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"Here's What's Not Changing": Institutional Adaptations That Respond To A Crisis But Preserve the Core

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“HERE’S WHAT’S NOT CHANGING”: INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATIONS THAT RESPOND TO A CRISIS BUT PRESERVE THE CORE

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

"HERE'S WHAT'S NOT CHANGING": INSTITUTIONAL ADAPTATIONS THAT RESPOND TO A CRISIS BUT PRESERVE THE CORE

December 2023

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An enduring tension in the study of institutions is between the micro level of agents' activities that shape institutions and the macro level of institutions as enduring entities that tend to resist change. Institutions in crisis offer opportunities to look at urgent and adaptive changes. I study an Islamic organization that is representative of a religious institution, which has deep traditions and meaningfulness to its members. In a time of crisis, in the urban area in the United States where it is located, the organization is pressed by external parties, such as government, media, and leaders from other religions, to demonstrate its legitimacy and its appropriate responsiveness. There is also internal interest in making some changes. My research explores the question: What happens as individuals undertake 'daily actions' to both change and preserve features of an organization that is dealing with ongoing external pressures?

Through a series of three papers, I explore this question, locating the importance of studying faith-based organizations, tracking how external jolts prompt changes but within limits, and demonstrating how the theory of 'strategy as practice' offers a useful toolkit for observing activities: improvisations, leadership strategic moves, unexpected discontinuous change, and sequences of action and reaction from members. I draw upon three kinds of data to understand these everyday practices: participant observation and reflective journals; interviews (expert interviews, member interviews, and opportunistic interviews); and community documents (such as flipcharts generated in brainstorming sessions). I track how the organization makes some outward-facing changes, to signal membership in what the leadership construes to be the broad institutions of American democracy and American religious participation. At the same time, I track internal changes and the members' mix of enthusiasm and pushback regarding change, with the resulting statements about "here's what's not changing." Cycles of experimenting with new practices end up preserving the meaningful core of the organization. Understanding this simultaneity of openness to change and buffers against change gives a finer portrait of how tradition-based institutions do change—how and to what extent—in moments of crisis.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to American Islamic communities everywhere who struggle against stereotypical classification and prejudgments.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In The Name Of Allah, The Entirely Merciful, The Especially Merciful.

I would like to thank Allah (God) for Helping, Guiding, and Providing the resources I needed for completing my thesis. I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my late mother, Fathia Shakfah, may she rest in peace, for her aspiration and inspiration. Her unwavering dream of witnessing her daughter becoming a PhD holder and never for once giving it up, even when my application for a PhD program in my part of the world was rejected because of my age at the time (43 years), is the one great motivation, which kept me going no matter how many of life curveballs I had to manage. As such, a great 'thank you' is owed to the faculty and staff of OSC for accepting the application of an already seasoned scholar like me, giving me the chance to make my mother proud.

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The order in which I mention them is not meant to be in any order of differential significance.

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CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

This research examines how institutionalized practices change, despite being part of a broad institutional script that is meaningful to members, steeped in history and tradition, and unlikely to change. An enduring tension in the study of institutions is between the micro level of agents' activities that shape institutions and the macro level of institutions as enduring entities that tend to resist change. Macro scholars describe why change is unlikely. Micro scholars argue that people *do* make nonetheless make some change. Indeed, the pendulum swing in organization studies seems to be toward many and varied accounts of how agents pursue quite varied moves and propel changes. However, these accounts may then miss some of the broader obstacles to change, which still do exert force. To find a balance, my research operates in a middle space, where there are cherished practices that simply will not be changed, but some practices that can change—especially in the face of a crisis, and especially to protect the more cherished practices.

Institutions in crisis offer opportunities to look at urgent and adaptive changes. I study an Islamic organization that is representative of a religious institution, which has deep traditions and meaningfulness to its members. In a time of crisis, in the urban area in the United States where it is located, the organization is pressed by external parties, such as government, media, leaders from other religions, and protestors and opponents, to

demonstrate its legitimacy and its appropriate belonging in the community. While the pressure for change is mostly exerted from the outside, there is also some internal interest in making some changes, especially to keep the organization vibrant for younger generations.

My research explores the overarching question: In a faith-based organization, what happens as individuals undertake 'daily actions' to both change and preserve features that are designed to deal with ongoing external pressures? This dissertation emanates from being a practitioner observer and is introduced through a faithful ethnographer lens. It follows a three-paper multi-manuscript model where each paper can be read independently while they are connected to a common research question.

The first paper sets the stage by examining the importance of studying faith-based organizations. Most such studies have been of Christian organizations, so I add Islamic organizations, describing my own standpoint in doing this work.

