me how to operate the machines, giving me a key for the doors, and I found myself little by little becoming more involved with Sunday School matters. My last position before leaving the community was as coordinator of the education committee of the Center's Executive Committee. I held this position for four years, from 2013 to 2017.

The next person to mention was Bassam Mahmoud, who shared with me a brief of his life story in America. He was a Palestinian who lost his home and land due to conflicts with the Israelis. He became a refugee with his family in Syria, and finally migrated to the US in 1986. In the first hundred days in this new land, he stayed in Detroit; then moved to East Lansing. In 1992, he returned to Detroit to open his first restaurant. In 1995, however, he came back to Lansing to continue his culinary business under the name of Sultan's Restaurant. Since then, and for the past 23 years, he has operated Sultan's.

I saw that Bassam's presence in the congregation contributed a vital role in the maintenance of the mosque community. As mentioned above, that halal food is among the basic concerns when a Muslim comes to a new place, the mosque in East Lansing made the availability of an appropriate kitchen/cafeteria as a highest priority. Bassam's business responded perfectly to this demand. As mentioned by Shaikh Omar in his interview, Bassam began helping in the mosque kitchen once he joined the community, assuming that responsibility from the previous caretaker, Arafah Hasan.

Bassam was indeed the right person for this position, because he had the skill and experience in the foodservice business, in addition to having the supply chain connections from Detroit, a city with major halal food suppliers that operated throughout the state. Outside the mosque, halal food could also be found at Muslim-owned shops in downtown Lansing. Three of them that I have visited include Baqla on Michigan Avenue, International Supermarket on Pennsylvania Road, and the now-closed Haramain Store on Kalamazoo Street. All these Muslim-owned food businesses had provided some relief for the concerns of the city's Muslim community regarding halal food. But among the mosque congregation, Bassam was the first to think about those who needed to order hot meals for large gatherings.

Bassam's Sultan Restaurants specialized in Mediterranean cuisine for the middle-class level. Before visiting his main outlet in the Hannah business complex across from the MSU campus, I had thought that the restaurant's look would be in an Islamic and Arabic style. But I was impressed that the restaurant's ambiance was as classy as those of top eateries. When I visited the restaurant, the receptionist desk was attended by a beautiful girl who did not don any *hijab*. I did not remember whether there was any sign in Arabic or pictures featuring desert life, except that the place was just wide and clean. Around the front desk, an item obviously put there for show were three placards of appreciation from the East Lansing Mayor for the business's contribution to the city. Other than that, I remember I was served some pieces of flat bread and *hummus* for the opening meal. After that opening meal, the main menu arrived, consisting of rice and grilled meat, bread, and salad and some others in such a large portion that I could not finish. And if there was something important to say, the chef was Bassam himself. The hard work Bassam puts into his business and volunteerism at the Center is exemplary.

Therefore, it is no surprise that typically, on almost every Friday, Bassam might be the busiest man in the mosque. He would arrive one hour early for the preparation of food sold in the front of the mosque kitchen. He had delivered some of the supplies even on Thursday because the amount of lunch to prepare was so much. The Friday congregation in these years was never less than four hundred for each of the two sessions of the weekly prayers. Around a quarter of the attendees would line up to buy the lunch once the prayer finished. That meant between two and three hundred boxes of lunch were sold each Friday. With other items to sell that included drinks, fried samosas, sandwiches and snacks, so many things were prepared that he was always helped by at least one person, including Charles Goins, Ghazi Mustafa, Hassan Khalil, some other brothers, or sometimes Nancy Hill, a Christian lady whose main job was in regard to parking arrangements.

But Bassam was not simply a culinary businessman; he delivered many sermons. Before the appointment of tenured imams in this mosque, Bassam was, after Shaikh Omar, the most frequent sermon speaker. That is because he was the most available person, ready to jump in if the speaker for the Friday prayers was not present. Many among the congregation might be willing to help to fill in with a job, but such work needed preparation. Bassam seemed already to be well trained in Islamic holy texts and knowledge, as from the moment of his arrival could spontaneously recite and deliver Islamic teaching. On many occasions, he grabbed the *79ames* robe hung behind the pulpit, placed it over his casual t-shirt and jeans, then began to deliver the sermon. His memory of Qur'anic recitation when leading prayers sometimes slipped, but his sermons were always valuable, both spiritually and from a social perspective.

I noted that at that time I was having somewhat similar feelings as those of Bassam as regards having appropriate food. When I found out that *tempeh*, the Indonesian dish made of soybean, was difficult to find in Lansing, I ordered a bag of starter flour for *tempeh* from Indonesia. After a year

of experimenting, I finally could make it by myself. My Indonesian friends and families began to order it from me, which then became an additional activity for my wife for a number of years while living in the city. I reflected that this was a kind of achievement that needed a follow-up. I went to Bassam to show my *tempeh* pieces and ask his opinion. He was impressed, and suggested that I continue making it and to put a brand on the packages, so that it could be sold to the public. That meant he was suggesting that I go through food certification courses(?) and obtain a commercial license, exactly as he had done before opening his restaurants. However, that was too difficult for me, especially in the context of my family responsibilities. I traveled around to seek information about these procedures and found out that there was simultaneously an opportunity and challenge. Obtaining a food certification and commercial license would take some time for training, but after receiving a license for food preparations I could make this tempeh production into a professional business. I concluded that my family could not go through that entire process, so we ended up simply producing the dish for ourselves and our family friends.

Regarding Bassam's skill in Islamic knowledge, I was also reflecting on my knowledge capacity. I had quite a long experience of Islamic learning from Islamic boarding schools during my middle and high school years, which gave me a background for speaking if my friends asked me to deliver an Islamic lecture during local Indonesian family gatherings and parties. But my level of competency was not at the level of Bassam's, who seemed always ready to speak. So, responding to my Indonesian friends' requests, I mostly was ready only to lead prayers and supplications. When it came to the job of delivering a lecture, however, I would ask them to take turns. So, I would deliver a lecture once every couple of months in front of my Indonesian friends. Another reason of my declining requests to lecture was my intention to limit my role in order to continue watching and observing. That is why at that moment I was introduced to Bassam; I had declined his spontaneous

offer for me to deliver a sermon. I was too anxious to prepare for such a public sermon, and it would limit me from my observation of others for my own learning.

Teachers Who Paved the Way

My first idea about Mr. Hassan Khalil was that his job had something to do with teaching or managing the Islamic school. That is because I often saw him helping Bassam selling sandwiches on Fridays to help raise funds for the school. But he sometimes delivered the Friday sermons, too, meaning he was not an ordinary volunteer. Only after the arrival of his son, Mohammad Khalil, who was appointed as a tenure-track faculty member at MSU, that I realized I had been mistaken about him. Hassan Khalil was an MSU distinguished professor in the department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, and he had started his career at MSU in 1978. Before that, he came first to the US in 1975 as a master's student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His son, Mohammad, helped me to get more in contact with him since he knew that his father was among the early members and leaders I needed to interview about the development of the Islamic center. So, finally I had a few opportunities to talk with him in detail about the growth of the community and the Islamic Center since his arrival, up to the present.

During these interviews, Professor Khalil shared with me his understanding of the developments that occurred in the East Lansing Islamic Center in the context of national and global situations. For example, he knew quite a bit about the early growth of the MSA (Muslim Students Association), since his first American campus, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), was the birthplace of MSA. He knew one prominent name of the MSA founders, Dr. Ahmad Sakr, who passed away near the end of 2015. Dr. Sakr was among the founders of MSA; at that time (1963) he was a student at UIUC. Professor Khalil knew that Dr. Sakr was majoring in

food science, which explained why Dr. Sakr wrote books and spoke a lot on the issues of food according to Islam. But Professor Khalil was not sure about Dr. Sakr's political background in his original country, Lebanon. Once MSA was established at UIUC, Dr. Sakr and friends started to found chapters and held gatherings in other universities. Then they also held conferences that covered issues about which many Muslims did not know, such as halal food matters and how to carry out tasks such as burying the dead according to Islamic teachings while still meeting local city codes. That is how they began to find solutions for challenges faced by Muslims living in America at that time. For Professor Khalil, MSA was ISNA (the Islamic Society of North America) itself. The alumni of MSA students kept their network intact after graduation and at a certain point they finally decided that the association would be called the ISNA. They made the ISNA an umbrella organization, as MSA helped establish the latter, while MSA would focus more on student issues.

Asked about the difference between MSA in the past and MSA in the contemporary era, Professor Khalil explained that a transformation within Islamic students' movements in America had an impact on the way millennial MSA members treated the local Islamic Center. He explained the significant changes in MSA's membership on campuses as follows. In the first decades, MSA was basically run by graduate students who came from overseas. Those students were very much involved in the affairs of the Islamic Center itself. So, it was difficult to distinguish the activities of MSA from the programs of the Islamic Center. In fact, by the constitution of the Islamic Center, the president of MSA was a member of the Center's executive committee. Although the committee might still be in effect on paper, Professor Khalil did not think it was currently holding meetings. Then, sometimes in the mid-1990s, MSA's leadership was basically changed from being run by a foreign graduate student to mostly domestic undergraduate students. Most of the undergraduate Muslim students were born in the US, so they basically started to take more interest in the organization and become

involved in its running. These new MSA leaders also changed their bylaws. They began to have their own elections, in which they elected their executive committee, then ran the organization independently. Sometimes they became closer to the Islamic Center, sometimes less so, depending on who was in charge. Professor Khalil mentioned the example of a young man, Fadlan Azim (pseudonym). When Fadlan was the president of the MSA, he was also active in the Islamic Center. So, during his leadership there was a great deal of collaboration, such as meetings that were held in the Islamic Center. But at other times the MSA would have no connection whatsoever with the Islamic Center. So, basically up to the mid-1990s the MSA chapter of MSU was very much part of the Islamic Center's development. After that, the American-born undergraduate members led the student organization, almost entirely independent of the Islamic Center.

Asked to why this happened in the mid-1990s, Professor Khalil suggested that during that period the Muslim community began to have a more significant number of undergraduate students. In other words, they were the second generation, born to people like him, who arrived in 1970s and began having children of their own. Now the children had reached the age when they were going to university. Taking his own case, his first son went to UM (University of Michigan) in 1997. At the time when East Lansing's MSA chapter was still run by graduate students, Professor Khalil saw that the MSA chapter of UM had been taken over by undergraduates. Professor Khalil commented that the takeover happened naturally. First, it was because those who were born and began schooling here had better English language skills than had the foreign students. They also better understood American culture. Secondly, they also did not have an attachment to the mosque, since many of them came from other cities in Michigan. Because of that, Professor Khalil explained, they did not have any special ties to the mosque in East Lansing. Many of them on the weekends would go home to their families, especially those from the Metro Detroit area. They did not have this emotional tie

with the mosque. Indeed, whereas for the foreign graduate students here the mosque could become like a home to them, the domestic students did not have the same emotional tie. Simply put, in contrast to the international students, the domestic students had their own home to go.

I shared with Professor Khalil how curious I was that only a few people were volunteering in the mosque. The speakers at the Friday prayers were called on so many times that the congregation needed to be more active in taking part in the Center's programs, but most of them left once the prayers ended. I was asking him if he had been too busy to be more active at the Islamic Center. Hassan acknowledged he was not accustomed to going to mosque. So, during his time in Illinois, it was his habit to go to pray the *Jum'a* every Friday, and that was the extent of his involvement. When he came to East Lansing he also attended only the same weekly prayers and that became his only major activity. It was only after he was called upon to become a member of the executive board (Board of Trustees) that he started to attend the other prayers, plus the board's meeting. Little by little he found himself becoming increasingly involved. I asked him if his reason for limiting his participation was because he did not see any problems; he confirmed indeed that he did not see any problems. I asked him if other people had the same reasoning; he replied that yes, many people just came, prayed, and actually did not know a lot about what was happening at the Center. He added that they might be aware of the Center's projects and then make a donation, but after that they were done with their involvement.

Professor Khalil agreed with me that some volunteers did not even want to be involved in the mosque organizations. But he explained that these people might not like the arguments that often took place during board meetings or discussions. So, they instead went away, and they did not like to be part of the mosque organization. Only a few among the people who understood that those disagreements were part of the work became actively involved. Professor Khalil also implied that

among these non-active people, the reason for their lack of involvement was because they did not want to be affected by any potential liability issues. By this comment he meant that some people might be afraid to have their names associated with the Islamic Center. They were concerned that there might be an evil act, a crime or something else unwanted by governmental bodies to be associated with the Center. I asked him if he ever had that fear. He said, “I am a servant, dot. I never had that problem.”

I asked Professor Khalil if some people might fear losing their job for being active in the mosque when something negative happened. He answered that sometimes it did not take much for that to happen to somebody. He described an example in which something illegal happened in the wider area, and the perpetrator was suspected to be a member of this mosque. Commonly, the ordinary public would turn to say this was a mosque of terrorists, then scrutinize who was on the board of the mosque, and suddenly, all the people whose names were on the board were identified, with some of them even lost their jobs. So, it was because for this reason that some persons did not like to be mentioned. They sometimes liked to help; for example, they came to pray Jum’a and leave, or they put a donation in the box or gave a donation through someone else. But their names were not to be found anywhere. They were not members; they did not donate by check. So, there was no record of them in the mosque. They did not put their names in the database, so if one looked at the records, it was not going to show their names anywhere.

Assuming that Professor Khalil’s explanation covered the period after September 11, 2001, I was trying to remind him that my questions pertained to the periods of the 1970s to the 1990s as well. But Professor Khalil answered that such fears actually were present from the time of the early years of the Islamic Center. Actually, he told me, in the 1980s especially around 1983, there was a big event that took place in Beirut. It concerned a US military base in the city, in which more than

two hundred US marines and soldiers were killed by a suicide attack using a truck full of explosives. Following that attack, Professor Khalil remembered that there were threats to the Islamic Center. He heard that unidentified people were calling and making threats. He also remembered the hostage crisis in Iran in 1979, which also caused a few outsiders to feel hatred feeling toward Islamic places like the Mosque. So, he concluded that during all of his time here there were always some issues, as well as some incidents and problems. Professor Khalil recalled:

“Off course 9/11 was the peak. Because this was the first, 1979 was the hostage crisis in Iran, 1983 was the bombing of the marine in Beirut, I think it has continued. However, off course 9/11 was a kind of bringing that to another level. But there were always people who were concerned that if their names, I have some people for example, will give me the donation cash, not with the check, so they give to me to give to the Islamic center, and they don’t want their names to be mentioned anywhere. Because they don’t want any of their names mentioned, they don’t want the Islamic center sending them a letter. They just don’t want their names. They would like to donate, but they just put their donation into the box or give it to somebody to deliver, but they don’t want their names to be associated.⁴⁵

Following Shaikh Omar, who was the first teacher and leader, Professor Khalil might be the second most significant person as the Center, due to the important roles he assumed. He was a leading member of the Board of Trustees (BOT), and later served at the BOT’s president, during what could be called the period of consolidation. In the mid-1980s, the community’s annual convention was applying a type of political experiment by omitting any term limit. They elected Syed Tariq Akhtar as president in 1985, and for their recognition of Akhtar’s hard work and full devotion, they allowed him serve the position until 1992. Professor Khalil was then appointed for the presidency for the next two years, after which he reapplied the term limit on himself. In 1994, he left the position for the appointment of Noor Ghani, a Malaysian, for the following two years. In 1996, Professor Khalil returned and was again appointed as president, serving until 1998. That was

⁴⁵ Interview, Hassan Khalil, 15 April 2016.

the period when the K-8 Greater Lansing Islamic School (GLIS) was opened, and the 1998 Handbook consisting the Center's history, constitution and bylaws was printed. To me, these two achievements constituted a consolidation of the community's political system and its regeneration in leadership. With Professor Khalil's style of leadership, an ethical norm about presidential term limits began to become a culture. Even more, his period achieved an important development in education, in which the training of the community's future leaders was guaranteed through the foundation and maintenance of the school. More about these education programs will be described in the following sections.

The Formation of the Collectives

Polletta and Jasper (2001) defined collective identity as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. I observed that the individual connections among Lansing Muslims' community were developed through the political and educational system mentioned above, and it was facilitated by a permanent place of gathering. Without such an established place, an institutional consolidation would be difficult to achieve. My Indonesian community of Pengajian, Michigan, for example, had no permanent place for religious gatherings and it still relied on the activism of individuals. We had to move from one home to another for our monthly gatherings. Those monthly programs included rituals, lectures and social routines, with food sharing and interactive times for families, which resembled the early programs of the East Lansing Mosque community. But this nomadic situation restricted the community's development. Its accommodation remained limited, and the organization stayed simple and non-formal.

Being active in both communities, however, I could observe a similarity between this nomadic

Indonesian gathering and the permanent Islamic centers either in East Lansing or in other places. It was their purpose to keep the members together through the establishment of routine programs. The monthly gatherings of the nomadic resembled the Friday prayers of the permanent, in that they both were reunions that became the cause for the formation of a collective. From such forms of collectivity, membership systems were created, shared rituals were practiced, group symbolizations were invented, and there also was some collective ownership on anything the members had earned together. In this matter, the difference between them was merely one of scale and size. But in both cases, there was the imagination of being in closer relationship among those who regularly met one another at reunions. The people did not have to know one another by name, as it was an imagined community. But the feeling of being closer was enough to produce trust among people to the extent that they wanted to preserve their friendship in a brotherhood and sisterhood. The brotherhood relationships among some families went even further, literally, to kinship building in the form of marriages among their children, which was surely aimed to ensuring that their friendships would be long-term.

Middle Eastern politics in the mosque membership

Sometimes, a global political situation had something to do with the way the collective identity was preserved. Toward a biennial General Assembly, the Center's president would call the congregation during the Friday gatherings to register and renew their membership. Not so many of the audience, however, did come up to sign up. There was no adversary consequence of having no membership, either, regarding the services available in the mosque except a ban to vote during the General Assembly or to hold a position in the Executive Board in the following year. For this reason, the formal record of membership in the Islamic Society was always small in number, having only around one hundred fifty by the time this research was completed. In an interview, Professor Khalil

explained that one of the reasons for the low number of members was because they did not want people to feel that in order to pray one had to become a member and pay the membership fee. This mosque was open for everybody, he said. But there was another reason, which he said was historical. Back in the 1970s, there were two organizations in town that were competing. There was the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and the Arab Student Association (ASA). The Arab Student Association stemmed mostly from the socialist movements of the Middle East. Its members' political inclination was more on the socialist side, the so-called *qaumi*, so they were on a different ideological path than that of the MSA students. There was some sort of competition between the two societies. The result was that each group had a concern that the other one would come and take over. So, the ASA did not want the MSA students to come and participate in their election, and all of the sudden they were electing themselves to become the board members. And there was the same feeling on the other side, creating a dual tension. The MSA students did not want to make the membership open for everyone, so their organization would recruit only those who were very much involved, people whom they basically trusted, and so on. Because of that fear, there was always a desire to keep the membership in a closed circle. The constitution of the Islamic Center stipulated that in order to become a member, two members of the society would have to endorse someone's application. Unless a person had gained someone's trust, they did not let anybody become a member. So, having dealt with the impacts of Middle Eastern politics with respect to the social relations among Muslims in the US, the mosque community of East Lansing consolidated itself with a collective identity: that a person's membership of this community was depended on an assurance that his/her presence in the mosque was for the sake of the community itself, not for the sake of any foreign interests.

