

ABSTRACT

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

By

Mujiburohman Abul Abas

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.