The second paper examines how an external crisis can push a whole institutional field to make change, specifically how the American Islamic institution experienced pressure to respond after 9/11. This paper explores how organizations, operating at the intersection of competing logics, respond in practical ways to field level legitimation pressures and the effect of such responses on the institution as a whole. Caught between a need to preserve its own identifying logic and the societal demands to visibly recognize and accommodate other logics, an American Muslim organization operating in a post-9/11 environment presents an appropriate case arena for empirical analyses. I take a historic approach, triangulating across types of qualitative data: interviews of different stakeholders, content analysis of printed and online materials including media articles, and comparative evaluation of two time periods. My findings indicate that largely uncontested, transformative institutional work occurred as a

response to unrelenting and all-encompassing field pressure that necessitated some resolution long-standing tensions between religious and secular logics. By becoming more actively involved in the larger American social, political, and cultural way of life, the broader post-9/11 American Muslim institution is accommodating the demands of multiple societal logics in its endeavor to occupy a more acceptable position within the American religious scene. I observe how community members evaluate the religious validity of the newly institutionalized practices. They question the extent of the changes and how far they might be from the core values of the institution, balancing a mix of accepting and rejecting the changes and the practical necessity for them. While institutions are portrayed as rarely changing, external jolts are seen as prompts for transformation, and I contribute a detailed analysis of how such a process might play out to support and limit change.

The third paper then takes up the question of *how* such change might happen. My in-depth case study looks at change in real-time on the ground. Many studies of change come in retrospectively to track what might have happened after change has occurred. It was at once fortuitous and tragic that I was working at my research site as new waves of external crises prompted many attempts at change that I watched right as they unfolded. As my dissertation title suggests, I find what's changing, what's not changing, and the dynamic tensions between the two. I demonstrate how the theory of "strategy as practice" offers a useful toolkit for observing activities: improvisations, leadership strategic moves, unexpected discontinuous change, and sequences of action and reaction from members.

Across the three papers, I draw upon multiple kinds of qualitative data to understand these everyday practices: participant observation and reflective journals; interviews (expert interviews, member interviews, and opportunistic interviews); and community documents

(such as flipcharts generated in brainstorming sessions). I track how the organization makes some outward-facing changes, to signal membership in what the leadership construes to be the broad institutions of American democracy and American religious participation. At the same time, I track internal changes and the members' mix of enthusiasm and pushback regarding change, with the resulting statements about "here's what's not changing." Cycles of experimenting with new practices end up preserving the meaningful core of the organization.

Overall, the findings from this dissertation will gives a finer portrait of how tradition-based institutions do change—how and to what extent—in moments of crisis, by increasing our understanding of the simultaneity of openness to change and buffers against change. The different angles on my overarching research question contribute to the quest for a balanced view between the micro level of what actors on the ground can do and the macro level of forces that constrain and compel organizations.

Throughout the process, my various advisors counselled me to be aware of my own standpoint in doing this work. The resulting expanded discussion of being an ethnographer who is also in and of the faith generated the first paper on really understanding what a faith-based organization is and what it means to study one. I came into my doctoral studies with strong Islamic beliefs, and beliefs about the Islamic institution, but it was only through further study that I came to see defining characteristics of what I call the American Muslim institution in a distinctive and analytical way. I had to at once stand back and stand closer. The early part of my doctoral education was about putting aside normative statements and commitments to pursue the smoothly composed rigor of social science. I immediately took to institutional theory, because it was about normative commitments without being dismissed as normative. It provided the balance I needed to craft my own identity as a researcher. As the

work progressed, my advisors suggested I put more of my positionality back into the work, but now in a way that I was more fully able to do. The idea was not to make proclamations, but to give a more thoughtful assessment of how my values matter, where, why, and in what ways for interpreting data on an institution I care about. This use of my own standpoint was a slowly evolving experience, stitching together the normative and the descriptive to become vigorously and caringly descriptive about the normative. While I aim mainly to make a contribution to the "middle space" in theorizing about how institutions do change, balancing change and resistance to change, I also may be able in future writing to make a contribution to the balancing act of standing at once outside of and inside of the process of studying what we care about.

CHAPTER 2

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR STUDYING THEM AND THE VANTAGE OF THE FAITHFUL ETHNOGRAPHER

Introduction

Spiritually, religion, and faith persist as profoundly significant aspects for individuals, providing a guiding source of support in their lives. Despite broader trends indicating a decline in religious adherence and spirituality among the general population, religion and its heritage remain notably relevant to individuals and their everyday existence. In the United States, a substantial 76% of Americans express belief in some form of a higher being or God, attributing either absolute certainty or a strong sense of certainty to this belief (Pew Research Center, 2019). Furthermore, 46% of these individuals affirm that religion holds importance in shaping their lives. From this starting point, this paper explores two pathways: what it means to study faith-based organizations in the field of organization studies today from a more global and inclusive perspective, and what it means to do so as a "faithful ethnographer" who is an adherent to the religion being studied. These two facets can offer new directions that answer calls to consider faith-based organizations more seriously in the field of organization studies (Tracey et al., 2014).