Kinship network enhancement (intra-marriages)

A social blessing of mosque life was the augmentation of a kinship network. Such a network would require a separate research project to study the phenomenon of intra-marriages among Muslims in this country. However, it could at least be estimated that in the case of the Lansing Muslim community, that since 2000s the events of intra-marriages among the children in Muslim families in the city began to flourish. That is because the post-1965 immigrants who managed to get jobs, settle and bring their spouses to America began to have children in the mid-1970s. The children, who constitute the first generation of the immigrants' descendants, reached their adulthood after the mid-1990s, so the trend of marriages among them could be realized by the 2000s. By that time, the Islamic Center already had a gymnasium, normally assigned for the Islamic school, which could be rented out to the public on weekends. Most Islamic marriages that took place in the mosque area would rent the gym to be used for private receptions with a limited number of guests. However, the marriage ceremonies where the vows were taken were sometimes held in the mosque prayer hall. When such events happened, lucky mosque-goers who came for prayer also got to attend these ceremonies. I was lucky one day in that when I stopped by the mosque, some noted families of the Center's congregants were holding a marriage ceremony of one family's son with the other's daughter.



Figure 10. Photograph: A marriage ceremony held inside the prayer hall in April 2014.

The image of the Lansing mosque as a noteworthy Islamic place also attracted Muslims from neighboring cities to develop lifetime memories there as well. Toto Budiono was a friend of mine who lived in Mt. Pleasant, a city one hour north from Lansing. There was a mosque in Mt. Pleasant, a house that had been converted for worship activities. Apparently, because of this building's condition, when he was planning to marry an Arab lady at the end of November 2013, he wanted to hold the marriage ceremony in the East Lansing mosque. While he was working to prepare various arrangements from Mt. Pleasant, he asked his colleagues, including me, to help in the preparation of some parts of the ceremony to be held in the East Lansing mosque.

Creation of a Muslim neighborhood

The next impact resulting from mosque life was the increase in property values. The construction of a new mosque in East Lansing increased the interests on the part of Muslims who lived in neighboring cities to move to the Lansing area. Accepting a job or spending retirement time in Lansing became a preferred choice because Muslims who happened to live in surrounding cities such as Mt. Pleasant, Charlotte or Jackson at that time could not imagine when they would be able

to build a mosque in their respective communities. Such a desire was difficult to realize during those time, and even until the present, moving to Lansing could be a more realistic alternative. So, Muslims who lived around the greater Lansing area started to visit and attend the Friday prayers in the East Lansing mosque. When a few homes around the mosque were put up for sale, some of the mosque-goers who had been waiting for such opportunities took chance and bought them, and the neighborhood began to have a number of Muslim. And so, the price of the houses in the mosque neighborhood, also known as the Flower Pot area, began to increase.

Cemetery cluster



Figure 11. Photograph: A cemetery plot for a Muslim.

Another outcome resulting from mosque life was the provision of cemetery plots for burial of Muslims. Beside of the building complex of the Islamic Center, the Muslims of Lansing also owned over one hundred burial plots in a cemetery at Mt. Hope Road, two miles southwest from the Center. The community began purchasing the plots around the same time the mosque construction occurred. For each plot used to bury a body, the Center could receive a two hundred dollars from the family of the deceased. However, the fee would mostly be waived if there was a

financial hardship involved. The Center often needed to help in that way because there were other expenses related to the cost for a funeral home, a type of business that the mosque community still did not have.⁴⁶ So, the events of a death procession among Lansing Muslims often became the moment of a trans-cultural phenomenon. First, the dead body that needed to be solemnized by the mosque people did not always come from families who frequently attended prayers. In such situations, when information came to the mosque about the death of somebody claiming to be a Muslim, volunteers would have to begin working without having much time to research the Islamic identity of the deceased. Secondly, they needed to adjust their work to coincide with that of the funeral home which did not have an Islamic entity. Usually, the mosque volunteers would try to go to the funeral home to wash and shroud the body the morning following the acceptance of their information used to identify the deceased's faith. But sometimes the information came to them after the body had been placed in the morgue for a week or so, which was contrary to Islamic teaching, which calls for immediate burial.

The circle of the Islamic school



Figure 12. Photograph: Greater Lansing Islamic School (GLIS) frontgate, February 18, 2017.

⁴⁶ In its website: www.lansingislam.com, the cost for funeral house service is estimated between \$4000 and \$6000.

The topic regarding social expansion coming out of mosque life revolves around the circle of schoolteachers and support staff. Since the worship halls were open for use in the mosque, educational activities were next on the priority list. As previously mentioned, study circles had been held among the Muslim students even before the mosque was built. After it was built, the study circles were held more regularly. Islamic classes for children became a necessity because the children of immigrant families began to reach school age. While the public schools were available for secular educational demands, the former students who then became Muslim parents began to worry about their children's learning about and knowledge of their religion. They began to hold Qur'anic and Islamic classes on weekends. By 1986, the weekend classes began to be more structured, as it they were referred to as Sunday School, Islamic Sunday School, or Darussalam school, following some donations coming from a few Arab students. Still, they did not see the weekend schools fulfilling the need for a comprehensive delivery of Islamic education. So, they began to plan for the foundation of a fulltime Islamic education by forming a planning committee for the school in 1993, during the leadership of the then president, Professor Khalil. In 1996, the construction of the school section of the building finally met the city requirements to operate an elementary level, which then opened the same year, under the name Greater Lansing Islamic School (GLIS). GLIS was a private school but open to public because it served standard curriculum despite its majority Muslim pupils. Today, it had been an accredited K-8 school and is acknowledged as one of the above-average schools in the city.



Figure 13. Photograph: Greater Lansing Islamic School, second floor, February 18, 2017.

I came to know more about GLIS when I enrolled my Lansing-born second daughter, Afifa, in its early pre-K for the 2012-13 school year. As a private school, it was not free. So, we had to pay tuition that amounted a minimum of two thousand, and five hundred dollars minimum. What I paid was the lowest rate because our household was at the lowest income level. To me, however, that was already very much. It was difficult, but I thought I had to go ahead for my daughter's education as well as for the sake of my research, which required me to know as much information as possible about the Center. It happened that GLIS needed a gate and parking guard for the beginning and the end of school days, which would require an hour a day. I applied for the position and they immediately hired me since they already knew me. In the following year, I moved my daughter to public school, but I kept working for GLIS. This time, I was appointed as a lunch monitor, accompanying the students while they ate lunch, and watching them during outdoor recess afterward. So, I had the opportunity to experience myself what it was like to be a parent and a worker at the school.

As at a public school, GLIS taught the state curriculums and followed the requirements toward accreditation. The result was that it had its own administrative and education standards to enforce, free from external intervention. Some of its math and language teachers had long been non-Muslims. On the other hand, it was also a private school that had the freedom to teach an additional curriculum beside that required by the state. GLIS students also were taught Islamic Studies, the Qur'anic, and Arabic language. The consequence of being a private school was that it did not receive financial aid from the government. To compensate for the deficit, GLIS annually held fundraising dinners. The annual budget of GLIS was near \$1 million, which was fulfilled by tuition and fundraising, as well as from approximately \$100,000 in donations from the Center and from among parents. GLIS presented a report during its annual assembly of the Center, but for the policymaking process, it had its own committee in order to ensure its autonomy.

Women's leaders

It was only after becoming active in the Islamic school and Sunday School that I began to be known by the women leaders of the community. After a while in helping in the school system, I realized that these sisters were the backbone of the educational programs of the Islamic Center. And I felt that having become connected with the sisters of the community was a great achievement of my research. The following names were a few among those I had the opportunity to interview during the course of my research.

The first person to mention was sister Ralya (pseudonym). She came from Syria in 1987 with her husband. First, she lived for three years in Newark, New Jersey; Delaware; and Boston, Massachusetts. After that, she moved to Toledo, Ohio, where she lived for another three years, and finally settled in Lansing. Had a medical degree like her husband, but she chose not to continue her

medical study in the US because she wanted to take care of their five children. During weekdays she was an Islamic Studies teacher at GLIS. She was also the principal and a teacher in the Sunday School program. As a principal, she emphasized during the interview that she would make sure the teachers that were recruited under her leadership were good Sunni Muslims. Actually, she was also appointed as the coordinator of the mosque's education committee. But she seldom attended regular meetings since she was reluctant to engage in too many activities in the Islamic Center.

Sister Janine Sinno came from Lebanon in the 1980s as a student in human ecology at MSU; she had made a promise to return to Lebanon after completing her studies. But the Lebanese civil war was taking place then, and would continue until 1991, the year when she and her husband were already promised Green Cards by the US government. In contrast with Ralya's strict way of Islamic life, Janine claimed herself to be a moderate Muslim despite coming from a family of the Shafi'ite school, one of the four major legal schools of the Sunni sect of Islam. That's because the culture in her town of origin in the past was much colored by the Christian French culture. So, she was accustomed to interfaith relations, pluralism and tolerance. She told me her past environment, in which drinking alcohol was a normal part of interacting with other people. Her interest in Islamic practice developed only when she was living among the mosque community of East Lansing. She tried to take part in the mosque activities, but as a professional and a moderate Muslim, she still wanted to promote a modern view of a woman's role in an Islamic society.

Sr. Sinno was for several years the chairwoman of the GLIS school committee. Asked about the highest limit she could take as a female Muslim activist, she said she actually had no problem even if elected as a president of the mosque executive committee. But she acknowledged that such an emancipative awareness needed time to be embraced by other people in the community. Back in 1995 she had an opportunity to help the mosque after receiving an offer of a grant from the city's

health department. She approached and asked the mosque's EC to cooperate with her for the application, but the EC people took too long to consult among themselves to accept her offer that time was up. She took another mosque in Detroit, the so-called ACCESS program, since she needed to begin the project and the grant had actually been secured for her whichever her institutional partner was. Two years later, when the money was running out, the EC of the East Lansing mosque approached her to suggest a renewal of the grant application. One of the EC members even accompanied her to the city's office to show the EC's support for the renewal, hoping that this time the East Lansing mosque would be the partner. But the funds were no longer available.

Sister Jamila Jones was a principal of GLIS for more than five years. She preferred to be called Black rather than African American, because she argued that indeed she was not an African, but a black American. She converted from the Baptist religion to Islam during her years in the student-teaching program in Detroit. She first changed her name into a fully-Arabic one, but later changed back to retaining her last name because she did not want to break that connection with her relatives. The background of her conversion had something to do with her hobby of reading occult books. She first read Kyballion, a Jewish book, then continued to read an Islamic theological book written by Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, until a meeting with a man in an occult bookstore led her into discussions with Muslims. She finally declared her conversion at the age of 21 years in front of a black imam in a Detroit Islamic center. This conversion made it difficult for her when she began wearing the Islamic style dress while completing her student teaching. Her old friendships broke up with her because she stopped attending parties and began going to different places.

Sr. Jones began learning Arabic from a book, and next took Arabic classes at Wayne State University in Detroit. Then went abroad for ten years (1983-1993) to teach English at Ummul Qura University in Saudi Arabia. She also went to Morocco and Egypt. She called herself a Sunni but was

not strictly a follower of any particular school of Islamic tradition. When she came back to the US to enroll her child, she accepted a job as the principal of the Genesee Academy in Flint (near Detroit) from 1996 to 1999. After that, she was hired by GLIS as its principal until 2002. In the same period, she also worked as a teaching assistant at Lansing Community College (LCC) and Oakland Community College (OCC). She acquired a Ph.D. degree in linguistics from MSU in 2003. From 2003-2006 she worked again for the Genesee Academy of Flint. Then she went back to Saudi Arabia to work for Prince Mohammad bin Fahd University (PMU) from 2006 to 2009. After that she returned to the US to teach as a professor of TESOL at Ball State University in Indiana for five years. She then was appointed as the principal of GLIS and worked in that position from 2014 to 2018.

Regarding the benefits of having an Islamic school in America, Sr. Jones wrote on the GLIS website: “Students are fortunate that they are able to study and learn in one place and at one time what others have to travel the world to learn. *Alhamdulillah* for the Islamic school.” During her long period of service, Sr. Jones played an instrumental role in the GLIS securing its accreditation. But she was not interested in taking part in the organization of the Islamic Center. She said that to be a president of Islamic Center would create too many headaches. She said she had no problem about working with males, but she claimed she was not a feminist in that way. In most cases, women indeed worked for men. She could be more active in the Muslim community, but she did not want to do so. She said jokingly that the worst work in the world was to sit in a meeting, listening to people argue.

Sister Nadia Elhussieny came from Egypt, first to Detroit in 1974 to meet her husband of three years who had been in the country before her. After that, she went back and forth between the two countries until she completed her undergraduate study in Egypt. In 1978, she finally moved to

the US to join her husband to stay. She then worked in various jobs and studied further in different cities in Michigan. She moved to East Lansing (?) in 1988, eventually completing an MBA degree from MSU. Like many women in Egypt, she said she did not wear a *hijab* until the 1990s. According to her, Egypt, for all its modernity and educational advancement, in the time of her youth time had felt like Europe compared to the other Arab countries, so the hijab was not worn because it was generally regarded as in opposition to modernity. Once coming to East Lansing, however, she began attending the mosque, as she wanted to meet other Egyptians and Muslims. She began listening to the lectures the were predominately delivered by Shaikh Omar and felt that it was time to begin covering her head.

Regarding gender issues, she said she had no problem in her workplace when she began covering her head. Some of her co-workers asked her what happened to her, and she explained the reason for her change, and others were simply not concerned about it. She always claimed that she embraced an open-minded way of thinking, so nobody had the right to teach one way of a Muslim's tradition toward other Muslims.

Preservation of the Collectives

The expansion of social activities stemming from the worship gatherings at the East Lansing mosque strengthened the image that the center of Islam in the greater Lansing area was located in the Islamic Center of East Lansing. There was another mosque open for the public on the west side of downtown Lansing, but the East Lansing mosque was the one that was open every day from dawn to late evening. With its larger size and more spacious parking, people also would feel confident about directing people to the East Lansing mosque if asked about the existence of an Islamic place in the city.

In terms of ceremonial functions other than regular prayers, the frequency of use of rooms in the mosque for various indicated that this place had a high preference for rituals of passage like marriage ceremonies and funeral rituals. Muslims from neighboring cities, where there had been no mosque, also wanted to hold their religious ceremonies there to add the sacred aspect to the administrative legitimacy of their life-changing events. Further, the mosque's presence had become a reason why many Muslims wished to live in its immediate vicinity. The establishment of an Islamic school ensured that this place would be a center of reference regarding Islamic learning. Undoubtedly, the Islamic Center had gained the public trust for its services, meaning that its service on Islamic matters had been accepted because it could be counted on. It seemed that it was just a matter of time before this type of legitimacy came, when the institutionalization of the Islamic Center gained formal recognition from local governments and other existing authorities. This constituted a major step in the preservation of the collectivity.

The second aspect of the preservation of the collective came through the recruitment of committed and resourceful volunteers. With volunteers committed to authoritative Islam, there would be individuals who were ready to devote their time and resources for the implementation of community duties. Meanwhile, volunteers having access to outside resources such as public enterprise bodies, university facilities, foreign institutions, and so on, would be able to better fulfill their services to the congregation.

The third aspect of collectivity preservation was witnessed through the maintenance of the organization. In the early constitution (handbook) of the Islamic Center, the organization of the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing was governed by two bodies: the board of trustees (BOT) and the Executive Committee (EC). Then a school committee that was created in 1993 to build the GLIS became the third body of the organization in 1996, the year the school opened. BOT had the

authority to protect the society's long-term interests and guard its constitution. With this authority, BOT oversaw all activities in the Center and settled all disputes. BOT also is responsible for developing plans; fund-raising; and the general management, maintenance, and growth of the Islamic Center. The BOT consisted of five members: two were nominated by the Executive Committee and approved by the General Assembly, one was appointed by ISNA, one was appointed by NAIT (North American Islamic Trust), and one is the President of the ISGL. The BOT members had to elect one from among them as Chairperson.

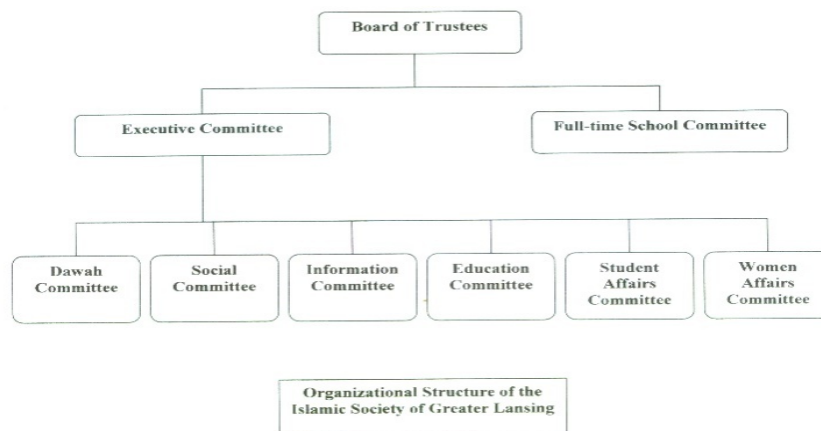


Figure 14. Chart: ISGL organizational structure (ISGL Handbook 1998)

The Executive Committee was charged with managing all activities of the society except for the affairs of GLIS, the fulltime school. Before the adoption of revised Constitution in 2006, the BOT consisted of ten members: the President, the Vice-president, the General Secretary, the Finance Secretary, the Dawah Coordinator, the Social Coordinator, the Information Coordinator, the Education Coordinator, the Student Coordinator, and the Women Affairs Coordinator. All officers are elected biennially by the General Assembly, which met once a year, except for the Student Coordinator, which was represented by MSU's MSA President, and the Women Affairs Coordinator, who was appointed through an election by the female members only.



Figure 15. Photograph: Annual assembly held the evening of November 20, 2015.

Following the approval of the new constitution by the annual assembly in 2006, the number of Executive Committee members increased to 12 positions. The information committee and the student committee were dissolved, but there were four committees added, which included Community Service, Property Management, Public Relations and Outreach, and the Youth Committee. In a new development, the MSA representatives began attending the meeting of the executive committee, although structurally the student committee was no longer in existence.

