

CHAPTER 1

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

Studying Islam in the West

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Growing Popularity of Islamic Studies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ See www.iiit.org

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

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

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

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

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

Research Issues

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Theoretical Framework

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

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

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

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

¹⁰Riyad al-Saliheen by Abu Zakaria al-Nawawī (1233–1277) is a popular book used as one of the collections of the authentic Prophet Muhammad's sayings (*hadith*). The saying above is normally assigned to *hadith* no. 960 (on the Ethic of Traveling) found in most versions, including the translations in numerous Muslim languages, as well as digitized ones for online access and smartphone applications. A website of digitized books of Islamic traditions also is available. See: <https://sunnah.com/rivadussaliheen/8> or <https://bewley.virtualave.net/rivad6.html#travel> on March 27, 2017.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Research Location

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thesis Structure

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

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

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

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