Organization studies, both historically and recently, has advanced through research on organizations of many types: schools (Swidler, 1976), hospitals (Ruef & Scott, 1998),

government agencies (Selznick, 1957; Wilson, 1989), the military (Lievens et al., 2005), and churches (Plowman et al., 2007).

Research on corporations, non-profit organizations, and organizations from the perspective of employment and wages arose as the sociology of organizations moved into business schools, initially on a parallel track to work on the sociology of organizations and then in a more integrated manner (Scott, 2008a). Thus, there is a long and informative tradition of studying "faith-based organizations" (FBOs) in organization studies. Their unique forms and nature, particularly as highly meaningful in their belief systems and voluntary in the way they engage members, has contributed to organization studies. This paper opens by examining the kinds of questions and contributions that the FBO literature has addressed, from the individual level of engaging members to the organizational level of sustaining engagement to the institutional field level of worldwide faiths.

Then, I offer two critiques of this literature. First, even as FBO researchers note the special nature of organizations that are infused with meaning and beliefs, the FBO literature is actually fairly careful and quiet about the content of the beliefs themselves, including the belief systems of worshippers, the historic evolution or canonical contexts regarding beliefs and practices, and the organizational structures that permit people of faith to engage in meaningful worship. This silence allows the FBO literature to be a legitimate, respected, and rational vein of study, just as any organization would be studied. While that approach has some strengths and yields some insights that apply broadly in organization studies, it also is a rather strange and aloof stance for the study of faith-based organizations. I will argue that looking at the content of the faith—and how it is enacted by followers, through practices, and in organizational forms—is important for understanding FBOs more fully.

Second, I argue that the literature has a distinct Western orientation, with an often-implicit focus on Judeo-Christian FBOs, and therefore, the organizational places of worship of these faiths. In addition, as Christian, and often Judeo-Christian, faiths are legitimated in many Western systems, so the FBO literature focuses more on the legitimation of the faith-based organization to its followers (e.g., Gutierrez et al., 2010), with little need to focus on the legitimation of the faith itself to a broader population. Indeed, Christian institutions underlie many political, economic, and cultural institutions of Western societies, as Weber captured in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905/2002). This integration means that Christian institutions do not as often have to fight for the very rationale of their existence. By stepping outside of this Western view, I argue that we see a different situation when Muslim FBOs are brought into this field of study. Muslim organizations prevail outside of Western institutions. Furthermore, in dominant Western settings, they are questioned harshly, from the content of the beliefs to the values of followers to the very purposes of the entire existence of the institutional field of Islam. Thus, in the second part of my paper, I begin to outline how the study of FBOs will encounter new challenges by moving beyond the Western focus and by including Muslim FBOs, and by extension in future research, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or other FBOs.

Finally, I close this paper by considering the vantage of what I will call the "faithful ethnographer." Ethnographers in the field of organization studies have long considered the challenges for becoming a kind of insider to the organization being studied, whether from the beginning or through socialization and contact over time. Being an insider to a faith-based organization is a distinctive kind of issue, requiring a researcher to stand back from the faith

as a social scientist but stand close to the faith to do deep interpretive work about what might be meaningful for individuals in FBOs.

Review of Literature on Faith-Based Organizations

There is an extensive and growing literature on FBOs. Institutional theorists feature prominently in a 2014 special issue devoted to religion in the domain of research on the sociology of organizations. Religion is one of the major "big building block" institutions identified in the study of institutions and society (Alford & Friedland, 1991), including religion, democracy, capitalism, schooling, marriage, and family. Identity theorists have also looked at how identity is formed in FBOs and how religious identity is experienced across settings, particularly across these broad institutional domains. So, people who are operating at once within capitalism and within a religion might become interested in linking these identities, which gave rise to sessions on "spirituality at work" in the Academy of Management. Religion and schooling as well as religion and the state are sometimes seen as being in contestation (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013). The organizational challenge for FBOs, therefore, is often described as how they help individuals navigate the tensions between religious life and their secular lives in other domains. I will develop later the argument that this assumption of tension is a Western view.

A theoretical discussion of FBOs has to start with a definition of religion as an agreed upon anchor. Looking at religion from an institutional perspective, Canda and Furman (1999, as cited in Tirrito & Cascio, 2003) define religion as "an institutionalized pattern of belief, behaviors, and experiences, oriented towards spiritual concerns, and shared by a community and transmitted over time in tradition" (p. 37). The definition of an FBO, however, is not that straightforward; in fact, Sider and Unruh (2004) asserted, "no clear definition exists of what

it means to be faith-based" (p. 109). In addition, Tracey (2012) proclaims "management researchers have stubbornly refused to engage meaningfully with religion and religious forms of organization" (p. 88), disregarding its growing importance to the private and public domains of life in the twenty-first century. In a review of books and articles containing the term FBO from 1912 to 2013, Bielefeld and Cleveland (2013) found that in organization theory research, much of the discussion revolved around the difference between FBOs and their secular counterparts. The social-service oriented research, prompted by the welfare reform discussions and its proposals for government to support religious organizations that provide social services in the 1990s, centered around answering the question of how an organization would be considered an FBO for legal and tax purposes in the United States, according to some sort of a typology of religious characteristics (Sider & Unruh, 2004).