The full-time School Committee managed the GLIS. It consisted of seven voting members, plus the School Principal, who was not a voting member. The voting members included the chairperson, the treasurer, and one member who was elected by the ISGL General Assembly; then two members who were elected by the schoolchildren's parents, and two members who were appointed by the ISGL Board of Trustees. The School Committee appointed one of its members as secretary. The School Committee members would serve for two years based on its own annual assembly.

Professor Khalil related to me some peculiarities of the executive committee members' elections. He said that was assumed in the early constitution that the service term would be two years, then the Society would have an election. What happened most often was that, at election time, they failed to hold the assembly. Then a person would be elected for three years, and because there was no specific date for another election, people would forget about renewing the election. Consequently, a person could end up serving for four to five years, until he or she realized or remembered that another election was supposed to be held. In the last thirty years, however, they have maintained the discipline that the annual meeting would be held at the turn of November to December, at which time the election would be held in every other assembly to elect every member of Executive Committee at the same time.

Based on the early constitution, ISNA and NAIT had the political authority over the personnel serving on the policy-making bodies in hundreds of Islamic centers in North America. But the reality could be different than this supposed structure because the implementation of such a far-reaching authority over so many Islamic centers was outrageously difficult to implement. In most cases, ISNA and NAIT officers would simply call Shaikh Omar, the person they knew most,⁴⁷ about the names recommended, then ISNA and NAIT would send the appointment letters to fill the seats allocated for them based on Omar's advice. In the new constitution, this mechanism was removed, so today all committee members are elected by the annual assembly.

According to Shaikh Omar and Professor Khalil, the background story of the prior mechanism was the feeling of uncertainty among Muslim students who pioneered the foundation of the Islamic centers about the future existence of Islam in America. Since the feeling was spread

⁴⁷ In the edition of Islamic Horizons magazine of Nov-Dec 1983, Omar Soubani was mentioned in the list of the members of the ISNA Board of Trustees.

among hundreds of Islamic centers under the MSA National/ISNA networks, such a mechanism was created to ensure that ISNA had jurisdiction over the Centers' continuity. Interestingly, the omission of ISNA's control did not occur during the trusteeship that NAIT held over the Center's properties. In Professor Khalil's words:

Since the people who were building were students, they were concerned about, 'What happens if all of us go home? Who is going to take care of that? So, they came to this idea. We have an organization here, in North America, that owns the buildings. So, if all of a sudden people leave and there are no Muslims living in town to take care of the building, at least NAIT can take the building to sell it, do something with it. And that's why they put the building under the ownership of NAIT.

So, in the ISGL's early constitution, on the second paragraph of the introduction, there is a section that reads: "The Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (ISGL) is an affiliate of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). All real estate purchased or donated to the ISGL is entrusted to the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT)". In the new constitution, the first section (Section 1.01) reads:

"The Society shall maintain an office at the premises of the Islamic Center, 920 South Harrison Road, East Lansing, Michigan 48823, or at such other place or places as designated by the Board of Trustees. Real Estate purchased by, or donated to, the Society shall be entrusted with the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT)" (Islamic Society of Greater Lansing, 2006)⁴⁸

Shaikh Omar has another story to support the trusteeship of NAIT with regard to the Center's property. On the MSU campus, not all Muslim students agreed with the foundation of an Islamic Center. These were the activists of Arab nationalism who had different political backgrounds, and their aspirations were mostly oriented toward the political struggle in their respective countries. They

⁴⁸ Similar statements can be found in numerous Islamic centers' websites. For example: the Islamic Center of Charlotte, NC (n.d.), the Islamic center of Central Missouri (2007), the Islamic Center of Rolla, MO (2012), the Islamic Center of Greater Lowell, MA (2009), and the Muslim Community of Ann Arbor (2015).

were known, respectively, as the Ba'thi, Nassirist, Qaumi or leftist Communist students. They had a tendency to trigger violent debates that often misused religious argumentations to validate their interests. Those politicized students also had spread false rumors, alleging that mosque activists were corrupting donations originating from abroad. So, to secure the very existence of the Islamic Center's properties from any misuse, the mosque activists did not want ownership to be place on their hands. By associating the ownership of the institution and the property to the trusteeship of ISNA and NAIT, they had created the idea that there was nothing to grab in the Center. To make sure that the Islamic Center's members had the same aspiration, a new membership application also required two signatures from two other persons who had already been members.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ This approach to membership acceptance remained the same both in the early constitution and the new one.

CHAPTER 4

EMBODIMENTS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY: PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

Following the previous chapters' discussions on historical and social features of Islamic authority, it is necessary to look more deeply at the make-up of bodies existing in the East Lansing mosque. A discussion of their institutional forms would clarify how religious authority was embodied locally among the Muslim community in the city and beyond. Researchers on Islam and Muslims in America like Haddad, Smith, and others, have identified that the increasing visibility of Muslims in American public spheres had something to do with the roles of Islamic institutions (Lotfi, 2002). As summarized by some reviewers, the writers generally concluded that:

“... Muslim minorities have become more visible by challenging the established frameworks of law and civil society, and gradually are becoming more accepted by the government, media, local populations, and so on. Over time, their priorities have shifted gradually from straightforward material and economic survival to combating Islamophobia and overcoming barriers toward symbolic and political recognition in public life. In working from exclusion at their society's edges to inclusion in the mainstream of public life, the role of Islamic organizations, religious leaders, and Muslim activists has been crucial. ...” (Gilliat-Ray, 2003)

In these works, scholars have implied that the Muslims' organizations and institutions did not increase the visibility of American Muslims with merely some random causes or types of calamitous actions. To the contrary, the authoritative institutions improved the image of American Muslims through fair representation and advocacies on behalf of Muslim causes through civilized, legal, cultural and political means available within the American social and political system.

Further, a 2002 report on such matters would also show how Muslim citizens were progressing through local regeneration of leadership. Until the last decade, scholars on Islamic affairs of America

still lamented the lack of locally trained imams (Haddad & Smith, 2002). Imams and equally authoritative entities actually had determinative influences in the attitudes of mosque congregations toward the surrounding society. Had they been present earlier, locally trained imams would have been able to guide their congregations in preventing the variety of conflicts caused by the interactions between Muslim citizens with other social and religious groups. This chapter will show that the community of Lansing Muslims had understood those demands and had fulfilled them by recruiting locally-educated imams to lead the congregation.

Expanding Forms of Religious Authority

In a talk to welcome a visiting class of MSU students, Imam Sohail Chaudhry said that among the reasons for his 2015 acceptance of the job offering to become the imam at the Islamic Center of East Lansing was the existence of an Islamic school at the Center, which would promise a quality education that consists of the state curriculum as well as Islamic subjects to be taught to the children. On the other side, among the reasons why the Center decided to select him for the job was his long experience as imam at a mosque in Morgantown, West Virginia, where he had served for approximately ten years. So, he came to East Lansing with his own social capital in the form of authoritative experiences of mosque leadership, which would increase the current community's confidence in the leadership of its religious institution. Since joining the community in 2014, Imam Sohail's role not charged him with operating and maintaining the routine programs and services, but also expanded them with his own initiatives for the betterment of the community and society in general. So, the relationship between the Islamic Center and Imam Sohail was based on mutual interests, in which they complemented each other and collaborated to consolidate a complex of services for the Muslim community in the city. The complex of service worked like a formation of a *habitus* that was entrenching community members, but the grip of control was not so strong that it

did not resemble the discourse of the Foucauldian concept, that is, one demonstrated in power relationships.

In accordance with noted scholars' works about individual and institutional emergence of religious authorities in the West (Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002), here we can see that the Muslims of Lansing mosque have created two distinct forms of Islamic authority: individual and institutional. Whereas Shadid and Koningsveld described separate individuals and organizations of Islamic authority in European, Middle Eastern and North American countries, this work focuses attention on the emergence of Islamic authority that multiplied between individual and institutional forms within the same community. In the local case, the individual authority could be found in the personality of Imam Sohail, and the institutional one was in the office of the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (ISGL). Furthermore, I observed through my involvement in the Center's activities, there were a number of educational services that could be considered as diverse between the personal and the institutional authorities. These variations were more than the individual authority by number but still less established if compared with the office of ISGL. The first variety to mention was Darul Qur'an, the Qur'anic learning classes and informal gathering of Qur'anic recitation for all ages that had been held mostly on weekends since the beginning of the community's compound. Secondly, there was Sunday School, with which I had been involved more for more than four years. And the third was the Greater Lansing Islamic School (GLIS), an accredited private K-8 school founded in 1996.

While the authority of the imam centered on one person, the core of Darul Qur'an in the Lansing mosque was found among a group of volunteer Qur'anic teachers, who tended to continue watching over the program despite the changes in management. Meanwhile, Sunday School was more institutional than Darul Qur'an because the program's leadership was maintained through

formal appointment, despite the frequent turnover of volunteer teachers. Finally, GLIS was a full-fledged school institution because it operated according to the state government's standards on formal education. It was a private school that had functioned autonomously despite receiving some support from the government and the mosque community. Each of them was created to serve the community members' religious needs in different ways, as described below.

Imam, a Personal Embodiment

In my first weekly visits to the mosque in East Lansing in the fall of 2008, it appeared to me, and probably to many other weekly goers, that Shaikh Omar was the leader of the mosque community. That is because our connection with the mosque was merely through attending the Friday prayers, and he delivered most sermons as main part of the prayers. Before dismissing after the prayers, some people would approach him for a handshake and a hug, and sometimes took a time to consult with him about something. The Shaikh's was also among the oldest members of the congregates, as I learned later that he was born in the 1930s. With his very early involvement in mosque matters, he must have been among the most knowledgeable persons about this community's past. He was also from Palestine, a place of concern to the most Muslims in this locale. His tone during sermons was heavy and slow, to me like a grandfather carefully giving story lessons to his grandchildren. And his *thawb*—the loose, long-sleeved Arabian garment—indicated that his presence was never unprepared but also not too ceremonious, which was different from the casual styles of most reserve speakers who filled in to deliver the sermon when he was absent.

Since its 1979 inception, and not until 2013, did the community of the Lansing area's Muslims have a person officially hired as the imam of their mosque. Shaikh Omar could have been the most authoritative person to fulfill the duties of an imam, but he was never formally hired as one due to his preference to work as a volunteer. Therefore, he was not salaried for filling in to carry out this

duty. As mentioned in the previous chapters, he had his own resources, either from his own pension, or saving from his past Jordanian work and other networks beyond the mosque, for example, as an invited speaker throughout the US. Therefore, he was among those mosque activists who still had agency, in the sense that he still had his own resources to survive and maintain a fair amount of control, to the extent that he would contribute to mosque causes. Apart from the fact that he was not officially hired, however, the point is that an imam was a necessity in the mosque of the East Lansing Muslim community. This role had appeared since the time of the community's early history, and it would be there to continue the work of the early leaders in the community. And in such a busy mosque, an imam's duty was indeed more demanding, so that it needed a dedicated and learned person, such as Shaikh Omar or someone of his caliber.

To explain how demanding an imam's job is, for instance, the subset of prayers' rules being applied in this mosque were generally implicit, assumed to have been understood and were agreed by the congregants without a declared consent. Therefore, a basic learner of Islam might not be able to ask a person in a position of authority about how to pray, and instead would have to rely on following how people in the room were doing so. Such learners would need to explore the rules, either in an Islamic school, through online sources or a teacher. I learned the general rule slowly by combining what I knew beforehand, plus years of interactions with the congregation.

Secondly, the need for an imam had something to do with the belief popularly taught among Muslims, that the congregational prayer, called "*salat jama'a*," was a ritual that was highly valued: that is, the ritual was twenty-seven times more highly rewarded spiritually through *salat jama'a* than if it was performed individually. Additionally, members of the congregation were also taught that the best prayers were the ones held at the beginning of the allocated time. These two beliefs converged into the teaching that the best prayer was that one that was done together at the beginning of the

allocated time. As prescribed, there were five times a day for daily prayers: the dawn (*fajr*), noon (*zhuhr*), late afternoon (*‘asr*), sunset (*maghrib*) and night time (*‘isha*) prayers. With such a high frequency, a prayer leader—literally translated as “*imam*” in Arabic—was a necessity for the congregation.

Last, the reason to point out the importance of an authoritative person like a professional imam was because there was a weekly *salat jama’a* called “*Salat Jumu’a*”, which was held on Fridays. At least a thousand people would attend the Friday prayers. And since 2013, Fridays in this mosque became busier because it started having *Salat Jumu’a* in two groups to accommodate the increasing number of prayer-goers.

The main session of congregational prayers was made more special due to certain factors. First, it seized the privilege of time and space in terms that there should be no other *salat jama’a* held in the same room at the same time. Secondly, all Muslims in the building were supposed to join in this prayer, although in reality at many times some people joined it late or missed it altogether due to activities taking place in other rooms. Third, this primary ritual would also seize the full devotion of the amenities available in the room. So, the imam would use the sound system and he would also lead the prayers from the *mihrab*, the niche in the *qibla* side wall (facing towards Mecca) of the prayer hall.

In short, people who came after the first *salat jama’a* finished were allowed to hold another *salat jama’a*, or pray individually, but they were not normally—although not forbidden—to use the full amenities of the room, such as the sound system and the *mihrab*. The only exception that routinely took place was the noon prayers for the students of GLIS in the period from November until March. During this period, the noon recess time of GLIS was always at 2 p.m., whereas the *zhuhr* prayer in the mosque was held at 1 p.m. That meant GLIS students would have to hold their own *salat jama’a*

at 2 p.m., which was the time when the appointed person would lead the prayers from the *mihrab* and use the sound system.

During prayers, the imam is the center of reference of the “*ma’moom*,” all those who stand behind and follow the imam. Forming a row behind the imam, *ma’mooms* need to stand straight to the left and to the right and be close to each other until their elbows touch. If there are only two persons to pray, the *ma’moom* needs to stand just one foot behind the imam on the right side. If one person is already praying and another person came to follow him or her as a *ma’moom*, the new person would touch the imam’s shoulder, stand behind him on the right side, and begin following him as a *ma’moom*. If the two are praying and somebody else comes to join the assembly, the new person should touch the *ma’moom*’s shoulder, who would make one step backward to form a line with the new person. More persons could come and join the line, making it longer to the right and left, and balanced. If there are men and women, the imam has to be a man, behind whom the women’s group of *ma’moom* will have to stand on the left side and the men’s group to the right. The distance between the lines needs to be just enough to allow them to prostrate and not be trampled by the feet in front of them. Only when the line for the first row filled would the second row take formed. It has become a routine here that just before starting the prayer, either daily or for Friday and Eid prayers, the imam would turn around to see if the first row was straight and full, after which he would remind the people to straighten their lines, filling the gaps in the lines, and one more important matter: to turn off their cellphones to avoid disturbances during prayer.

In the East Lansing mosque, the space arrangement for men and women used to be facilitated by having the women’s prayer area on the left half-side of the multipurpose room—separated from the right half-side with a retractable divider—behind the main room where the men’s group was located. On the right front side of their position, the women had an access door facing towards the

men's prayer room—which was mostly closed—and a few glass windows through which they could see the imam. The men's voices could be heard since the upper part of the wall was open. Around 2011, when the congregation swelled due to the coincidental timing between Ramadan and summer vacation, the women's overflow was accommodated by opening the access door and creating a small square by placing curtains in the corner of the main room. Meanwhile the men's overflow filled the right half-side of the multipurpose room. Since 2012, a larger women's room eventually was built to the immediate left of the main prayer room, with a one-way looking glass wall in between. Now the women had a wider view toward the men's room, but they could no longer directly hear the men's voices. Because the wall was now constructed fully to height of the ceiling, the women could rely only on the sound system to hear the voices coming from the men's side. Based on a story from a friend of mine from among the sisters, one day the congregations were prostrating when the sound system failed, so the women did not hear it when the men raised from prostration for a last sitting toward the end of the prayer. For a while the women continued in prostration until some of them dared to raise their heads and saw that the prayer on the men's side was ending. One by one the women raised from their prostrations and ended their prayers individually. This incident was so upsetting that some of the women came afterward to the imam to lodge a complaint. Years have passed since that incident, and there has not yet been a renovation done on the wall, so such an incident might possibly happen again.

There should be mutual respect between a prayer leader and *ma'mooms* regarding differences of *mazhab* (school of Islamic law) among them. The prayer leader would be better off if he or she knew the ritual preferences dominant among the *ma'mooms*. On the other hand, the *ma'mooms* had to listen when the imam was reciting something and followed the imam's prayer movements, which included standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting. The *ma'moom* should never outstrip the

imam's movements from the beginning to the end of the prayers; otherwise the assembly between them is nullified. In case there was a difference between the imam's school of Islamic law and that of some of the *ma'mooms*, usually the particular *ma'mooms* would follow only the parts agreed upon among them. An example of this was the position of the hands during standing, in which most imams and *ma'mooms* would place their hands above their stomach. Conversely, *ma'mooms* of the Sunni Maliki school and all schools of the Shi'ite sect would let their hands hang down while standing. Interestingly, a person I knew coming from the Maliki school—as he came from Algiers, a Maliki-dominated North African country—would place his hands above his stomach when standing as imam and return to hanging his hands down when he was alone or acting in the role of a *ma'moom*.

During the prayers, *ma'mooms* were allowed to warn the imam if the imam made a mistake that needed correction, by reciting the correct verse or part of the correct verse. To do that, male *ma'mooms* should say “*subhan Allah*”—meaning God is most perfect, free from errors—and females should make a clapping sound with their hands. The mistake I saw most often at the mosque of East Lansing was the errors in the imam's recitations of the Qur'anic chapters. Most imams had made such mistakes at least once during my watch, including the chief Imam, Sohail, and other senior members who often stepped in to lead when needed. Many *ma'mooms* memorized parts of the Qur'an as well, and those were the ones who would say *subhan Allah* when they heard a mistake in the imam's recitation. In most cases, once the warning was heard, the imam would realize the mistake and try to correct his recitation before continuing it. When the imam happened to get stuck on a mistake or forgot the part he was reciting, *ma'mooms* would say the correct verse to help the imam adjust the words so he could continue his recitation. From women, I have not seen or heard clapping from them during my observation, since the women stood separately in other rooms.

If the imam continued with the mistake despite the *ma'moom's* attempts to correct him, then the *ma'mooms* had a choice to stop following the imam and finish the rest of the prayer individually. However, confusion also occurred at such times. Such confusion once happened when a friend of mine who was actually a *muallaf* (new Muslim) somehow got appointed to be an imam--probably due to his age and priestly demeanor. Unfortunately, he made the mistake of incorrect movement commands during the prayer, and was warned, but continued the prayer, given that he did not understand the *ma'mooms'* warnings. The *ma'mooms* also kept following him anyway, as many of them, including me, who stood farther away along one side did not realize the mistakes the imam had committed. After the prayer, the *ma'mooms* began arguing with one another about the validity of their prayer, whereas my friend, the imam, still did not know what had taken place. He said he felt there was nothing wrong with his prayer, whereas some *ma'mooms* said they thought he had made some mistakes. He finally stood up and walked away, whereas some of the *ma'mooms* stood up to pray again. Sometime later I asked Imam Sohail about this and he answered that the *ma'mooms'* prayer was actually fine, and it was the imam who was supposed to pray again.

