

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.

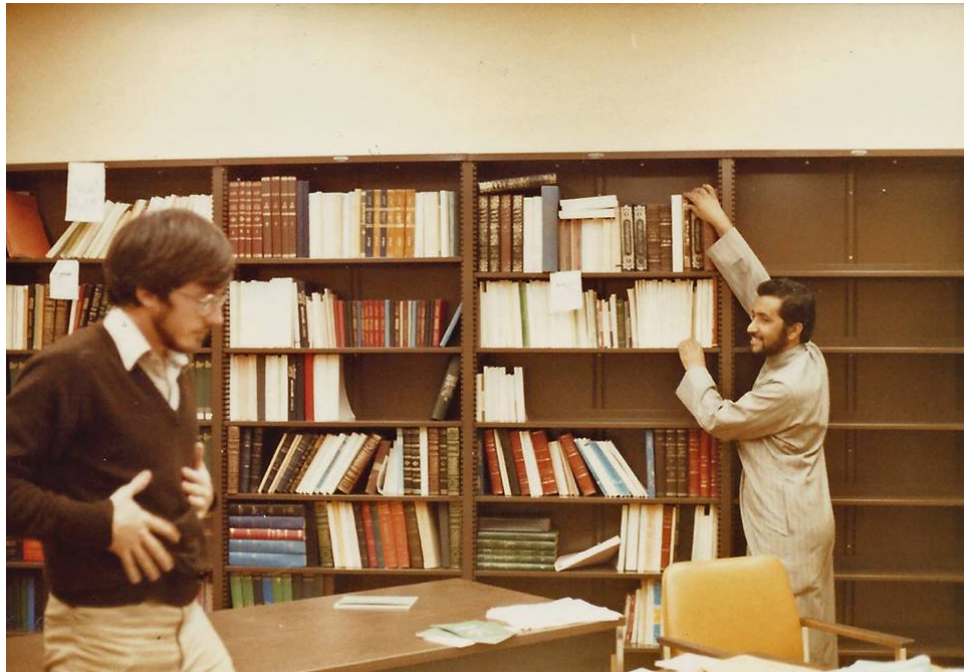


Figure 9. Photograph: Daniel Masters (left) in the mosque library. Facebook, ICEL, August 21, 2014.

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.

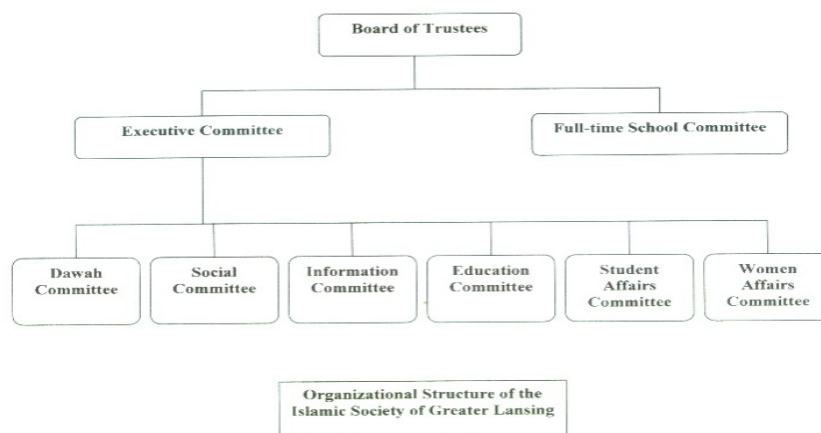


Figure 14. Chart: ISGL organizational structure (ISGL Handbook 1998)

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.