Defining what renders an organization religious or faith-based, especially in terms of empirical indicators, is a challenge (Ebaugh et al., 2006, p. 2264). They suggest empirical indicators that encompass various aspects such as "service religiosity" involving activities like praying with recipients and disseminating religious material; "staff religiosity" which may entail praying during staff meetings and demonstrating spiritual care to recipients; and "formal organizational religiosity," such as having a religious mission statement and displaying sacred imagery in public space. The crux of the issue expressed here lies in the difficulty of pinpointing the precise characteristics of a faith-based organization or understanding how faith functions within such entities. Consequently, much of the literature relies on categorizing an organization as faith-based primarily based on the organization's self-identification. Other scholars have added two more identifying markers, the organization

is formally incorporated and verified as religious through a government entity, and it has applied for IRS 501(c)3 tax-exempt status (Huston, 2019).

An operational definition of FBOs can be helpful. On a more unifying approach with organizational theory and drawing on Selznick's (1957) recognition of institutions as organizations "filled with value" (p. 17), Hinings and Raynard (2014) use Etzioni's (1961) classification of religious organization as "a belief-centered or meaning-based normative organization" to offer a definition of an FBO as an "organization which uses symbolic means of control and members must be highly committed to the inherent 'rightfulness' of the authority system with religious leaders entrusted with the tasks of interpreting, codifying, and integrating teaching earning them a very special place in the organization" (p.162). Authority in religious organizations is a "theological concept" that usually comes from the "principle of scripture and on the basis of divine guidance" (Nelson & Hiller, 1981, as cited in Hinings & Raynard, 2014, p. 169). Nevertheless, with all the theorizing about the religious organization, management theorists managed to sidetrack the issue of fully developing a general theory of FBOs (Tracey et al., 2014).

Scholars from different research strands have endeavored to explore faith-based organizations through various lenses, including examining the inherent nature and significance of faith within these organizations, understanding their missions, scrutinizing the methodologies employed in studying them, and categorizing them based on organizational theories. However, it is important to note that these perspectives represent a minority within the spectrum of existing research on faith-based organizations. In a 2014 special issue of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* on religion and organizations, social science researchers tackled the "unpopular" task of studying religious organization (Tracy et al.,

2014). Management scholars used the church-sect theory to offer a definition of FBO based on organizational form (which I will argue is Western based and does not map to any similar notion of organizational form for Islam or Sikh religions). For example, research on organizational form, structure, and religious organization stated that, because the church organizational forms are intimately connected to the theological beliefs—and in particular to the way the sacred is conceptualized and how that strongly impacts the system of church authority—the church-sect forms will vary drastically (Hinings & Raynard, 2014). Churches are bureaucratic and hierarchical with specialists at the helm, in charge of the development of rituals and dogmatic statements of belief or mission statements (Washington et al., 2014). Sects, on the other hand, are defined by heavy reliance on charisma and informality that helps them in retaining some degree of spontaneity and flattery in their organizational forms and governance (Hinings & Raynard, 2014).

Furthermore, there has been limited progress in scholarly research aimed at comprehensively describing a faith-based organization at the micro-organizational level. Existing research has primarily centered on the religiousness of individuals engaged within the organization, with a focus on the micro-organizational level. Despite studies investigating individual religious behaviors at this level, scholars have largely overlooked delving into the internal mechanisms and management processes within these organizations (Huston, 2019). This aspect remains largely unexplored within the current body of scholarly work.

In the realm of faith-based organization, there is an ongoing exploration into the various tensions, contradictions, oppositions, and paradoxes present within these entities. Torry (2017) emphasizes the significance of probing into the tensions experienced by any faith-based organization, suggesting that understanding these tensions is crucial (p. 119).

Smith and Lewis (2011) echo this sentiment by highlighting the importance of describing organizational phenomena by investigating the nature of tensions within these organizations and how they are managed (p. 397). This emphasis underscores the ongoing quest in research to unravel and comprehend the complexities inherent in faith-based organizations, particularly regarding the management of tension within these contexts (Huston, 2019).

Overall, utilizing organizational management theory to study faith-based organizations offers an opportunity to extend and enhance existing organizational theories and management frameworks. By moving past the basic description of nonprofits and embracing theoretical applications (Blank et al., 2006; Brooks, 2005), a deeper understanding of faith-based organization emerges, facilitating their development and potential testing of management models. A greater degree of professionalization has been adopted by faith-based organization in their management practices, making the tools from organization studies relevant. Not only can research expand understanding about FBOs, but insights from FBOs can expand thinking about organizational theories and concepts. Doing so will build upon two levels of analysis, individual and institutional.