If a *salat jama'a* is ongoing, there is no way to take over the leadership role, except when the imam has aborted his or her own prayer—due to passing gas, for example—and step away to withdraw from the assembly. At that point, the person behind him or her must step forward to take over the leadership. It never happened during my observation in this mosque, but the possibility has to be anticipated. That means a *ma'moom* who stands directly behind the imam has a special position in the sense that he or she needs to be a person qualified to be an imam as well. That is why when a young man with good Quranic memorization, called as *halizh*, was present, and he was spontaneously appointed by Imam Sohail to lead the prayer, Imam Sohail himself would take the position immediately behind the young imam. And indeed, it was mostly those who stood behind

the imam that heard most clearly the imam's voice, and hence identified the mistakes that happened, and made corrections when necessary.

To be an imam in terms of leading the prayers, many members were qualified, including myself. Talking about qualifications, many members of the East Lansing mosque knew about the Prophet's tradition, which held that an imam should be appointed among the *aqra'* people, those best in Qur'anic recitation. That means that a Muslim who knew the whole order of body movements of prayers from beginning to end, and one who memorized the first chapter of the Qur'an, *Sura al-Fatiha*, and a few other short chapters to recite, was qualified to be appointed as imam. An elementary Islamic education could prepare a Muslim to be able to meet such basic requirements. It was when additional numbers of Muslims attended the prayers that the appointment to the position of imam would entail a process of selection. In an interview, Imam Mabrouk, the chief imam before Imam Sohail, noted that among those able to recite the Qur'an, the persons who had committed the most to memory, usually the *hafizhs* would be the best suited to be the imam. Among those *hafizhs*, the most knowledgeable person in Islam was the most ideal to choose. Then among the most knowledgeable *hafizhs*, the best choice would be the oldest among them. In such an order of imam rank, I believed that my position was just above the lowest rank, which rarely resulted in me leading even small *salat jama'a* prayers in the mosque, and never for the major ones.

What made the duty of a chief imam hired in the mosque of East Lansing no longer that simple was that it included not solely leading worship activities. Besides serving as prayer leader, an imam was also a spiritual leader of the community, as served and represented by the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (ISGL). That is why during two periods of imam selections launched by ISGL, in 2012 and 2014, there were some rounds of candidate rehearsals that were then judged based on a complex list of criteria, as stipulated on ISGL's website. In the pages of the contract to sign by a

selected imam, the list was even longer, with detailed job descriptions that included responsibilities, qualifications, competencies and specifications a candidate needed to meet. In short, the list showed that the job of chief imam could not adequately be filled by a person who failed to stay in the vicinity of the building. This job needed a fulltime residency and so, it had to be paid according to the standards of professional employment in the United States. If he was a foreigner, the candidate had to possess work authorization in the US. Additionally, the contract also included clauses about salaries and benefits that were to be counted commensurate with the level a candidate was able to attain.

Finally, a strong feature in the list of duties on the imam's contract was an expected familiarity with the American culture. The list read that an imam had to be fluent in the English language—spoken and written—while he needed to have a good knowledge of Arabic. It was also expected that he would be able to communicate effectively with all age groups and both genders, to whom he must provide guidance, relief, comfort, healing, and counseling regarding problems that face the community. That included cooperation with people of other faiths, government offices, and groups of visitors coming to the mosque to be briefed about the religion.

So, the qualifications being pursued by the Center's office was indeed quite high, asking for nearly a perfect person of authority who would carry out a variety of tasks, from leading prayers, to delivering Friday sermons, to speaking in seminars and fundraising banquets, to teaching in Islamic and Qur'anic classes, to solemnizing Islamic marriages, to giving advices in religious consultation, to hosting funeral processions, to representing the city's Muslims in interfaith events, and so on. Still, he was a member and an employee of the executive committee of the mosque office, meaning he would be evaluated periodically and the contract would not to be extended if he failed to meet its expectations. With the commensurate wage, however, the office had also been realistic by being

open to negotiate in the range of qualifications and experiences of the candidates to be selected for a vacancy. We can see the differences among the candidates by looking at my observation about the output of the selection process, which resulted in the appointment of Imam Mabrouk during 2013-2014 period, and Imam Sohail since 2015.

In the following two profiles, I will try to show how these two imams had used different types of expertise while trying to merge and strengthen the local system. As noted above, the completeness of prayer rules in the mosque showed the existence of a value system, which could lead toward a habitus if it was placed in a context together with other rules and situations there were ongoing in the community and vicinity. Since the two imams had come from different backgrounds and educational careers, each of them had different achievements during their periods of service with the community.

Imam Mohammed Mabrouk



Figure 16. Photograph: Imam Mohammed Mabrouk delivering a sermon

I knew about the coming of Imam Mohammed Mabrouk in the first meeting I attended upon joining the mosque's Executive Committee (EC) on early April 2013. So, I did not know how the EC ended up appointing Mr. Mabrouk and rejecting the other candidates. At that meeting the attending executive members already talked about a welcome dinner to be held on April 19. On April 12, after Friday prayer, Thasin Sardar, the EC's president at that time, announced the coming of a newly hired imam and invited the congregation to attend the welcome dinner. He also asked the people to be patient since the new imam was still in an orientation with the Michigan branch of CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations), an American-Muslim advocacy group.

One of Imam Mabrouk's qualifications that made most members in the executive circle confident was his American citizenship. He was a Palestinian, but he was born in Detroit, the largest metropolitan city in the state of Michigan and a city that included many Muslim citizens since it had in its vicinity the city of Dearborn, where the largest concentration of Arab Americans was located. As previously mentioned, many members of the mosque were accomplished at reciting the Qur'an, and many of them also memorized chapters of the Holy Book. But most of them were born abroad, which made them alien with respect to worship matters at an American mosque. Imam Mabrouk, being born and raised in an immigrant family but educated in an American environment, was more preferred because he was expected to handle both worship and cultural affairs. Previous records showed that many problems in mosque communities in the West were not handled effectively due to foreign-born imams' unfamiliarity with local culture (Haddad & Smith, 1994; Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002).

Another strength to highlight about Imam Mabrouk was his relative youth, with a wife, with whom he had not yet had a child. Having a religious mentor for community teenagers had been a serious need among the parents whose growing children began to spend more time in the mosque

facilities, not only to pray but, in particular, to play after night prayers during weekends. It was expected that a younger imam could provide excellent leadership for these teens, as he could impart to them Islamic knowledge more smoothly through his communication skills and familiarity with the young people's lives.

Beyond his youth and ability to communicate with young people, the new imam's foremost skill was his resourceful mastery of Islamic texts. One year before his employment at ISGL, he graduated from an Islamic college: the Jami'atul 'Ulum al-Islamiyya (College of Islamic Studies) in Canada, which—according to Imam Mabrouk himself—was a subsidiary branch of the same school located in Saudi Arabia. From this college, he achieved an *ijazah* (certificate) in Quran and Hadith, which meant he had memorized entire chapters of the Qur'an and several hundreds of Hadiths, the Prophet's traditions. Because he was a native speaker of Arabic, his pronunciation also was perfect when he recited the Quran during prayers. In the Canadian Islamic college, he also told me, he learned Islamic law and the philosophy of Islamic legal jurisprudence, called *fiqh*, of all *mazhahib* (plural, schools of Islamic law), with a specialization in the Hanafi *mazhab* (singular of *mazhahib*). With this background, he claimed to still be in contact with his teachers, with whom he would consult before responding to questions he found difficult to answer. In short, he had mastered at least four resources of Islamic authority: the Qur'an, the Hadiths, jurisprudences of the Islamic schools of law, and his resourceful connection with his former teachers.

From the first week of his tenure, I had tried to establish a good communication with him for the sake of Sunday School, since I had just been appointed a coordinator of educational programs by the EC, and to dig deeper on his thoughts about a variety of Islamic matters for the sake of my research. I requested that he teach one class in Sunday School, but he finally could only deliver a short general lecture to a routine assembly before the classes began. He did this for a few Sundays

in May before the end of the academic year. During the following summer months, I took some time to sit with him for a few interviews and intermittent chats for my research. During the fall, however, he began to become overwhelmed with his core work as imam, making him rarely available for Sunday School.

Since leading prayers had become a routine, it could be said that the most time-consuming regarding his attention was the second core job: delivering speeches in the public space. Whereas he managed to deliver speeches only for a few Sundays in Sunday School, he delivered Friday sermons almost every Friday, plus public lectures almost every other day, from the first day to his last days in the mosque. He spoke for different audiences, ranging from adult males, to females, to non-Muslim group visitors, to college students, and to youths and children. In the first interview, I asked him about his feelings after accepting this job. He replied:

“Number one, it’s a very big responsibility, because whatever I say, I am held accountable for, in front of Allah *subhanahu wata’ala* (SWT) first, and with the people. If I say something that is not correct, and the people follow, I would be in trouble. But at the same time, I am honored that Allah (SWT) will choose me for this job. And personally, you know, I love to teach, I love to recite Quran, I love this job, I love teaching the people, I love reaching out to the people, I love helping the people, so *alhamdulillah* no complaint from me *insha* Allah.”

So, he identified the imam’s job more with giving speeches and it seemed he did not mind much about leading the prayers more than preparing the speeches.

Above everything, the very presence of Imam Mabrouk as permanent imam, was a major achievement of the mosque EC and BOT members, as they managed to fill the void by presenting a person qualified to sit in a position of authority that previously had been lacking in the community. Despite the roles of Shaikh Omar and others who had filled the imam’s duties, there had been a feeling that this community was in need of a full-time imam. So, Imam Mabrouk’s important contribution was his consolidation of the imam institution and the fulfillment of the jobs assigned to

his position. Before the coming of a hired imam such as Mabrouk, a person of *da'wah*, the (preaching) coordinator of the EC had to keep working on recruiting a team of qualified persons to lead daily prayers. The *da'wah* person also had to manage the schedule of the speakers for the Friday prayer sermons. There were also weekly lectures outside Fridays whose speakers had to be sought. Now, with the presence of Imam Mabrouk, who would always come, as he was living in a home located directly behind the mosque, the congregation members were no longer concerned about the frequent absence of an imam when people came for the routine prayers or having a speaker for weekly lectures. The team members were now positioned as backups, filling in when Imam Mabrouk could not come due to an illness or when he was out of town.

The administrative politics of the mosque community actually did not demand as much time from Imam Mabrouk as his attendance for the purely religious aspects of the imam position. Apart from the dynamic situation of the policy-making process in the mosque leadership during those years, there was no disagreement among the mosque activists regarding his appointment. People already appreciated him for his maintenance of leadership in ritual matters. To my knowledge, during his service period, Imam Mabrouk was seldom, if ever, invited to attend meetings that did not need him to play a direct role. As an example, in the ISGL annual assembly in mid-November 2013, I observed that the EC had kept him distant by not inviting him to attend their meetings from the beginning. Some noted members were afraid he might witness clashes among members involved in various arguments. Debates indeed often became fierce during annual assemblies, especially when the public talks unintentionally included some accusations, prejudices or personal matters. For instance, I overheard during a preparation that Imam Mabrouk would be present only at the end to recite closing prayers. It turned out the session ended too late and was so acrimonious that the board of trustees (BOT) chairman closed the session. So, Imam Mabrouk did not show up at all that night

despite the possibility that the power of his words might have weighed heavier with regard to reaching a decision. I understood this as the people's effort to prevent him from becoming involved in a personal clash, in which a single rebuttal against him could lead into undermining the institution of the imam. These clashes indeed took place, but the incidents involved only those among the ordinary and officary members. Imam Mabrouk was saved from becoming involved in this way, but he missed witnessing directly some problems suffered by some within the community.

Imam Sohail Chaudhry

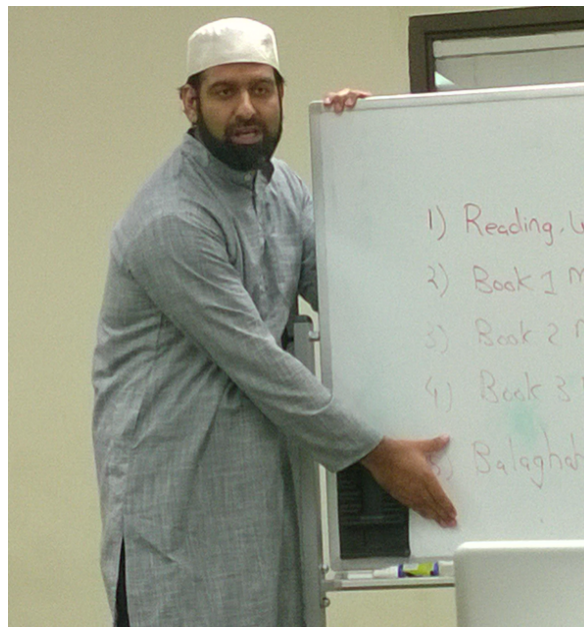


Figure 17. Photograph: Imam Sohail Chaudhry teaching an Arabic class

Imam Sohail Chaudhry provided a complete and open description of himself as a result of an MSU student's visit to the mosque. Sohail Chaudhry is a Pakistan-born man who came to the US when he was 17 years old at the end of the 1990s to begin an undergraduate study in computer engineering at West Virginia University. He described himself as a person from secular family in which religion was not very much discussed. He said his mother was the one who taught him how to

do the *salah*, the Islamic prayers. He mentioned that there was a mosque near his house, but every time he attended public events, such as Friday prayers, the talks were mostly about politics. Political talks lessened his interest, although during his childhood he actually liked the subjects of history and religion. So, rather than in the realm of religion, he grew up developing his other interest, namely, playing cricket, a popular sport in Pakistan.

He said he never dreamed of going to the US, but once he landed here he became fascinated with the plurality of the society. Back in Pakistan, he saw only Muslims, since people of other religions were so small in number and scattered. Here in the US, communities of different religions existed freely, thrived, and were well organized. So, he began following his prior interest in religion by exploring religious knowledge through attending seminars and classes, and visiting the places of worship and meeting people. Then the 9/11 tragedy happened. There was a real backlash, but at the same time, knowledge about Islam and Muslim matters became important. He knew Islam was regarded as the second largest religion in the world, but found out there was no class and no expert about Islamic matters at West Virginia. So, despite still being a student at the university, he joined his friends in setting up free classes and seminars to impart basic knowledge about Islam. He taught some of the classes and in turn, he got became more enlightened about Islam. He knew more about what people thought was important about the religion based on the questions asked by the attendees of the programs.

Other than opening courses on campus, Sohail and his friends routinely visited the city's prisons to teach about Islam to hundreds of Muslim prisoners. During his time in Morgantown, he estimated there were around eight hundred Muslim prisoners out of a population of two thousand inmates dwelling in nearby facilities. He illustrated how the religion was spreading like wildfire among the prisoners. Sohail said he was fascinated and received benefits from the experiences of teaching

the prisoners as they shared their stories about their lives, providing background about their crimes and how they found Islam, converted to the religion and learned more about it.

Then another opportunity arose. The imam of the Morgantown mosque resigned and left the city after completing a Ph.D. from the university. The mosque offered Sohail the job and he accepted. In the first couple of years, he fulfilled the imam's duties as a voluntary part-time position. Then he graduated with a bachelor's in computer engineering and began to shift his track. He began serving formally in the imam's job as full-time work. He also enrolled in an online Islamic university with the goal of adding a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies. He finally graduated, receiving the degree after moving from Morgantown and becoming the imam of the East Lansing mosque. In all, he lived in West Virginia for about 15 years and had lived in East Lansing for approximately three years by 2017, when he shared this story with me.

He became connected via an online matrimonial site and was married in 2009. His wife is a white woman from Alabama, who converted one year previously. She came from a family of Catholic and Southern Baptist Christians. He told us visitors that the process was simple and quick. Once contact was established, they talked over the phone for a month, met personally on a Wednesday, and were married three days later, on a Saturday. After the birth of their child, they began to worry about the future education of their children. They wanted an Islamic education for their children, so they began looking around the country to find Islamic schools. They discovered that this particular Islamic center in East Lansing had a position of an imam and an Islamic school that for them would fulfill their family-related goal. That is how he finally applied and accepted the appointment to become the imam of the East Lansing mosque.

Sohail Chaudhry's appointment as the new imam of the East Lansing mosque was not a result of random selection. He first came to the mosque in East Lansing at noon on a Friday in October

of 2014 to deliver the sermon and lead prayers. Not only him but other imam candidates, including Imam Quadri from Flint and Imam Ahmad Salie from Detroit, also delivered the sermons and led prayers on different Fridays of the same month. Through deliberations among members of the EC and BOT (Board of Trustees) the Center finally selected Sohail Chaudry as the new imam. Imam Sohail moved with his family during the Christmas holiday period during the last week of December to a house situated directly behind the mosque. The house was owned by the Center, was average by size, and was situated in a quiet neighborhood of about one hundred middle-class American homes, some of which were owned by Muslims.

Shortly after giving his first sermon as the new imam, on January 9, 2015, Imam Sohail began helping the Center's existing programs. To support my own programs stemming from my involvement with the committee of education, he granted my request to help in Sunday School, and began teaching a class of older boys during in the same month. He also initiated opening a course in Arabic language, which was again a blessing for me, as it was another part of my responsibility as a member of the education committee. This program's implementation had been struggling since its initiation the year before. For this collaboration, I helped with the office work pertaining to the classes, and Imam Sohail focused on the teaching curricula. Beyond the education committee, Imam Sohail also cooperated with the *da'wah* committee by holding more routine lectures in the evenings for men, women, youths, new converts and non-Muslims. With the youth committee, he also held youth-centered programs such as special lectures and Jeopardy-style quizzes following prayers on certain Sundays of the month. Every first Sunday of the month, he also held an "Islam 101" class for new converts and non-Muslims. In his sermons, Imam Sohail often called the congregants to take part in the executive committees of the Center's overall organization. In short, he kept trying to implement new ideas by instilling religious teachings within the community.

Imam Sohail ideal as regards language since he could speak Urdu and English, thereby placing himself in close relationship with the most dominant group in the community: the Indo-Pakistani Muslims. He also continued to improve his Arabic since he was learning while teaching the language classes. In contrast to Imam Mabrouk who was a *hafizh*, Imam Sohail had not finished memorizing the Qur'an, but he already had more than enough in his memory to recite when leading prayers. Finally, his latest achievement was his achievement of American citizenship, which was granted to him in the middle of 2017.

