

**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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A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

Anthropology–Doctor of Philosophy

2018

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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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My ultimate gratitude goes to the community of the East Lansing mosque. The fact that I was able to persevere in my life and research activities for so many years demonstrates the people's full support of my presence. This work is dedicated to them. The next community that I must mention includes the families of Indonesian and Malaysian students. Their warmth and cheerful habits have provided me with endless energy to continue working despite all difficulties and challenges that have arisen during the course of my study. Next, I would like to offer thanks to the guidance committee for this doctoral research, since my lengthy period of study added to their burdens. Last, but not least, I have to express by deep appreciation to my wife and little daughters for their lasting patience and unconditional support during our arduous years living as foreigners in America.

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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 |