Individual-Level Issues

With meaning being a defining element of FBOs, it makes sense to start at the individual level. That does not mean taking strictly a micro focus. Individual level dynamics can be the mechanisms for understanding how religions more broadly as institutions are perpetuated and sometimes adapted. Two issues at the individual level that are relevant for organization studies have received particular attention: commitment and identity.

Commitment

Because FBOs are voluntary organizations, they are fruitful places to understand commitment, both why it is easier to leave and why it is more difficult to leave. In fact, Wald (1987, as cited in Putnam, 2000) asserts that "religious ideals are potentially powerful source of commitment and motivations" (p. 67). In a study about the apostolic visitation of U.S women religious and how it became "productive resistance," the emphasis on lifelong membership and commitment, whether for those in religious roles, staff, volunteers, worshipers, or attendees, was the defining feature for an FBO and propelled individual emotional responses (Giorgi et al., 2014). This type of affiliation is based on the idea of a "calling," also central to Weber's (1905/2002) classic study, and the argument is that a calling reflects a deeper commitment to institutional membership than one might observe in other institutions.

On the one hand, individuals do not rely on FBOs for a paycheck, so they might be more easily able to exit. An organization that does not have incentives like pay has to work harder to keep individuals committed to the organization. Ideas about motivation and commitment in the workplace tend to focus on material rewards. There is a rich stream of research on how material rewards are not sufficient, which argues that meaningfulness is an important part of connecting individuals to their workplace. Thus, on the other hand, even though FBOs are voluntary organizations, individuals are not lightly connected to them nor able to exit easily. The attachment runs quite deep, such that individuals may turn to various cognitive strategies to align themselves with their organization, even when aspects of it may surprise or disappoint them (Gutierrez et al., 2010), which leads to the concept of identity. It is simply too valuable and too necessary to retain the commitment and attachment.

Identity

Research on identity has often turned to FBOs to understand how identity is shaped and experienced:

> At its core, the literature on identity focuses on how individuals and groups of various kinds answer two fundamental questions: "who am I" and "who are we." Both of these questions are concerned intimately with religious beliefs and the membership of religious organization. (Tracy et al., 2014)

In particular, FBOs often carry cultural and ethnic traditions at the meso level of the institution of religion (Tirrito & Cascio, 2003). Identity formation is a culturally embedded process facilitated by the construction and internalization of self-defining life stories which serve to reinforce, sustain, and justify a person's commitments and aspirations. For many adults, these commitments, decisions, and investments both define and subsume their organizational lives and also compel them to resolve any contradictions between their secular and faithful lives (DeJordy et al., 2014). So, if we look at organization as institutions as Selznick conceptualized them, with values and meaning at the heart (Washington et al., 2014), it becomes increasingly interesting to understand how individuals persist in their attachment to FBOs as societies change. The research on the maintenance of identity examines how individuals in FBOs retain their attachment during personal crises of faith as well as institutional crises in the FBO (Gutierrez et al., 2010), which leads to the institutional or field level.

Institutional-Level Issues

Although little research has been done using an institutional lens to examine religious organizations, with a few exceptions (Washington et al., 2014), institutional theorists

continue to regard religious organizations as one of the main institutions of societies (Thornton et al., 2012). They build upon Scott et al. (1991), who placed churches in their two-dimensional typology (technical environment/institutional environment) at the quadrant of strong institutional pressures and weak technical requirements. (I will argue later that this placement does not well characterize American Muslim organizations after the September 11, 2001, or "9/11" crisis.). The pastor is portrayed as an institutional leader (Washington et al., 2014). Change, institutional resistance, and the centrality of power and resistance in the dynamics of religious organization also were part of the institutional research on religious organizations (Giorgi et al., 2014). Such change often comes about as members grapple with multiple institutional logics.

Field and Institutional Logics

At the field level, theorists have been interested in religion as one of the major institutions or institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and FBOs as elements of mature fields that persist across challenges. From there, interest developed in how major and enduring institutions are sustained when faced with crises. Friedland and Alford (1991, as cited in Peifer, 2014) define institutional logic as "supra-organizational patterns of activity through which humans conduct their material life in time and space, and symbolic systems through which they categorize that activity and infuse it with meaning" (p. 341). Institutional theorists consider religion among the logics that may play out with implications for practices. In a study by Peifer (2014) about institutional complexity, in which he analyzed religious mutual funds, he identified how a religious logic is "revolving around practices (frequently symbolic in nature) and beliefs that are oriented toward a supreme being and mediated by institutional religious groups" (p. 347) and studied its effects on individuals and

organizations. Such studies consider how different kinds of religious organizations are able to resolve any tensions amidst the complexity.

When studying the major institutional building blocks of a society, theorists tend to focus on how these institutions coalesce in a sustainable way. For example, democracy and schooling go together in advanced Western societies as the mechanism for creating an educated citizenry. Religion, in contrast, is often posed as existing in tension with major institutions like the state and public schooling. The separation of church and state is highly valued in many Western cultures. That separation allows religion to persist in a relatively autonomous way. However, the central tendency toward persistence is interrupted when there are crises.