As imam of an American mosque, Imam Sohail's job covered many more tasks than those listed for Imam Mabrouk. Other than the five daily prayers, his core job included delivering the Friday sermons and leading prayers, funeral arrangements for Muslim's deaths, wedding ceremonies, and Ramadan and Eid special activities. He also provided marriage counseling and counseling on other issues, conflict resolution, weekly lectures on Islamic subjects separately for men, women, and youths aged 8–12 years, courses in Arabic, Islam 101 for new converts and non-Muslims, interfaith meetings, guest lectures on campuses, and so on. He said he felt his job contained so many duties, but he enjoyed it, commenting that the more he taught the more he would learn.

Implicit Requirements

Beyond the written criteria listed in the published qualifications and competencies, there were some implicit requirements for the imam's job. I learned that there were some important requirements that were unwritten, but they were commonly understood, tacitly agreed upon, and consistently mentioned in the selection process for an imam heading the East Lansing mosque. They were as follows:

1. Male

That the imam had to be male was not listed in the requirement of an imam selection, but this qualification was understood from the way the imam's job would be completed. The basic work of an imam was to lead the daily prayers of a mixed gender congregation. Since a female could not lead the males' prayers, a woman can only lead females' prayers, which meant she could not become the imam of a mixed congregation—hence the chief imam of the mosque needed to be a male. Part of Imam Sohail's life story was his early leadership in a Morgantown mosque, in West Virginia, where he was caught in a clash between some strict Muslims who held separate and over-dominating roles of male leadership, and Muslim feminists who were demanding gender equality that was regarded some as asking for too much. Imam Sohail was among the moderate new leaders who sought to give as many more places and roles as possible to female members, but reserved leadership roles for males in ritual matters, as prescribed in Islamic traditions. These episodes remain controversial and have been well documented in the media. ("America at a Crossroads. The Mosque in Morgantown | PBS," n.d.; "The Mosque in Morgantown," n.d.)

2. Married

It was difficult to have a male imam who had not been married to lead and guide a large community like the one that comprised the East Lansing mosque. Muslims believe in the positive values of married life, so that having a married imam with whom community members could consult about their household issues would be preferred. Imam Mabrouk was firm on this issue for the same reason, and Imam Sohail, beside of giving an example of how he met and married his wife, he endeavored to connect families with in his new community with a new matrimonial service in order to help eligible youths to find the most suitable spouse.

3. Limited acceptance of non-mainstream Sunni Muslims

As stated in the Islamic Center's constitution, the Center was open to the public, and all sects and groups of Islam were welcome to pray in the mosque. This commitment was often expressed in public speeches, such as sermons for the Friday Prayers, seminars and open houses. One theme occasionally reiterated in such sessions was about the need to love the Prophet and the Prophet's family, a favorite narration in the Shi'ite traditions. I never saw an obvious sign or attitude of Shi'ite identity among the Center's attendees. But after a visit to an Ashura gathering at the end of September 2017 in the Zahra Institute⁵⁰, a Shi'ite center located around five miles from the ICEL, I became aware of their presence in the Center. I could recognize that a handful of the Shi'ite congregants had also attended Friday Prayers in the ICEL. Zubayr Ahmed, then the ICEL president whom I was accompanying, said that there were even more Shi'ite brothers and sisters who attended non-ritual events in ICEL, such as marriage parties. But the number might not seem significant if compared with the total number of congregants at the Institute, which numbered around seventy. Thasin told me that he knew two Shi'ite families who had their children schooled in GLIS. There were also two class teachers and one teacher assistant who were Shi'ite. Some beneficiaries of the almsgiving services that included *zakat* and *sadaqa* also were refugees of Shi'ite backgrounds who came from Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries.

Notwithstanding exceptional times when some Shi'ite or Tablighi Jama'a members were involved in peripheral positions in the EC, the top positions at ICEL were always held by mainstream Sunni Muslims. 'Mainstream group of Muslims' meant those who adhered to general and plain teachings and practices of Islam without being affiliated with a special interest

⁵⁰ According to its website, the Zahra Institute was founded in 2010. Interestingly, in an interview in 2016 Anis Ahmed told me that the property wherein the Institute was located was purchased from him. During the purchase time, nobody told him that the Muslim fellows buying his property would turn the facility into a Shi'ite center.

group within the religion. With this condition, Shi'ite Muslims were welcome in the community and they took part in the daily activities in the mosque, but I have never seen any of them hold a high position in the Executive Committee or on the Board of Trustees. This also meant that some exclusive groups such as the Jama'a Tablighi group or groups with various ethnic affiliations had representation in local politics. They sometimes invited people to join their activities but never to override the flow and use of the space at the Center at the expense of the mosque programs.

Imam Mabrouk also was accepted as the imam because he was in line with this condition in terms of religious sect. He stated:

“Shi'ite, they could come and pray here, because this masjid is open to everybody, all mazhab, Sunni, Shi'i and others, but as far as leading the prayers, we prefer the Sunni ways. Shi'ite people have many additional recitations beside of the core rituals, which would become a reason why they couldn't lead prayers here. Not many people know about Shi'ite style of prayers after all. I spoke with them a few weeks back.”

Imam Sohail also had a similar point of view that was based on the same practical reasons.

4. Continued Islamic training

It happened that Imam Sohail was mostly pursuing a non-formal education in Islamic studies through his attendance in short courses and through online colleges. His formal education included a bachelor's degree in computer engineering, and only recently did he graduate from an Islamic studies program through an online university, on which he relied mostly on his own diligence and self-teaching. His next focus seemed to center on the Arabic language. After his first days of working in East Lansing mosque, he had expressed his intention to begin offering the Arabic classes, which looked odd to me and probably to many others because he was not a native-speaking Arab. I helped him launch the program anyway, and soon I could see his limitations. Imam Sohail never lived in an Arab country, so I could see that difference from my

other non-Arab teachers who had lived in Arab countries. From my observation, while helping him for at least two years, however, he progressed greatly. He seemed to know Arabic grammar more than the Arab brothers in the mosque and began to share with us sophisticated vocabularies. Within a few more years, I am sure he would surprise any native speaker of Arabic with his language ability.

Imam Mabrouk's schooling was mostly achieved at Darul 'Ulum College in Canada, an institution similar to the Islamic boarding schools, where students study and stay in the same building complex. Imam Mabrouk told me in an interview that his boarding school cost was significantly subsidized by college donors. He had to pay about \$200 US per month to cover all costs, including room, three meals a day, books and classes. Not only that, even after graduation he also kept in contact with his teachers. That indicated that his learning continued to progress and that sometime in the future he could become a national figure.

Imams as Product and Part of *Habitus*

Viewing the socio-cultural system around the mosque as a habitus in development, an imam needs to be seen as a graduate of an Islamic environment, wherein a boy is born, trained and educated by the natural and social environment, as well as by the people around him. When the boy grows up and happened to become an imam or leader of another sort, he becomes an authoritative person on religious matters and part of the larger authority in his mosque institution. As a human being with a learning capacity, he would continue to grow and develop his knowledge and understanding, along with the development of the institution. At the same time, he would influence the growth and psychological development of the men and youths of the mosque of which he was in charge.

In the case of Imam Mabrouk, the question about him was whether he could merge with the community's system of values. That is, could he become part of it? As it turned out, he resigned after working for just one year. However, it did not have to be understood as incompatibility between the ideals he was pursuing and the ones followed by the community. It appeared to me that it was more of an incomplete integration between the two potentials of specific authoritative figures. In April 2018, Imam Mabrouk announced his resignation, citing family matters. He had told me on a previous occasion that his mother needed a care in Arizona, and his sister, who had been caring for the mother, was involved in a car accident. So, he needed to go and take care of both of them. Had he stayed longer in the community of the East Lansing mosque, he probably would have contributed many more improvements in the mosque service. He had told me before he left about his ideas to improve the Center's programs, such as a plan to form a school system similar to Sunday School, except that it would operate every other day of the week. But the plan did not materialize because he left the city at the end of April the following year.

In contrast, so far, Imam Sohail has stayed for three years in the community of the East Lansing mosque. He also had a long record of leading one of the mosques with controversial records in America, the mosque of Morgantown, West Virginia. He came from a secular family in Pakistan, but he kept an interest in social and religious issues during his life while pursuing an education in the hard sciences. He happened to be in the country when the 9/11 tragedy took place and was drawn into the activism of Islamic advocacies amid the high demand of learning more about Islam and Muslims in the US. He followed a track that eventually led him to become the leader of the Muslim community; in turn he would influence the growth and development of the youths of both Morgantown and East Lansing.

Finally, the habitus perspective here applies better than the disciplinary viewpoint. While a habitus perspective requires the presence of authority and social nurture, disciplinary view would require an authority and the enforcement of power. Authority and power are two different things. The authoritative person does not have to be powerful. Sometime the authoritative person has lost his or her authority after a clash of power, and sometimes an authoritative person survives his or her existence but loses its power. That would happen among those who relied on its authority as nothing beyond its legitimacy, so that it resembles a leader who holds nothing than a flag. That is why the authoritative person sometimes avoids confrontation to secure his or her authority. The disciplinary perspective follows this logic. Disciplinary actions cannot be applied in a community in which confrontation is suppressed or avoided. That is exactly what happened in this mosque community. There was no record of punishment by force toward those who had caused trouble. There were some instances of conflicts and some initiatives to restore harmony and order, but any type of strict enforcement was lacking.

Authoritative Institutions of East Lansing Mosque

Darul Qur'an: multi-personnel embodiment

Darul Qur'an is the current name for the previous program conducted at the mosque of East Lansing regarding Qur'anic learning, which taught students how recite and memorize the Qur'an. The students were grouped into classes based on their ages and prior fluencies. The classes were held every Saturday in the late morning for three hours before *zhuhr* prayers, except for adult classes, indicating the schedules were quite flexible.

The Darul Qur'an class was the first circle (gathering) I attended during my stay in the city. The group I first attended was one for adult beginning reciters. A few months later, I moved to another class for adults in which the students would recite and memorize Qur'anic chapters page by

page. I continued to attend this class for about two years. During the span of my attendance, I met and got to know friends from different nationalities among the attendees of these Darul Qur'an classes. I also had experiences of learning under different teachers. From the weekly meetings, which included vernacular talks and jokes between the Qur'anic drills and reviews, I become more familiar with the people, the Center, the social environments and anything touching upon their spoken interests. They also became aware of the field of research in which I was working, mutual knowledge that made it easier when I began recruiting some of them for interviews.

My circle of Qur'anic learners at this level was rather small since the group had more than ten persons attend. I can remember the frequent attendees included myself, the only Indonesian and university student; Sani Abbas, a Nigerian who had retired as a state correctional officer and was a former president of the Islamic Center; three Pakistanis and one Sri Lankan IT engineer who working for the city offices; a Pakistani pediatrician; an Indian who was retired from the University physical facilities staff; and a black American who was a former Marine who was presently working for an electric company. During one period, for a few months there were two Malaysians among us, but after they quit I became the only Southeast Asian in the room for the subsequent years. Except for me and the Malaysians, all the others were either citizens or permanent residents of the US. With our frequent attendance in this program, we were basically among the active members of the congregation, as we were also Islamic school parents, former and current board members, teachers and doctors, all of whom donated routinely and volunteered frequently for the Center.

The special part of this Qur'anic class was that the teachers happened to be all Arabians either of Middle Eastern or North African origin. That might seem like somewhat of an exclusive background, but we the adult non-Arab Muslims indeed suffered a natural problem with our tongues, which found it difficult to perfectly pronounce certain Arabic consonants in the Qur'an.

Perfect pronunciation was the standard for the class level of advance students like us. In the classes of a younger age, where beginning students were still learning how to read and recite, many mispronunciations were tolerated. But at the advance level, where everybody had been able to recite, the standard was elevated to perfection in pronunciation. So, we had no problem with such a situation since it was just like learning language with native speakers.

But not all Arabs could recite the Qur'an with perfect pronunciation. There is a subject in Islamic learning called *tajweed*, a compact of rules on how to recite the Qur'an; it is based on the original examples of the Prophet (PBUH). An Arab who seldom recites the Qur'an tends to recite Arabic texts with his or her dialect, which frequently could be wrong. That is why the activists at the Islamic Center of East Lansing kept trying to improve the Qur'anic learning program, to better serve the community. While chairing the *da'wah* committee, Najim Salman, an Iraqi immigrant and an MSU graduate in computer engineering and an employee working for a state office, he collaborated with his friends such as Ghazi Mustafa, a Palestinian construction engineer who also worked at a state office, and others, who together initiated a program on Qur'anic learning. They named it Darul Qur'an and they wanted it attended by people with serious intentions. To ensure the students' seriousness, this program would charge every enrolled person fifty dollars each semester. With a \$6,000 donation from a medical doctor, they renovated an unused imam's apartment in the mosque into a classroom complete with a set of Middle Eastern sofas and six sets of computers. The money was used to buy copies of the Qur'an and pay nominal compensation to the teachers.

Both Najim and Ghazi were teachers of Darul Qur'an. The other teachers also were recruited among those who had been known to be fluent in Qur'anic recitation, especially those who had achieved an *ijazah*, the certificate of fluency in Qur'anic recitation. With the common assumption that *ijazahs* were only granted by those who held *ijazahs* of a higher level, such people were highly

qualified persons to lead prayers, and hence became imams. Many of those listed as substitutes for Imam Mabrouk and Imam Sohail were indeed Darul Qur'an teachers. In other words, the teachers of Darul Qur'an collectively constituted another embodiment of an authoritative entity of Islam in the form of a group.

With more reliance on these persons, Darul Qur'an became less institutional in terms of management. As mentioned above, Najim initiated the establishment of Darul Qur'an when he was the coordinator of the *da'wah* committee. That is understandable since this program was aimed at preparing imams and preachers. The program's routine class meetings, however, were not really compatible with the committee's typical activities, which included scheduling prayers, sermons and seminars, public lectures and so on. Such routines were more appropriate for being coordinated by the education committee, whose charges based on the Center's constitution included weekend classes of Islamic studies, Arabic and English languages, and Qur'anic learning. Based on this charge, as education committee coordinator, I offered my support to administer the program, but the Darul Qur'an people insisted that it was not the domain of the education committee. I abided by this decision, letting them managed the program since I was already overwhelmed with other responsibilities. I helped them silently by setting up an unused Sunday School's computer unit when theirs was broken.

Sunday School, semi-institutional embodiment

As mentioned before, Sunday School represented the remainder of a weekend Islamic educational program that had become available for Muslim children in the mosque of East Lansing, all the way back to the beginning of the mosque's full activities in 1979. In 1986, non-formal education was becoming more structured under the name of the Darussalam Islamic School, which

followed some donations from some various persons. In 1996, the school was upgraded to a formal school, which began to function on normal weekdays and was recognized by the city under the name of GLIS. Meanwhile, the weekend school continued to operate and began to be known as Sunday School. So, distinct from Darul Qur'an, Sunday School was historically more institutional, although it was still a non-formal school.

My involvement with Sunday School led me to eventual membership on the Executive Board of the East Lansing Islamic Center. The first contact occurred when I heard about Sunday School and enrolled my first daughter, six-year-old Aufa, after Labor Day in September 2010. I drove her six miles in our white 1999 Toyota Corolla every Sunday before 11 a.m. and waited in the mosque library while she was in class, until the 2 p.m. *zhuhr* prayer. I also sometimes waited by joining a couple of other fathers in another room to learn basic Qur'anic recitation, which later led me to enroll in Darul Qur'an in the ensuing semesters. Aufa sometimes told me her teacher did not show up, so her class was combined into another, that of a different age group. That made me sometimes visit her class and help with watching the children when there was no teacher in her classroom.

The then-principal administrator, Thasin Sardar who worked as an IT engineer on weekdays, began to know me and asked me to help a female teacher who had to teach too many students in her class. At that time, the number of the students was approaching one hundred fifty, which was quite overwhelming. For the following semester, Thasin appointed me to teach a class of boys between seven and eight years old, who were, in my view, all naughty. With all the struggles to handle kids of that sort, I became a teacher of Sunday School for the next two years. In the fall of 2012 when Thasin was the Center's president, I was appointed as the principal of Sunday School. In 2013 the Executive Committee of the Center elected me education coordinator; at this time Thasin was in his second year as president. I held those two positions until I resigned in 2017 because I had

held these works for too long. I had served in Sunday School for six years, four of which were combined with the coordinating position in the education committee. During my voluntary service, I had worked consecutively with three presidents: Thasin Sardar; Bassam Mahmood the owner of a middle-class *halal* restaurant; and Zubair Ahmad, a retired Lansing city engineer. Based on the Center's constitution, an executive member could hold the same position, consecutively, for four years at most. So, my time was over, and I had to transfer my position to the next person or leave the position empty. I actually had applied to resign in previous years, but the position did not attract a single community member. So, during the elections no one was willing to be a candidate and I ended up holding the responsibility in my hands for a longer period of time.

The Center's Sunday School had a more structured administration than the one for Darul Qur'an. While the latter focused on training students how to recite and memorize the Qur'an, the former taught the students several subjects, which included Islamic theology and history, ethics, rituals, the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (PBUH). Sunday School had a position of teacher coordinator that was usually held by the most senior among the teachers, and a principal who took care administrative matters for the school, including the financial matters, plus accommodation and communication with other institutions in the Center. For these works, the principal controlled of the school email, as allocated within the Google-based website of GLIS, the regular Islamic school.

Before my time the positions of the principal and the teacher coordinator were held by the same person. During my period, however, I was not able to simultaneously attend to the daily complexities of lesson preparations, the teaching process, and school accommodation. The Sunday School's teachers were mostly female, so we employed a female administrative staff member to serve

the routine paperwork that required many contacts with the teachers. I took care of the rest, including non-routine tasks like hardware maintenance, or ordering supplies and publications.

Sunday School teachers were recruited among community members who had been familiar to the teacher coordinator. Any person who was interested in taking part in the program would have sent an application to me or to the teacher coordinator. But the teacher coordinator alone would make the selections and the final decision. When the number of appointed teachers was sufficient, I compiled the new teachers' information for the sake of financial compensations for the months to come.

Contrary to the past, when all works were voluntary, teachers since the year before my period had been paid ten dollars an hour. In 2017, the rate of pay rose to twelve dollars hourly. That was higher than the average wage in the city at that time. But it still was not much because the working time amounted to three hours on Sundays. The average number of the students each year was 70. We used a sliding scale for tuition, by which the first student in a family would pay \$150 per year; the second would pay \$100; the third \$50; and the next children in a given family, if any, would attend for free. With that, the financial balance of Sunday School so far had been just fine. Every year, we still had about \$200 in the budget. And in case help was needed, we could ask the Center's president to solve our problem. But to date we have never suffered a deficit.

