

CHAPTER 4
EMBODIMENTS OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY:
PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

Expanding Forms of Religious Authority

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

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

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

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

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

Imam, a Personal Embodiment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Imam Mohammed Mabrouk



Figure 16. Photograph: Imam Mohammed Mabrouk delivering a sermon

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Imam Sohail Chaudhry

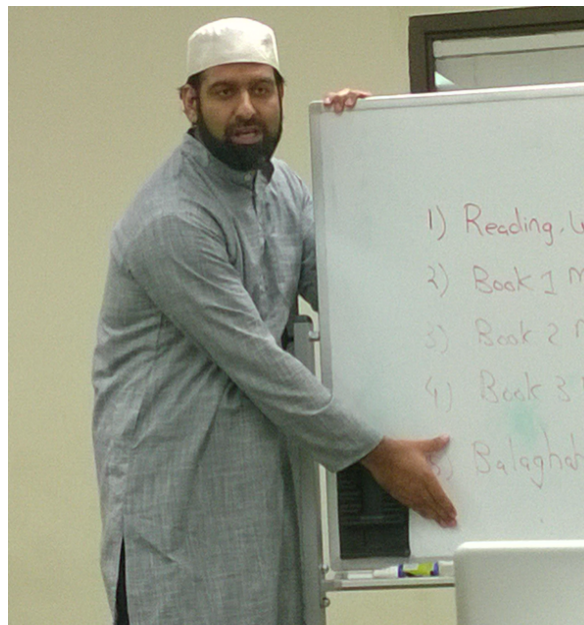


Figure 17. Photograph: Imam Sohail Chaudhry teaching an Arabic class

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Implicit Requirements

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

1. Male

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

2. Married

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

3. Limited acceptance of non-mainstream Sunni Muslims

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Continued Islamic training

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

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

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

Imams as Product and Part of *Habitus*

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

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

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

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

Authoritative Institutions of East Lansing Mosque

Darul Qur'an: multi-personnel embodiment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday School, semi-institutional embodiment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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