Persistence and Crises

From a field level, churches and religions are remarkable in how long they endure historically and how widely they are connected and enduring across geography. Maintaining religious identity in the face of powerful secularizing forces is not a new concern, and it is one that most FBOs face in one way or the other. Several characteristics have been found to help FBOs maintain their religious identity, such as having a strong mission, regular contact between coreligionists, expression of religion through daily activities, and being flexible and adaptable (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013). The last part is the one that could lead to unwanted results if that flexibility and adaptation is taken too far afield from enduring core beliefs. For example, a 2013 Pew survey of the American Jewish population found that within all three denominational movements (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform), most of the switching was in the direction of less traditional Judaism, raising concerns from some scholars about institutional perseverance. In addition, only 19% of the population say that “observing Jewish

Law (halakha) is essential to what being Jewish means to them," while the majority of those surveyed say "a person can be Jewish even if that person does not believe in God" (Pew, 2013). The tensions between how individuals sustain religious identity and how the institution persists with meaningfulness intact begin to appear.

Practices at the organizational level interpolate between the individual and the field and can mediate long-term survival and response to crises (Scott & Davis, 2015). I am most interested in the organization level, and how it operates between the level of individual dynamics like commitment and identity and broad institutional logics. At the organization level, FBOs are instructive for a multitude of organizational issues. For example, as Creed and colleagues (2014) considered the basis for agency in organization across religious and nonreligious domains, they found that "one way in which religion as a macro-order is pulled down and becomes imbricated within organizations and the people inside them is through redemptive self-narratives that enable generative agency" (p.114). For personal crises of faith and identity, these self-narratives will suffice to restore alignment and the commitment and identity discussed above. However, where there is a legitimation crisis regarding the entire institutional field, members must respond both more collectively and through more systematic organizational level responses. In my empirical research on FBOs, I examine three classic dilemmas of organizing: leadership selection, governance, and participation, and stewarding of the next generation. However, I argue that these strategies can only be understood when embedded in the broader context, in my case, the American Muslim institution.

The "American Muslim" Institution

My goal in adding the Islamic religion to the study of FBOs is not simply to urge a more inclusive and global perspective. Rather, I am interested in what is distinctive about the American Islamic institution that makes it a worthy subject of study to push the boundaries and reveal new mechanisms for institutional theory. Therefore, in this section I first describe the practices and organizational form (mosque) of Islam, moving toward the somewhat more bounded space of what I call the "American Muslim" institution. In the next section, I offer critiques in terms of how these practices and forms from Islam do not fit within the confines of current approaches to FBOs and offer some new directions.

Practices

Islam as a lived institution is a very precise kind of an institution (Islamic practices, Islamic dress, Islamic food, Islamic finances, Islamic code of conduct, etc.), hence practicing Muslims tend to be easily identified in any society they may live in. The intuitional scripts are not agreed upon scripts by institutional actors, instead they come from what is recognized by those actors as divine and therefore, these scripts are sacred and not negotiable. As such, this institution allows no modifications to the core values nor to the manifestation of faith. In fact, there is a great fusion of value with the practice. For example, although practicing Muslims will be very vigilant about performing the five daily prayers on time and in accordance with a set of precise, direction, dress code, motions, Quranic passages, and forms, they know that if those prayers do not stop them from saying and doing evil things in their daily interactions with others, then the prayers will not be accepted by Allah. In addition, if their prayers are not done purely for Allah's sake, then their prayers are not accepted by Allah either. So, although the act of prayer is very individualistic, it is at the same time very

formalized in form, intent, and expected results. Hence, Islam as an institution is very restrictive both as a set of practices, but also in the "praxis" of engaging in action in a reflexive and aware way.

Muslims are found in all corners of the globe, not just in Muslim countries, and as such have different cultures, aspirations, orientations, and certainly different interpretations of their faith. However, their public expression of their faith can be very similar at the individual or organizational level. Members of the faith may individually choose to be as close to or as far from the authentic expression of the faith as they like to be, but this is not a position accepted for publicly recognized Islamic institutions.

For the Muslims living in their diaspora to be able to pass the religion and its traditions to the next generation, they had to hold on to their faith and its culture, being as authentic as possible. The host countries were often welcoming. In an article titled "Who Defines Islam?" the author reiterates the sentiment that "there is a local and autonomous Muslim identity marker in the West that favors a return to tradition and authenticity" (Belhaj, 2023, p. 4). In fact, the Muslims were often able to live and practice their faith, away from the prying eye of governments, wherever they landed in the West, benefiting from the religious tolerance of their adopted countries.