Sunday School used some tables and amenities from the GLIS office and classrooms. A typical day of Sunday School started when I came to open the doors about 10:45 a.m. from March through October, or about 10:00 a.m. from November through February. I used one key to open almost all doors. There was a janitor who had all keys if I needed help. As usual, greetings, saying *salaam*, to those already present was a good gesture. Before walking into classes, all students had to gather in the gym for an assembly in which they would together recite supplications. Meanwhile, I readied the

copy machine, a computer for the administrative staff, and opened the classrooms. Preparing food and drinks for recess time, I checked the amount of drinks and snacks remaining in the fridge and cabinet, as well as the number of cups and napkins. When the classes were in session for an hour and a half, the administrative staff would work with paper copies or serve the parents for registration matters, and I would prepare the snacks and drinks for recess time. Sometimes I drove out to a grocery market to buy more snacks and drinks. During recess time, the staff remained in the gym, serving the students with snacks and drinks, and I would watch the kids play or try to be of help in the area. Students went back to classrooms after a half-hour recess period and were dismissed about an hour later. Ending the day, I walked toward the mosque through classes to make sure the classrooms were not messy—otherwise I would receive complaints on Monday. The calendar for Sunday School began immediately after Labor Day, which was routinely the second Sunday of September. The end of the academic year was celebrated usually with a pizza party on the first or second Sunday of June. During the celebration, students presented performances and receive certificates that were presented to each of them.

My long service with Sunday School made me familiar with many parents and female community members, especially the teachers. Knowing one another so well, people were open in sincerely talking with me about mosque life, thereby supplying my field research with much information. Recalling Marcel Mauss's theory of gift giving, again it can be argued that every gift can give back some advantageous values to the giver (Mauss, 1954). My service in Sunday School not only gave me a lot of knowledge, but also other kinds of help that made me feel at home in the community.

CHAPTER 5

RITUALS AS OBJECTS OF ISLAMIC AUTHORITY

Rituals Observed at the Islamic Center of East Lansing

While living as a temporary resident in America, and as a practicing Muslim, I faced numerous challenges in performing daily prayers. These challenges arose because America is a secular nation, its weather is not conducive for a large part of the year to perform prayers while outdoors, and Islam, being a minority religion, was not well understood among the general populous. Back in Indonesia, the country of my origin, the laws require accommodation of the spiritual needs of the six major religions of the world, namely, Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Muslims constitute the majority of the population. Whereas the goal of the Indonesian government is to provide equal accommodations for all, Muslim citizens tend to benefit the most in terms of worship facilitation and religious accommodation, owing to their higher numbers and more frequent daily religious rituals, as they pray five times a day. In America, a practicing Muslim tries to fulfill his or her religious obligations despite the lack of accommodation in public or other spaces. This lack of accommodation is invariably never deliberate; rather, it is owing to a lack of awareness and the scarce number of people who seek it. For practicing Muslims in America, they feel a dire need for religious accommodation, and where this is not provided, such as in work places and other public spaces, this is a tremendous inconvenience for those seeking to fulfill their spiritual obligation of offering their five daily prayers in a timely manner.

On university campuses such as at MSU, the provision of an assigned room wherein a Muslim could pray during school hours will go a long way toward accommodating Muslim students and employees. This is all the more significant at a big university like MSU, owing to the relatively high number of international students, many of whom hail from Muslim majority countries and are

accustomed to praying at designated times. Owing to the lack of such facilities, students like me, order to pray in a timely manner, had to find a space such as between corners or passages between buildings, or inside buildings in which to pray. There have been a few occasions while I was praying in full public view, and someone passed by. These situations filled me with guilt for performing a personal activity in a public place and possibly causing discomfort or disturbance to passersby. The noon and the afternoon prayers were the two rituals I had to offer while I was on campus. I used to work overnight in the library and had to offer my evening and late evening prayers there. During the winter months, when sunrise is quite late and sunset is rather early, this made it more difficult, because the dawn and sunset prayer schedule fell within typical business hours. During periods of severe weather, the prayer time sometimes lapsed when I was on the road. In other words, practicing Islamic rituals poses major challenges for Muslims who live in a country where there is very limited provision for appropriate public spaces, plus being in a minority status, combined with at times challenging climate conditions. If one happens to work near a mosque, this makes it easy for them to take a break from work and worship directly at the mosque.

The establishment of the Muslim religious facility in East Lansing fulfilled not only a basic need of a place for Islamic worship, but also several other social and educational needs. A series of improvisations and innovations have helped serve the needs of the area's Muslims. Some of the rituals that were improvised and which evolved into other daily routines and practices are detailed below.

1. **Prayer direction (*qibla*).** Many mosques that were built early in America directed the *mihrab* (a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque where the Imam, worship leader, stands to lead the prayer) towards the southeast (S. F. Howell, 2009, p. 62). That was because in the past, many Muslims still used the plain Mercatorian maps that showed the direction from North America

to Saudi Arabia in a southeasterly direction. At the Albanian Islamic Center in Detroit, which I happened to visit once, there were two *mihrabs*: the old one that directed toward the southeast, and the one in use that directed toward the northeast. The Islamic Center of East Lansing was among the mosques built whose members used globe-based maps. In a globe-based map, as opposed to a Mercatorian map, the *qibla* is derived as the shortest distance from North America to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and this is in the northeast direction.

2. **Mosque interior.** As shown on the picture below, the interior at the Islamic Center of East Lansing is plain and lacks any ornamental decoration. Any fixture on the wall is not a decorative piece and simply serves a purpose, such as coat hangers or bulletin boards. There was not even signage instructing the people to turn off their phones in order to prevent those phones from going off during prayers. The purpose of this lack of adornment evidently was to avoid distractions and to help worshippers concentrate on their prayers. Meanwhile, many other mosques around the world still place accessorial articles on the walls, such as Qur'anic verses, or the words “Allah” and “Muhammad” in calligraphic style, or a sign directing worshippers to turn off their phones, or a clock situated above the *mihrab*.



Figure 18. Photograph: Main prayer hall of the Islamic Center of East Lansing

3. **The call to prayer (*azan*).** In predominantly Muslim countries, it is common to hear the *azan*, the call to prayer, blaring from mosques' loudspeakers five times a day. At the Islamic Center of East Lansing, the reach of the public speaker system is confined to inside the building, and no sound is audible outside the building. While churches and university campuses in America are traditionally known for their towers with bells that regularly ring to tell the time, the mosque *azan* was recognized as a noise disturbance (Leland, 2004). That is because American mosques were mostly built around residential complexes, where the communities were mostly occupied by non-Muslims. Many non-Muslims heard *azan* as nuisance to the neighborhood, so they would never encourage the reach of the *azan* outside the mosque. In Detroit, where there were more than fifty mosques, I have seen only two mosques that were permitted by a court to sound their *azan* outside the building. Alisa Perkins in her research reported eloquently how the permission was gained in the case of Al-Islah Islamic Center, one of such mosques di Hamtramck, Detroit, through a lengthy process involving public debates, media campaigns and interfaith events (Perkins, 2015).
4. **The mosque parking lot.** The City of East Lansing parking and code enforcement rules had a significant impact on activities in the mosque. Every building intended for public occupancy, including houses of worship, is approved for construction only after convincing the city's planning commission that adequate parking is made available. Any abuse of this code amounts to a violation of the code and subject violators to fines, and even the impounding of vehicles in violation of the code. That is why when the East Lansing mosque occupancy increased for the Friday congregational service, a decision was made to offer two services. While some professing a certain school of thought objected to holding two services on Fridays, this move greatly alleviated the overcrowding situation and eased the problem of a lack of parking availability.

5. **Attendance at Friday prayers.** By virtue of practice, Muslims coming from overseas are accustomed to attending the Friday congregation prayer without fail. This is because the Friday prayer is considered obligatory for every able adult male. Religious instruction was found in the *Sura* (chapter) 62nd) of the Qur'an,⁵¹ which was named *al-Jumu'a*, meaning *the gathering*. The same word was also used for the name of the day in Arabic, *yawm al-jumu'a*, the day of congregational prayer. And the mosque where prayers were regularly held was called *masjid al-jami'*, mosque for *jumu'a* prayer. As a prescribed gathering, Friday prayers must be held in a public congregation. So, if a public gathering cannot be assembled owing to problems such as weather, safety, or disasters, or for various major logistical reasons, then the weekly prayers could be called off and the people would simply observe the noon prayers individually at home. Friday prayers in East Lansing have historically never been called off, although it is potentially possible owing to some of the reasons cited above.
6. **Politics in rituals.** Being instructed as a public event, Friday prayers also were not removed from political dynamics. Historically speaking, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did not hold this prayer when the Muslims were minority in the city of Mecca. Only after receiving an endorsement from the people of Yathrib (earlier the name of the city of Medina), and he arrived safely after traveling the so-called *hijra* (the emigration from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD), he began holding Friday prayers in Medina. After that, Friday prayers became a weekly routine. In East Lansing, the early Friday prayers were held at the MSU's Union or the International Office building by acquiring a permit to use the room for this purpose. It is considered permissible for one to pray noon prayers individually on Fridays when a congregation cannot be assembled.

⁵¹ The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters of different lengths that total 6,236 verses (Ringgren & Sinai, 2017).

7. **Gender in Friday prayers.** Friday prayers are considered obligatory only for males, which signifies the patriarchal character of the Islamic social system, wherein females are not obligated to join (Ahmad, 2013; Bowering, 2012, pp. 177–178). At the Islamic Center of East Lansing, as in most other cities across the US, Muslim women are equally enthusiastic as men in attending weekly prayers. In this mosque, the number of female congregants during Friday prayers was about half of that of the males. The community's female members had been as active as the males in attending the Friday prayers. This is not to say that those who stay at home during the Friday prayers are uninterested in attending. Based on my observations, they did not attend mostly because they had to work or take care of domestic chores or simply did not have the means of transportation to attend.
8. **Sermons' themes.** The mention of global politics sometimes caused tension during the Friday prayers. In some cases, this unsettled the audience, as they did not agree with what was being said in the sermons. Shaikh Omar told me a personal story following the American military operation that took place in Iraq in 1991.⁵² In 1991, he decided to come back early from a family visit to Jordan after receiving a call from Tariq Akhtar, the president of the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing's president during that time. Akhtar said that the mosque community of Lansing was breaking up following disagreements about the American military presence in Saudi Arabia and the attack on Iraq that followed. Once back in Lansing, Shaikh Omar delivered sermons for a few Friday prayers to cool down the tension. His main message to the congregation at that time was that quarrels gave no benefit to anybody, and that the people in the Middle East did not care about what they were disagreeing about in Lansing. Regarding Friday sermons, Shaikh Omar

⁵² US-led Allied Forces launched Operation Desert Storm in January 1991 to free Kuwait from an Iraqi invasion. The operation base was on the Saudi Arabian areas bordering Iraq, a fact which caused debates among Muslim scholars regarding the use of Muslim land by a non-Muslim army as the base from which to attack another Muslim country.

explained again the neutrality principle as noted in his interviews above. He told me about his advice to the imams of Friday prayers to refrain from speaking about certain rituals that lacked consensus or had room for varied opinions. He suggested that the sermon speakers avoid speaking about any controversial issues. Controversial topics could be discussed in lectures and classes. As an example, he did not recommend the topic of moon-sighting debates (there is varied opinion on whether to follow calculations or sight the new moon with the naked eye to determine the beginning of a lunar month) for a sermon, in order to avoid someone in the audience standing up to protest, which could make him consequently defeat the purpose of praying to seek spiritual gain. Omar suggested instead talks about education, social services, or other general teachings of Islam.

9. **Additional supplications.** During the 2008-2009 Israeli attack on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Friday prayers in East Lansing added a special supplication called *qunut nazila*⁵³ to the congregational Friday prayers, as well as to some other daily prayers. This addition was made to express the community's deep sorrow and mourning over a calamity in other parts of the world. In some cases, the supplication was emotional, as the person leading the prayer wailed, and a impassioned rendering of words of mourning made it feel touching even for non-Arabic speaking congregants such as me. It evoked a depth of sadness and compassion in the congregants' hearts. It reminded me of similar supplications about fifteen years before, during the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia that took place between 1992-1995, when I was back in Indonesia. This additional

⁵³ *Qunut* as a normal part of ritual is practiced daily at dawn (*fajr/subh*) prayers by the followers of the Shafi'i school of Islamic law, and by all Muslims during the night prayers of Ramadan month. This supplication is called *qunut nazila* if it is recited with other prayers like the Friday prayers during the times of calamity. The Prophet, peace be upon him, began this tradition when his army suffered a defeat at the Battle of Uhud (625 AD). Having the same core wording as the regular *qunut*, *qunut nazila* also allows it to become longer depending on the imam's memorization of the supplication collection. Wordings of *qunut nazila*: <http://www.zamzamacademy.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Qun%C5%ABt-alNazila.pdf> accessed on March 7, 2017.

supplication is a sparingly practiced in Islamic tradition, meaning that it would not be allowed by most congregants if there was no widely felt impact. As is widely known among Muslims, an illegitimate addition in ritual matters was called *bid'ah*, a negative label of heresy that could lead to violent conflicts among Muslims.⁵⁴

10. Mosque and its non-Muslim neighbors. The American secular system regulated worship places like mosques based on measures of safety and for administrative reasons. Mosque buildings had to meet all requirements of security and safety set by authorities and those agreed upon by the zoning commissions of the cities and townships before acquiring their approval to build a place of worship. It was not uncommon if a mosque plan was cancelled or rejected if some part of the requirements was not fulfilled. However, sometimes the challenges also came from anti-Muslim segments of the population who spread fear about the growing presence of Muslims in America. America's leading civil rights advocacy group, American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU), found that the emotional rejections were often camouflaged behind propagandist reasons aimed at making the building of mosques difficult if not impossible. For Muslim citizens of Lansing, they had to accept the fact that they were a minority in the city. Similar to the situation undergone by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, during the Meccan period, East Lansing Muslims had to realize that there was another requirement to build a mosque: the emotional connection with the surrounding community. In the case of the East Lansing mosque, Shaikh Omar told me a story how his cohorts reached an agreement with the surrounding neighborhood for the expansion of the mosque. In one instance, a neighbor always came to the city's hearings about this mosque to express his full support for the mosque community, for two reasons: he had some

⁵⁴Bid'ah is described in the entry of "Innovation." See the definition: ("Innovation - Oxford Islamic Studies Online," n.d.), <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1037> (accessed March 7, 2017).

good Muslim colleagues who worked for the Detroit carmaker, the Ford Company, and here in East Lansing he often received help from some Muslim students who mowed his yard. In another instance, Omar and his friends met the leaders of the Baptist church next door at a dinner to extend to them the courteous offer of selling their church building to make way for the mosque parking expansion. Omar and his friends made the deal successfully in part because the Baptist church had already been losing most of its members.

11. **The mosque's increasing numbers.** The increase in the number of mosque buildings could have been caused by a friction within the mosque community could be followed by splits among its plural congregants. Sarah Howell reported how some mosque congregants in Dearborn split up following conflicts between two groups of different Middle Eastern countries of origin, resulting in the construction of another mosque by the one group who lost control of the older mosque.⁵⁵ So far, Lansing Muslims had been able to keep their diverse members united. But it is not impossible that such a split could happen at the East Lansing mosque if the ground situation changed and other factors drove the need to build another building for the Islamic Center. For example, if the growth of the number of Muslims in the city made it impossible to accommodate the number of worshippers served by the only mosque in East Lansing during Friday prayers, an idea of building another mosque could emerge. Since April 2011, Friday prayers here had to be held twice because the parking lot could not accommodate all the cars at the same time, even after utilizing a parking facility owned by the University Lutheran Church next door. If the situation worsens in the future, the community might have to think about building another mosque in another part of the city. For the purpose of unity, the classical tradition of Islamic

⁵⁵ In this case, Howell described a story of how the control of the Dix Mosque in Dearborn was transferred from the Lebanese to the Yemeni Muslims (S. F. Howell, 2009, Chapter 3).

ritual prescribed Friday prayers to be held one time on a particular Friday in one place in a village. Now the dual observance of Friday prayers in one mosque has become an acceptable norm, despite the fact that, technically, half the community would no longer meet weekly with the other half of the brothers and sisters of the congregation. The Executive Committee of the mosque partially addressed this concern by assigning the same person to deliver both sermons so that the same message is delivered to the entire congregation, even though the sermons actually occurred at two separate times. Still, the imam for the two prayers had to be different persons. Some persons told me they missed the beautiful voice of the imam because he had attended the other gathering. The difference of *Bilal*, the prayer callers, between the two prayers could also make for some odd feelings for some congregants. A student often performed the *Bilal* for the first batch. This left some people uncomfortable, while some others were pleased to see a young student being mentored in this role. But over time, this became the new routine among local Muslims' newly emerging traditions.

12. **Schedule of rituals.** Muslims determine their calendar based on the moon sighting throughout the year. But the timing of daily rituals was determined by the positions of the sun. In clear weather, a Muslim could determine the prayer times by him or herself. But such conditions are rare in cloudy Michigan. So, the congregants of the Lansing mosque relied mainly on the publication put out by their mosque administration. The ISGL policy on this matter was to follow the decision of prayer and fasting times published by the FCNA (Fiqh Council of North America), a council of Islamic law scholars formed by ISNA (Islamic Society of North America). In turn, FCNA used a variety of considerations, among which was the service of MCW (Moonsighting Committee Worldwide) under the leadership of a Maryland astronomer, Khalid

Shaukat, who focused on providing astronomical data for mosques and Muslim organizations.⁵⁶ Interestingly, FCNA did not actually use all of MCW's calculations. To decide the day of Eid Adha (the feast of the pilgrimage), FCNA would refer to the decision of the Hajj authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.⁵⁷ The reason behind this policy was apparently unity and authority. So, while the dates of Ramadan fasting and Eid Fitr (the feast closing the Ramadan fasting) could be different between America and other parts of the world, the decision of FCNA could not be different from that of the Hajj authorities. The Saudi Kingdom held authority over the schedules of pilgrimage, which other Muslim countries from around the world had to follow. Therefore, it would be strange if they celebrated the feast on day different from that of the Saudis. In the years between 2014 and 2018 Muslims in America had been observing Ramadan fasting around the summer solstice, especially when most of the days were in the months of June and July.⁵⁸ During this period, the long daylight hours would make them refrain from any food or liquid intake for about 15 to 17 hours. According to a calculation, Muslims who lived above the 48° of geographical latitude would have to endure up to 23 hours. On the Youtube website, there were some video clips showing some immigrant families in the northern Scandinavian countries who chose to endure this hardship. Considering this situation, FCNA scholars have re-analyzed the *fatwas* (Islamic law opinions) regarding this matter and have come out with a pragmatic consideration. Jassir Auda, one of the FCNA scholars, wrote an article that read, in part:

⁵⁶ Khalid Shaukat is an American astronomer who graduated from the Georgia Tech University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA in 1970. See: ("Moonsighting.com," n.d.)