In its Western location, this lived institution, while it is spiritual, is also political and racial, in the sense that followers are generally categorized as anti-Western, Middle Eastern/Far Eastern foreigners. In an article written to research the institutionalization of Islamic studies as a field, the authors emphasize this linkage of religion to political spaces and expectations: "Clearly based on the perception of Muslims being the significant 'other,' national policies have moved towards a 'culturalization of citizenship' in which the aim is to

regulate Islamic practices and to mold outlooks, institutional settings and legal arrangements into the format of the nation state" (Aghdassi & Hughes, 2023, p. 2). The place of Muslims living in the United States came under scrutiny after the tragedy of 9/11, calling into question issues across the levels of individuals (their identity and place in society) and institutions (how mosques and their operations come to be questioned and understood in their wider context). The American Muslim institution appears to be a prime site for organization research, particularly to address issues of both societal relevance and emerging theoretical interest, such as institutional change, organizational professionalization, political mobilization, racialization of immigrants, and more.

Organizational Form: The Mosque

The mosque is an Islamic gathering place for worship that has existed in Islam since its beginning. The first act of Prophet Muhammad in Madinah was to establish a mosque. It served as the central space for followers to learn about their religion and to enact congregational activities. There is a long history of mosques in the Muslim countries that depict different purposes for mosques at different points in time, from just a place for congregational prayers to a starting point of what are regarded by Muslims as the greatest universities in the Islamic world; for example, Alzaitonah University in Tunisia was established in 737 AD (the oldest university in the world according to an Oxford University archive).

The traditional mosque in classical Islamic civilization and within the contemporary Muslim world differ in their governing structures. Mosques have historically served as places of worship, yet those in attendance typically had no influence in the mosque's governance. Instead, these mosques are typically overseen by governmental authorities, affluent

benefactors, or endowed foundations. The American mosque stands as the cornerstone in catering to the needs of American Muslims (Bagby, 2018). In contrast to institutions in the Muslim world, the mosque plays an exceptionally unique and vital role for Muslims residing in the United States. It addresses the void in the United States resulting from the absence of numerous supporting Islamic institutions found in Muslim-majority countries. The American mosque serves as a hub for spiritual worship, Islamic education, social interaction within the Muslim community, charitable assistance for the needy, counseling and arbitration, and the presentation of Islam to non-Muslims. Additionally, it engages in interfaith dialogue with other religions, provides instruction on political awareness, delivers medical health services through the establishment of free clinics, and fosters community engagement by creating youth clubs and community centers to celebrate various festivals.

As such, the mosque stands as the permanent Islamic institution in America, with the pinnacle figure being the ideal imam or mosque spiritual leader. I place a meaningful boundary around what I call the "American Muslim" institution, where there may be some participation by members in mosque governance, and where leaders of a mosque may understand themselves to be connected to some institutional idea of democracy. Unfortunately, there exists a considerable misunderstanding or lack of information regarding mosques particularly concerning its role for the American Muslim community. This attitude, and even suspiciousness, became evident in the extensive debate that unfolded nationwide following the proposal to construct a mosque near Ground Zero (a 9/11 memorial) in New York, underscoring prevalent misconceptions about the role and function of a mosques in the American context. Contemporary religious organizations are more likely to be examined for how they stand off to the side vis-à-vis institutions like the market, education, or polity, but I

note here that there is a case of a religious organization being drawn into visible and contested terrain, which opens up new avenues for approaching and studying FBOs. There is no other place than the mosque where the institution of Islam is lived and practiced in its most visible collective form, rendering it a suitable place for studying the Islamic institution.

Critiques and New Directions for the Literature

The remainder of this paper has the purpose of considering how to study this broader context and institution, discussed above, by drawing upon and also extending the insights of research on FBOs.

Limits to Being Agnostic About Content

It appears to be of value to Western social science not to insert the content of religious values and ideas into education and research. The classic citation in the sociology of religion is to Durkheim's (1912/2008) *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. He argues that the particulars of religious beliefs are not so important as the forms of how people worship, regulate fellow worshippers, and connect to their religion. His work launched a functionalist approach to religion. The point is that a religion binds people together, reduces loneliness and anomie, and creates mechanisms for people to discipline each other into good behavior so that society can function. Any religion will do.

Academics in the social sciences, following the Western Enlightenment, are reluctant to engage in analyses of religion per se, because they argue that it would not be rigorous and neutral and scientific. However, it is difficult to study values without some focus on the content and meaningfulness of those values. In addition, the separation of values and science is itself a Western notion. From this standpoint, I will propose an alternative perspective.

Examining Western Assumptions

The examples in the FBO literature are predominantly Christian. According to Hinings and Raynard (2014), "there is a paucity of organizational research conducted outside Western Christianity" and more than that, the existing research with "its root in early Christian theology sometimes makes it inhospitable to other faiths" and gives it "a tendency to reduce every facet of society to crass organizational terms" (p. 181). Indeed, institutional theory and the study of individual lives in societal context tend to explain the effect of the rationalization of nature and society, taking a Western view that "has rendered religious belief systems outside the posture of proper national actor-hood" (Jepperson, as cited in Creed et al., 2014). After reviewing 889 books and peered-reviewed articles dating back to 1912 about FBOs, Bielefeld and Cleveland (2013) found that the specifically Protestant Christian genesis of research on FBOs clouds its applicability to other religions (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013).