⁵⁷ In the Islamic science of astronomy, there are two opposing methods of calendar determination: *ru'ya* (direct sighting) using telescopes, and *hisab* (calculation). The Lansing mosque prefers the second, which has determined the estimated dates of Ramadan and other feasts up to 2021 and beyond. See: www.lansingislam.com/an1.htm accessed March 7, 2017.

⁵⁸ Considering that the summer solstice in Lansing falls on June 21, I emphasize here the period one month before and after that date: May 20 until July 20. See: ("Sunrise and sunset times in Lansing," n.d.) accessed March 8, 2017.

... fasting does impose some physical hardship on the believer and does require patience and perseverance. However, it is not an objective for fasting to be incapacitating to the believer to the extent of not performing necessary religious, family, social, or professional duties. This is definitely the situation of people who will fast for up to 23 hours for the whole month. (Auda, 2011)

He also used an interpretation of the holy text to provide an alternative for understanding the message behind the religious obligation. A few other *fatwas* suggested a strict observance despite the hardship. But he offered his analysis based on the interpretation of the 2nd chapter, the 187th of the Quran, which suggests that such a hardship should not be imposed. With a variety of legal justifications, he ended up making some choices to observe Ramadan fasting within the limit of a human's health. First, a Muslim could follow the fasting time range according to the calendar of Mecca and Medina. Secondly, he or she could fast according to the calendar of the closest region, ones having moderate times. Third, one could undertake fasting beginning from the *fajr* (dawn) for a maximum of sixteen hours, based on the area of 45° of latitude. And according to a fourth alternative, a Muslim could fast from *fajr* to a maximum of eighteen hours, based on the 48° of latitude (Auda, 2011). These alternatives detached the practice of Ramadan fasting from traditional habits, and not from the classical tradition at all. The fasting times, which used to look at the positions of the sun, was now allowed to consider individuals' ability to fast or preference for fasting between certain hours. In any case, among those four choices, a person could offer dawn prayers hours before starting the fast and hold a sunset prayer after breaking the fast. In normal places, it was the opposite, in which he or she would conduct dawn prayers immediately after starting the fast and do sunset prayers immediately after breaking the fast.

Based on the same justifications, a Muslim in Lansing technically could apply the alternatives on him or herself. In the context of the spirit of the community, however, individual choices normally did not override communal agreements. As in the case of the East Lansing mosque:

Ramadan fasting was usually marked with daily gatherings for breaking the fast together in the Center, and people tended to agree on the choice of the prescribed fasting schedule. On this issue, Shaikh Omar told a story set around 1985 or 1986, in which one of his fellows insisted on following the schedule of the Saudi scholar, Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Baz. Finally, they agreed to consult directly with the Saudi *shaikh*. They gathered in the mosque office one evening, then used the office phone to call the Saudi *shaikh*. After a couple of tries, they finally got connected with the office of Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Baz. After listening to the question from Lansing, the voice from Saudi office said, “Follow MSA, don’t divide between yourselves, for God’s sake. This is not big issue.” So, somehow the Saudi people already knew about MSA by 1986. Thus, local tradition prevailed.

Lessons Learned

As explained in the previous chapters, the formation of the Muslim community in Lansing was a result of encounters among individuals who happened to share the same interests in practicing some aspects of Islamic teachings. On the campus of Michigan State University (MSU), where the greatest number of Muslim members interacted with one another in close proximity, these shared needs were easily visible. The concerns and wishes in everyone’s mind grew and this was shared among all of them and together they began to hold Islamic rituals. After a decade, they ended up building a mosque and establishing an institution: the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (ISGL).

But they came from different countries of origin and different levels of Islamic understanding. As a way of life for many nations, Islam had adopted many local cultures, albeit accessorial or supplementary, on the grassroots level after having been practiced in a variety of cultural contexts

for many centuries on different continents.⁵⁹ Consequently, the Muslim newcomers from the Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African countries, who dominated the number of Muslims in the city, would have different stories regarding Islamic practices as their minds still had memories that originated from the religious practices in their lands of origin. In their new mosque here, however, it would be difficult to accommodate those differences if the variety of Islamic traditions were to be preserved together in the only one place of worship that they just built. So, they needed to practice only the shared parts of Islam if they wanted to keep all Muslims together in the new community. As a result, the Islamic Center became a unique place where shared traditions took precedence and people set aside their individual practices.

As the Islamic Center had been established as a site of Islamic authority, it constituted a human-created institution that had the power to select and decide on a variety of existing practices that eventually formed two scenarios: those that would be continued for common gatherings and ones that would not. The Center's organization, ISGL, began to produce rules, either in written form, such as a constitution, or unwritten ones that were implied from the common routines. Whether or not it could lead to a stable production of normative traditions, this process had made the Muslim community center into a place where all cultures could come together to engage with one another and celebrate as one. So, instead of losing its authority in the face of globalization, as indicated by some scholars (Mandaville, 2007; Roy, 2004), the phenomenon that we have called here the *territorialization* of Islam in a Muslim community center had signaled an opposite trend. Further, whereas those scholars described the symptoms of "deculturation" (Roy, 2004, p. 259) for Muslim

⁵⁹ Clifford Geertz, for example, has compared the developments of Islamic cultures between the Muslims of Morocco and those of Indonesia, which showed the syncretic *illumination* or *maraboutism* of Islamic practices between the two peoples. That was followed by the rise of scripturalism at the end of the 19th century, a form of belief that was brought by pilgrims coming home from the Middle East. (Geertz, 1971)

immigrants who had been detached from the context of their original culture, we can call the production of rules and norms within the Islamic Center a *reculturation*.

There is some truth in saying that globalization could cause Muslims to undergo what is the so-called “functionalization,” “respatialization,” and “mediatization” of Islamic authority, because displaced Muslims no longer follow the “conventional understandings of religious knowledge, its location, and mode of articulation.”(Mandaville, 2007, p. 1) But such descriptions give a more chaotic impression than does the settling process of religious culture. With its ability to *recontextualize* the prescriptions of Islam on a piece of American land, the development of a normative culture in an Islamic center would be more suitable to be described as the emergence of “law” as defined by Geertz (2008) as local knowledge. Geertz wrote:

“Law, ..., is local knowledge; local not just as to place, time, class, and variety of issue, but as to accent—vernacular characterizations of what happens connected to vernacular imaginings of what can. It is this complex of characterizations and imaginings, stories about events cast in imagery about principles, that I have been calling a legal sensibility.” (p. 215)

Drawing from the general meaning of the word, Geertz defines law as the characterization of what exists and can imaginably exist based on local knowledge. Bringing this definition to the context of the Islamic Center in Lansing, the law of the community is derived from the compilation of its members’ understanding of their experiences. This spans the time of the initial efforts of setting forth Islamic practices; to the establishment of an Islamic society; and on to the future, when the community will presumably continue to record its memories. It is from these communal memories that rules are produced through the employment of what Geertz called legal sensibility. These communal rules will become a social tool that will contribute to the way communal life will evolve. As other scholars have pointed out, law is a constitutive part of culture (Mezey, 2001; Rosen, 2006).

As a part of a culture, Islamic traditions can be formed and enforced only if local situations and conditions allow it. In one country, the process of judicial production could be very simple in the hands of single judge in an Islamic court. Lawrence Rosen writes, "... a single judge ... in his personal discretion, in an instant of seemingly boundless might, could magically lift or permanently affix a burden that had been laying upon me and my neighbors ..." (Rosen, 1989). In another instance, the local case of Islamic matter could make its way to becoming legal dispute of at local or national levels through more complex social exchanges involving a variety of political campaigns, religious debates or economic rivalries (J. R. Bowen, 1993, 2003). Borrowing the terminology of social scholars, Islamic aspirations will turn into enforceable legal products through a rational process called public reasoning.⁶⁰ In the context of the development of Islamic law, Muslims' reasoning consists of three components. First, the existing members of a community should have in their practice of Islam something that can be shared among one another on an equal and voluntary basis. Second, there is an overlapping consensus, or a measure of acceptable commonalities among different interests that can be formalized for public benefits while keeping intact the equality and freedom of everyone. And third, there is enough of a collection of reasons to justify public actions, which is called the repertoire of justifications (J. R. Bowen, 2003).

Regarding shared practice, we can see that in a country with a long record of religious freedom, people are free to preserve their traditions, either revived or improvised. Considering this situation, we could generalize that the development of legal culture in this particular Islamic center consisted of at least three streams of tradition that were running parallel to one another. In this regard, different

⁶⁰ The concept of public reasoning was launched by John Rawls through his theories of liberal citizenship and justice, a theory that argues that the establishment of a public institution should go through a variety of reasoning, which constitutes a type of overlapping consensus that gives benefits to individuals amid their various social and economic differences (Rawls, 2001, 2009).

traditions were sharing a place for the convenience of all in a non-intervening coexistence. The first category is the most common; this includes the great mainstream traditions that had been widely accepted by Muslims from the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, himself and his companions, which are basically kept the same despite multiple transmissions through different places and generations. They remained the same as they were carried on by the immigrants that attended various Islamic centers in American cities.⁶¹ In the context of Lansing, the traditions of this category are few, since they are parts of the core traditions, so-called the pillars of Islam, as described in the previous chapter, and their implementation depended on the mosque's capacity. Of the five ancient traditions, the Islamic Center of East Lansing as an institution had provided various services for all except for the facilitation of those who wanted to follow the fifth ritual: *hajj* or the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Despite its important record as a connecting factor in the spread of Islamic authority in the past (Geertz, 1971), this annual ritual today mostly began from personal initiative and has been fulfilled through personal efforts. Only a few have imams in America served as guides or companions for *hajj* and *umrah* (lesser *hajj*) all the way to Saudi Arabia, and if they do, they are mostly doing it in their personal capacities outside of mosque affairs.⁶²

The second category of these traditions is the local improvisation, which could be come into being in either complementary or supplementary to the first category of traditions.⁶³ Inspired by the meaning of complementary and supplementary in the science of geometrics,⁶⁴ complementary

⁶¹ The term *great tradition* was proposed by Robert Redfield to describe parts of orthodox practices that were present in local contexts, in comparison to the *little tradition*, which was made only in a location (Faisal, 2011, pp. 1–27; Redfield, 1955, pp. 13–21).

⁶² See for example Imam Tahir at: <http://www.imamtahir.com/site/> and Imam Mohamad Joban at: <http://www.arahmanhajj.com/> both accessed on 2/27/2017

⁶³ This is very close to the definition of *little tradition* as proposed above by Redfield.

⁶⁴ This is an analogy from geometry, in which angles are called complementary if they can be combined to make 90°, and supplementary if the angles can be combined to make 180°. See:

traditions are the ones that are needed to improve or to ease the implementation of the main traditions, without which the implementation of the main traditions would be seem incomplete or difficult to observe. For example, building a mosque is itself complementary since it is not compulsory. But a worthy mosque will guarantee the validity of prayers because it fulfills the concept of cleanliness, and congregants' collective safety from the forces of nature. Supplementary traditions are those that will add to the congregants' social life after the fulfillment of the main traditions. Unlike complementary traditions, which cause direct effects on the main traditions, supplementary traditions will bestow indirect benefits to the spiritual life of congregants. Learning circles and social gatherings between the prayers' sessions provide examples of such supplementary activities. Learning circles will not affect the validity or comfortability of prayer activities, but the transfer of knowledge, especially in an Islamic context, will improve the congregants' religious experiences, and can lead them to become more steadfast believers.

The third tradition is the one that has been set aside from the common congregation, as it is not fully shared among all attendees. This exclusive tradition is remains among groups of Muslims who still want to keep their inherited traditions within private forums. These traditions could be ethnic, such as those surrounding the ceremony of birth, the so-called '*aqeeqah*, or of marriage, the so-called *walimat al-ʿarush*, which are usually set up according to how the hosts of the events want them to be done, in line with the prescriptions of their countries of origin. They could also be sectarian, such as the traditions of the Shi'i School of Islamic law, which would become the minority inside a Sunni-inclined mosque. Another example is the traditions of the Tablighi Jama'at, a traveling caravan of people (Masud, 2000), who always held their meeting circles in other community's

<https://wkar.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/gedgeo.geo.angles.ancomsup/angles-complementary-and-supplementary/>
accessed on 2/27/2017

mosques and often used the main pulpit if allowed by the host congregations. Despite being a Sunni group, the Tablighi Jama'a people have behavioral routines that are normative for their own members. So, newcomers or uncommitted attendants need to adjust their attitude if they still want to comfortably join a Tablighi circle.

Regarding an overlapping consensus, this is one of the ways to harmonize the relationships among those three types of tradition in the context of an American city. In America and in many other democratic countries, equality and freedom of religious belief are protected, and all people residing the country are legally entitled to the preservation of their own culture and tradition. Because of that, agreements need to be extracted from disagreements among different groups of people who share the desire to form a unified community. Supporting Rawls' idea of overlapping consensus, Gerald Gaus explains:

The Kantian-Rawlsian solution to the problem of universal legislation under diversity of private judgment depends on the claim that public agreement can be insulated from deep disagreement on fundamental issues about how to live. We can put aside the matters on which we disagree, and reason simply on the basis of what we share (Gaus, 2010, pp. 38-39).

Agreeing with this reasoning, we can understand that the Islamic Center would have to allow the unshared traditions, the third category, to live in limited forums assigned for private events. The common public forums then would be filled with the first, the mainstream old tradition, and the second category, the improvisations of the old. They both support each other in order to establish an enforceable, local culture of Islam. When someone goes back to their country of origin, however, it is the first and the third that will come along on him or her, because the second is developed only for an American environment. Another instance of such a change will also take place when an ethnic or religious group holds a private event: here, the first and the third also will come along at the

expense of the second tradition. So, the meaning and assignation of the little tradition is contingent, dynamic and contextually, on the place and time.

Regarding the repertoire of justification, it is a discursive collection of reasoning that can be used to justify personal or communal actions. As a discourse, its scope has a dynamic characteristic: it can expand or shrink. In line with the definition of authority that consists of dynamic perpetuation of public interactions, the number of reasons that come up to legitimate an action can increase or become reduced depending on the complexity of the situation. When Lawrence Rosen commented that the legislation process in the countryside of Morocco in the 1980s was magical, it was because he did not see justifications other than the vulnerability of legal reasoning in the view of the local religious judge and the simplicity of the town's court. Whereas John Bowen, who did his research ten years later in the closely connected societies of Indonesia, saw many factors that could influence the final episode of a legal process. So, the first case witnessed a low number of reasoning in the local repertoire of justification, while the second case had to go through numerous reasoning processes, which indicates an expanded repertoire of justification.

In the case of the East Lansing mosque, we can see that basically all members of the community had a strong intention to build a religious institution that would serve their shared spiritual needs. In terms of consensus, the institutionalization of ISGL is proof that the community has made formed with an organization that includes a variety of activities that are aimed at accommodating various demands with an available place and time. And finally, the community's existence in a very complex social system in America and its heavy use of available technologies undoubtedly indicates the involvement of varied justifications for every action taken either by individuals or by the society in its institutional capacity.

The following section will elaborate further on instances that point out the observance of Sharia, that is, Islamic jurisprudence, at the Islamic Center of East Lansing.

The Reasoning of Ritual Improvisations

The complexity of legal culture can be traced from discrepancies between the official rules and the actual practices of people. As described by Geertz, that law is local knowledge,⁶⁵ it includes the official statements and their vernacular discourse as uttered by the people. In an interview, Shaikh Omar tried to generalize the basic principles of public practices in the mosque, which describe the intentions behind the official statements of the constitution of ISGL. First, he said that after the establishment of the Center it was no longer a student community. Whereas the Friday prayers inside the campus area had been attended exclusively by students, the prayers in the new Islamic Center were attended by more varied segments of Muslim residents. In his words, the additional attendance, in addition to the students included:

... youth attendance, they are coming. They never came to the International Center before, the *halaqah* (study circles) which was there. Also, we realize many students are not stable here. They will stay one year, some two years, then go, sorry, because who cares. We have gotten their replacements, not necessary by students, but by others as well. Then added here, people are coming not from one country, but from many countries, especially the Indian and the Pakistani communities are the largest here. So, those are engineers, workers at the state, accountants, or doing some business here. Also, American converts who are working, have jobs, or some even without jobs. Then we have the professors at the university, who used to be not caring too much to attend the Friday prayers at the International Center, or the *halaqah* in Friday evening, but now with this big church, big mosque, they will come. All of them needed to be recognized in our activity. ...⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Geertz's *Local Knowledge*, Rosen's and Mezey's *Law as Culture* above.

⁶⁶ Interview with Shaikh Omar Soubani, East Lansing, Feb 10, 2016.

From this description, community such as Shaikh Omar Soubani began to realize early that the university students' attendance in the Islamic Center was no longer the main segment of the congregants. The numbers of non-student residents who attended mosque activities grew into a number that balanced the number of the students, and exceeded that of the students, with the influx of professionals and immigrant workers.⁶⁷ This change indicated to the mosque activists' an orientation toward the future of the society. They would pay more attention to the interests of general congregants and to the surrounding society rather than to the needs of the university students. With this background, a passage on the ISGL's website reads:

Towards that goal, the Islamic Center holds congregational prayers, teaching circles, educational programs, and social activities. The Islamic Center provides Muslims and non-Muslims with advice and information about Islam. The Islamic Society of Greater Lansing is open to all and does not make any distinction based on denomination or sects.⁶⁸

and its 1998 Handbook explains:

... One of the goals of the Society is to promote unity among Muslims and deepen their feeling of brotherhood. Towards that goal, the Islamic Center holds congregational prayers, teaching circles, educational programs, and social activities. At the same time, the Islamic Center provides Muslims and non-Muslims with advice and information about Islam.⁶⁹

From a students' perspective, it seemed they could not maintain a powerful presence in the mosque because they often were temporary residents who would come and go. With an additional characteristic in which the leadership structure of MSA had to be reelected every one or two years, this dilemma would become a feature of the student organization. The students were pulled by different agendas, among their own study goals, the on-campus organization in the form of the MSA,

⁶⁷The increasing number of Muslims in Lansing was part of a positive contribution of immigration to the state's population, which otherwise would be shrinking amid the trends of decreasing birthrate and increasing death of aging Michiganders. See: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/cgi/cgi_census_popest_slides_2011_375079_7.pdf accessed on 03/05/2017.

⁶⁸ See the lower paragraph in the website: www.lansingislam.com, accessed March 7, 2017.

⁶⁹ The 1998 Handbook of ISGL, Introduction.

and the off-campus organization in the mosque. Now they had ISGL besides MSA, and the students had to focus their attention on MSA activities, because there was nobody else that would attend to them, and they would have to let ISGL be taken care by the resident Muslims who would stay longer in the city. Consequently, there was a natural transfer of control within the mosque leadership, from Muslim students to the Muslim residents of Lansing. It was a smooth transformation of leadership from temporary hands to those of a more settled population. In Omar's words regarding this transformation, "So, we made it clear to ourselves, to honor the brothers who left and to honor the people who are there."

This intricate characteristic is also obvious in the second principle described by Shaikh Omar about the Islamic practice in the Center, as he commented:

... and to protect the future of the community that we should not touch areas where Muslims differ from each other. We have Shi'ah, we have [Ahl] Sunnah, we have Shafi'i, we have Maliki, we have Hanafi, we have the Hanbali, we have the Sufi, we have people who are likely attached to the religion, but not really caring much about it either, and so forth. That's the reality. This mosque should not be taken as Hanbali, or to be Shafi'i, or to be Sunni, or to be what?

In light of this, can we simply refer to it as American Islam?

Not American Islam. We say Islam as the *Sahaba* were, not divided. As Muhammad *sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam* [SAW] left them for the first generation. Not divided in taking the main teaching of the Quran and Sunnah. And then develop their understanding and act on it and making deeper study and more generation to follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. And why do we do that? Because there is no other masjid in the bigger town, or even the vicinity.⁷⁰

⁷⁰Shi'ah and Ahl Sunnah (Sunni) are the two largest theological factions of Islam. The Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanafi, and Hanbali are the four largest *madzhab*, the Islamic schools of law. Sufi is the religious quest of Muslims who place a greater emphasis on the mystic and ascetic aspects of Islam. The phrase *ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wasallam* ("may God's blessings and peace be upon him"), or more popularly, just "peace be upon him" (PBUH) is always recited by a person who observes the ethics after mentioning the name of the Prophet. *Sahaba* is the Companions, those whoever saw and learnt something from the Prophet. A further explanation can be seen, among others, in: <https://www.britannica.com> under the entries of Muhammad (prophet of Islam), Sunnite (Islam), Shi'ite (Islam), and Sharī'ah (Islamic Law).

Based on this description, the early leaders wanted to accommodate all Muslims who needed a place to observe prayers. For that purpose, neither the Society's handbook nor its constitution mentioned a sectarian affiliation for the rituals to be held in the mosque. So, by law, any Muslim of any sect would be welcome to use the available service in the Center, although in reality, the community was dominated by Sunni Muslims. But this would create a phenomenon of tensions because the legal provision advises an ideal situation of unity and brotherhood in the community, without prescribing a suggested preference for the actual practices that would be held in common forums.

So, the plurality of traditional backgrounds had been merged to form a common practice in public forums. Omar was proud of this because the need of unity and brotherhood was so critical. He acknowledged that he was a Sunni by theological doctrine and a Shafi'i in terms of Islamic jurisprudence. But if the mosque was to be declared a Sunni place of worship, he was afraid what to do with the Shi'i, or the Sufi fellows. Even if it was known that the mosque was dominated by Sunni Muslims, he did not want to announce the mosque's ritual preference towards, say, the Shafii or Hanbali school, because the other *mazhabs* would be alienated. He described an instance in which one day an Indian made a note for him that this mosque was unique because it did not formalize a sectarian preference. He also received a comment from a professor from Pakistan who asked about the position of mosque, because in his country the Muslims had different mosques for the Sunni groups, the Sufi brotherhood, and for the Shi'i. But Omar argued that the Lansing mosque was one for all because this was a better approach for the local situation. Then he argued:

... we are not like the Americans. There is a Baptist church, a Lutheran Church, this church, that church. Many churches here, people are divided here and there. But this is the only mosque. There

have to be some people who are open minded to accept others and to work with them. Because this is easily said, but not easy to do.⁷¹

So, Omar referred to American religious diversity to suggest that within its own dominant religion of Christianity, there was obviously a divided community. But his preference for non-sectarianism was not solely for ideal unity. It was because there was only one mosque available in the area that caused plural Muslims to keep the peace out of necessity while sharing a place of worship. Implicitly, he was hoping for a natural merging by saying:

... It is *hidayah*, it is guidance, it is open minded, it is not to create *fitnah*, not to tear other people, and not to have problem when they come, or when they leave, not to fight with each other, not to divide the community, because if you open this [mosque's] history, then this does not say it is Sunnah or Shi'ah. What was done in Saudi Arabia, how they had done it in Egypt, how they would do it in Pakistan, they were divided between Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanafi, and Hanbal. You are not open minded if you are not up caring about the future of the community. You will be divided more and more.⁷²

So, he put the practice of local Islamic rituals into a global context by which Muslims had been scattered to different places and followed different theological sects and schools of Islamic law. He, and the other founding fathers of the city's Islamic Center had tried to pursue a mission of unifying Muslims' plurality in a shared Islamic center, where the rituals were to be negotiated on a daily basis. They had not come to formalize a certain preference of Islamic practice to transcend this plurality, but they were following that path by first refraining from putting a label on what was being practiced in the common hall of the mosque. The following section contains examples of those daily practices.

⁷¹ Interview with Shaikh Omar Soubani, Feb. 10, 2016.

⁷² Shaikh Omar Soubani translates *hidayah* as guidance, and *fitnah* as a tear against other people. Interview with Shaikh Omar Soubani, Feb. 10, 2016.

Reasoning New Islamic Traditions in America

Conjoining the words “Islamic tradition” and “America” for many people was like trying to popularize an oxymoron. That was because the earlier attempts of joining the word “Islam” with “America” had not been fully accepted by both sides. Even the meaning of being American and the meaning of being Muslim were still debated.⁷³ In this thesis, I am arguing that scholars need to decide how to move forward from the undeniable existence of Muslim citizens and their Islamic traditions within American culture. With this framework, the improvisation of Islamic traditions in the mosques of Lansing could be understood as a part of cultural processes that have moved toward the inclusion of Muslims into American citizenship.

Scholars of social sciences have observed cultural processes using different perspectives to explain how a variety of factors had been synthesized to survive an inherited religion in a new social environment. Andrew March, one of John Rawls’s followers in the field of political liberalism, scrutinized cultural developments among Muslims by posing three questions whose answers had to be revealed from the Muslims’ side: whether the new traditions indicated that their residency in a non-Muslim country had been legitimated by the Islamic texts, whether they proved a religiously sanctioned loyalty to their new nation, and whether they showed Muslims’ recognition to non-Muslims around them as fellow citizens and not merely potential converts (March, 2006, 2011). To respond to these questions, we can see the relevance of Mujahit Bilici’s work, which explained the Muslims’ efforts to make their religion part of American culture. Those efforts, according to Bilici, consisted of at least three factors: active participations in the campaigns of legal justice for American Muslim citizens, nurturing friendship networks and cooperation with other religious faiths, and vernacular familiarization of Muslims’ presence as a natural part of American society through

⁷³ Akbar S. Ahmed has written two books using each of these two perspectives (Ahmed, 2007, 2010).

comedy shows in the public media (Bilici, 2012). Bilici's work described more about the externalization, or the outward embodiment of Muslims' presence in America, whereas March's questions demanded more regarding a transformation in the interpretation of Islamic texts. Muslim scholars have produced numerous works whose purpose is to reconcile Islamic legal prescriptions with the challenges of modern civilizations, particularly in the West.

How far can an Islamic tradition be adapted to a new land? Apparently, the direction of Islamic practice in America would depend on the possibilities available when Muslims are gathered in the prayer spaces and communal events in mosques. Harmonious gatherings would normally undergo the development of routines that would form the crystallization of a new Islamic tradition. Many scholars have seen indications that such a crystallization would lead to a culture that will "... represent both a continuity with the life and faith of the Prophet to his community and the emergence of a new entity with its own qualities and characteristics—a truly American Islam" (Afridi, 2001; Smith, 1999, p. 187). But this development also was dependent on the availability of the Islamic advisors serving their community in the mosques. These were the professional imams who would perform *fatwa*, a scholarly opinion on Islamic jurisprudential matters, in order to offer solutions to the problems faced by Muslims in their actual lives.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has attempted to describe the emergence of an Islamic authority in America based on the writer's understanding of his experience while living and working within the mosque community in East Lansing, Michigan. In Chapter One I argued that a student may acquire advanced knowledge of Islam without having to travel to foreign (including Arab) countries because the so-called centers of Islamic studies are now widespread and not limited to traditional centers of Islamic education. (For instance, I acquired Islamic knowledge in Indonesia but never attended an Islamic college in the Middle East.) I found among the community of East Lansing a mosque that has been moving toward becoming one such center of Islamic education. The population of the area's Muslims has exceeded five thousand, and the city's position between Detroit and Chicago, two host cities of longer-established and larger Muslim communities, help to explain the rise in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and the steady growth of local mosques.

Such centers of Islamic learning, which emerged mostly after World War II in America, are different from the Oriental studies centers that have existed since the colonial era in American and European countries. While the Oriental studies centers were mostly initiated and sponsored by colonial governments, the current Islamic centers are a result of the activism of educated Muslim residents, including students, scholars and professionals who wanted to serve fellow Muslims and provide welcoming spaces for Islamic rituals and social activities. Chapter Two offered examples of such spaces, specifically, the Wali Mahmoud Mosque on Lahoma Street in Lansing, which was founded by former followers of NOI, and the Islamic Center of East Lansing (ICEL), which was founded by students such as Omar Soubani, Daniel Masters, and others.

As representatives of a growing Muslim community, ICEL leaders initially relied heavily on Middle Eastern resources for financial and intellectual support. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, however, such connections became limited. After Shaikh Omar's journey to Saudi Arabia in 2000, followed by the terrorist attack in New York City on September 11, 2001, the financial resources of the Center became practically domestic in origin. But such challenges proved to have a positive impact, as community members had to strengthen their degree of self-reliance and improve on nation-wide networks for the success of local fundraising events. Such hardships have also led to the emergence of various community leaders. Chapter Three presented my observation on the characteristics of the volunteers who have carried on this institutional upbringing. Besides noted figures like Shaikh Omar, who played a foundational role with his teaching and fundraising activities, there were others who played significant roles in the enhancement of friendly relations between the mosque and local communities, the organizational consolidation of the Center, the technological maintenance of the facilities, its culinary and educational services and the daily administration of the Center. An early sentiment of collectivity was apparent when members of the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) worked to limit the influence of the Arab Student Association (ASA), which was more politically oriented and more focused on Middle Eastern issues. Further, the collectivity among the Center's members was also enhanced by intra-marriages among their children, by the fact that some of them lived in the same neighborhood, the Center's purchase of cemetery clusters for Muslim corpses, the creation of an Islamic school, and the organization of both men's and women's activities. All of these groups and circles formed a general collectivity of the congregation, which was maintained through formal recognition from local governments, the recruitment of resourceful volunteers, and leadership reproduction through annual conventions.

In Chapter Four, I examined the features of community imams. Throughout the chapter, I presented the ways a Muslim might become such an imam. The first point presented was that the relationship between an imam and the mosque community in the case of East Lansing was mutual: the community sought the leadership of an imam (prior to the hiring of an imam, volunteers played various critical roles), and the imam (and others) benefited from the community's social resources. The second point was that the imam, as an authority on religious matters, could represent both individual and institutional authority. Between these individual and institutional forms of authority, local Islamic authority could expand toward at least three other forms of authority. In the case of the East Lansing mosque, there was a collective authority that could be seen in the group of Darul Qur'an teachers; the semi-institutional authority that could be seen in the management of Sunday School; and the autonomous authority that could be viewed in the Greater Lansing Islamic School (GLIS), which had its own management. During my participant observation, I have worked in each of these three forms of authority, so I have experienced myself how the paths toward leadership are generally open for Muslim community members who want to play specific roles in serving their religious community. In conclusion, the imamhood authority is expansive, and every Muslim can become an imam at a certain level and place.

In Chapter Five, I described how rituals in the Center underwent gradual objectification, which resulted from combined factors consisting of the distinct climate of Michigan, the Center's leaders' efforts to improve services for the congregants, and city regulations. In my records, there were twelve improvisations carried out by the Center's leaders who arranged public rituals; these improvisations served to alleviate risks to the congregants' state of health and comfort while avoiding violating the rights of neighbors and city regulations. Since I was a community volunteer for four years, I was involved in such practices. The lesson learned from this experience is that the knowledge

about local situation will shape religious practices and norms (Geertz, 2008), which will prompt the community to select which parts of religious teachings may remain intact and which others must be suppressed. In addition to these two categories, some new routines have also emerged to complement or supplement more traditional practices.

Comparable to what I observed in Indonesia, the main purpose of such improvisations was to make sure the mosque adequately serves its local community. However, to guarantee that the main purpose is maintained, the control of the mosque operation tends to be controlled by the majority, which, in this case, is by the Sunni members of the community. And finally, to make sure that the religious practices in this community are in harmony with the host society, the Center adopts modern and contextualized interpretations of Islam. Indeed, the Islamic Society of Greater Lansing has been able to successfully navigate amid the at times tumultuous relations between Muslims and the others in America. These relations were up and down depending on the situation, from the friendly acceptance of the 1965 immigration policy, to the tense climate following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and to the state of shock following the 9/11 terror attack.

Further, Muslim activists in the city of Lansing have succeeded in establishing the Islamic Center as a new territory that provides for its fellow immigrants to preserve some parts of their inherited culture while trying to integrate toward full American citizenship. The programs operating within the Center have encouraged mosque congregants to respond to the high demands for more cooperation with the surrounding environment and communities with some adjustments in their traditions in order to adopt American values, including democratic principles. Likewise, the ways in which the Muslim community's leaders introduced their religion and gave respect to existing rules has led the host society and local government to recognize an Islamic authority in the area and include the Muslims' traditions as part of the American way of life.

To reflect on the observations that have been described in this thesis, the first phenomenon to keep in mind is the Islamic Center's establishment in East Lansing as an indication of the *reterritorialization* of the Islamic tradition. In other words, this is an establishment of a new location for the cultivation of Islamic culture. The main reason for this stipulation is the difference in natural conditions. The area of Lansing presented generally different features of nature from those of Muslim-majority nations, at least in terms of climate and day-to-day timing. Whereas Muslim scholars historically permitted Islamic prayers to take place in any clean area, colder climates necessitate an enclosed brick and mortar building complete with walls and a roof. The timing of Islamic prayers also varies and changes nearly every day.

Here I must also mention the support of or cooperation with other communities. Contrary to the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, Islamic movements emerged relatively recently in the United States, so the property required for Muslim communities was not to be acquired without support and cooperation from local churches and neighborhoods. Further, the role of non-Muslim government authorities over Islamic establishments is another determinant of reterritorialization. The US was already an established nation state when Muslims began to gather to create social groups in the form of organized movements. They basically did not have a share in the authorship of the Constitution and the American system of governance. So there were already many rules that Muslims had to follow in order to establish mosques and Islamic organizations.

The next reason to call it a reterritorialized Islam concerns the role of foreign sources of financial support in addition to local donors. Due to the complexities of building worship places and operating religious organizations, from the very beginning finances mattered. Whereas the Black Muslim movement found success in fundraising efforts and business networks, immigrant mosques

gained their initial support from foreign donors, without whom many Islamic centers established decades ago might never have been constructed. This process can be contrasted with the way Muslims established Islamic centers in Muslim-dominated countries, where the places of worship often had more humble beginnings before they eventually expanded.

Lastly, it is called a new reterritorialization of Islam because it followed a bottom-up pattern. In the history of Islam, the religion emerged from an extraordinary person, the Prophet Muhammad. His companions then spread and became teachers in different cities and established Muslim communities in wider regions. In America, Islamic movements seemed to grow more from good networks than from great teachers. The Black Muslim movement, for example, began from influential figures like Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad, but it was the networks of their disciples that allowed their teachings to become great religious movements. Immigrant Muslims generally came to United States with average knowledge of Islam. It was only after they gathered and created organizations that Islamic movements expanded and were able to hold annual nationally publicized events.

Since the emergence of Islamic authority is important to understanding the establishment of Islamic Center of East Lansing, I would like to conclude by outlining important characteristics of that authority in the context of reterritorialized Islam. First, authority is a perpetuation of service wherein different human situations are treated according to their type of complexities. Second, authority is dynamic, progressing through various stages of ups and downs. Third, authority requires that the community's interactions be held in an open public space, where its progress would have room to expand or shrink. Fourth, there is a goal for every existence of authority, namely, the intended service. Fifth, authority exists when there is acceptance—no matter how small—of the actions being rendered. Sixth, there is a name, or at least a symbol, for the service being realized. And

seventh, the declared name gains recognition from another authority existing beforehand. As such, based on the present study, authority could be defined as a dynamic perpetuation of public interactions that begins with an attempt of service that gains an acceptance, and a name that is sealed by an appropriate form of recognition. With this definition, the main characteristic of an authority is its perpetuation, and the other characteristics are the ones necessary to uphold the perpetuation itself. In other words, the emergence of an authority begins from an attempt to serve, and concludes with a recognition originating from another body of authority.

Building on this definition, it can be seen from the attitudes and actions of the mosque activists in the city that they had tried to ensure the existence of Islamic authority beyond their own existence in place and time. In other words, their efforts are a result of the so-called *objectification* of Islam. Following Eickelman and Piscatori, I understand the *objectification of Islam* as representing a way of rationalizing Islamic teachings that can be “seen as systems (*manhaj*) to be distinguished from non-religious ones.” With this understanding, the subjects or runners of an Islamic authority can work, produce and reproduce, repeat and change or manipulate parts of Islamic operations toward certain purposes. In this case, we can observe how the operators of Lansing’s Islamic authority worked on their center and the agendas of its organization to make what they perceived as Islamic services available not only during their time but also after they left the area. The agendas with which they concerned themselves included the mosque’s institutional products, such as constitutions and handbooks that presented visions, missions, and the execution of the programs and policies, all of which were supposedly aimed to serve the community better.

There is a shortcoming that I wish to address in a future study. Almost all the descriptions in this thesis have been sourced from the side of the leaders and the elders of the Islamic Society. If there is a plan for further observation, this thesis can be expanded by adding more voices from the

middle-level workers of the organization and the ordinary members of the congregation, which would include fathers, mothers, youths, and pupils. Further, additional fieldwork may be needed to collect the voices of outsiders, which would include members of local governments, the local college community, and the neighbors who live near the Center. By incorporating a considerable amount of information from the perspective of the host society, one can arrive at a deeper understanding of Islam in Lansing, and indeed, by extension, Islam in America.

In the end, neighborhood tranquility matters. Whatever the reasoning is, pragmatic considerations ultimately determine Islamic development. The new presence of a mosque and Muslim residents would impact the social economic situation of any given American neighborhood. And when one considers that in a Muslim-majority country, such as my own country of Indonesia, it is much easier to establish a mosque without having to deal with various property regulations. All of this is to say that the establishment of a mosque in East Lansing must be appreciated as a significant achievement.

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