An Alternative Approach

My alternative approach is a provocative one. In this section, I am beginning to form an argument about studying Islamic FBOs and how that might be unlike studying just any FBO. Moving away from a Western focus involves taking the content of values seriously. It requires not assuming tensions among domains of religious and other identities (or perhaps examining how these tensions are differently understood and navigated), because as explained above, Islam offers a whole way of life. It also requires looking at how FBOs exist not on the sidelines of other institutions but quite in the center of political life when actively under attack in the media and under harsh public scrutiny. While separation of church and state as a principle has actually been fraught and often blurred in Western history, the general Western approach is that the church is left alone on the sidelines. However, for Islamic FBOs,

the current cultural and political climate is quite hostile. Western suspicion about Islamic FBOs creates a new set of challenges, and for organization studies, a case for uncovering new dynamics of how organizations operate under threat and crisis.

Working Across Levels

In this section, I revisit the linked individual, organizational, and field levels to consider how they might be viewed differently through an alternative lens. Specifically, I consider FBOs where identities are integrated for members, organizations are not historically the focal mediator between the individual and the faith, and where an institution must respond to crises.

The study of how individuals connect both to the FBO and to other institutions of their everyday lives might look different in focusing on Islamic FBOs. Places of worship per se have not figured largely in the Islamic faith, in the way that churches or synagogues play a role in the Judeo-Christian domain. Worship has historically been as much personal and individualistic as collective. People worshipping in the same place are worshipping simultaneously, but not collectively, in their individual connection to their faith. Individuals can stop and answer the call to prayer in many settings, not specifically in a mosque.

The role of FBOs as mediators between religious and secular life has simply not existed. This role for churches—as places where people express faith but also try to resolve the inevitable tensions between faith and modern life—has not been assumed in the Islamic faith. In fact, the very notion of tensions has not been assumed. As discussed above, that is a Western imposition, mainly to resolve (without quite coming out and saying it) the "irrationality" of religious beliefs and the rational nature of political and societal life that is considered "enlightened." To the extent that tensions must be navigated, particularly in the

American Muslim institution, those are externally imposed by a hostile environment, not endogenous to the experience and practice of a religious life.

The idea of Islamic FBOs is itself new, and thus, the idea of a linked and mutually aware field of Islamic FBOs is also new. Studying the emergence of this field can be quite interesting and offers a contrast to studies of Christian churches whose field level connections (e.g., the linked religious and secular sense of "Catholic" and "catholic") are taken for granted as a defining feature.

Islamic institutions in the United States are central to the practicing members of the American Muslim community, and at the same time, they occupy a peripheral position within the world-wide Islamic religion. Such a duality of position offers the American Muslim institution two advantages. First, it gives it freedom and time to evolve to better fit its local conditions. Second, it can end up serving as an example of the kind of changes in practices that proved religiously acceptable to a community in the diaspora, which though this community remains small, is well known for their authentic devotion. Since the Islamic institution in its very essence is a practice-based institution governed by a set of rules, legitimized only by a clear reference to the Quran and Sunnah, with no hierarchal governing structure, it places the practices and the practitioners at the very heart of institutional change.

How Islamic FBOs arise and appear at the field level is thus a new area for study. In an emerging research area under the umbrella of "Islam in the Public Square," a variety of researchers are examining new ways in which the American Muslim set of FBOs may participate in faith-based dialogues and cross-institutional links, to help their members connect to U.S. institutions. From an interesting new angle, they are tracking how the American Muslim institution is also beginning to take on the philanthropic role that churches

have long held in the United States. That role has a long history as a way to patch social service gaps that government did not fill. In contrast, in the countries where Islam arose, governments were providers of social services and mosques did not play that role.

For so long, American Muslims and their Islamic institution have been omitted from the American public square discourse and consideration. A commonly cited example of such exclusion is the remarks by U.S. President Jimmy Carter on November 17, 1979, during the American hostage crisis in Iran. In these remarks, he omitted American Muslims from his special prayers request for the hostages, by not naming mosques:

> We join with people of all faiths throughout the world who adhere to fundamental principles of human rights and international law. We are united with them in seeking an end to acts of terrorism against innocent people. On Thanksgiving Day and during the holiday weekend, I ask all Americans to make a special prayer at churches and synagogues and places of public meeting.

According to Mirzaei (2022), in President Carter's statement, there is a noticeable exclusion of Muslims and mosques from two significant categories. First, Muslims are omitted from the collective of individuals from various global religions who are portrayed as unified in their commitment "to fundamental principles of human rights and international law." Second, concerning the participation in the president's nationwide prayer for the hostages in Iran, the designated places for American to offer prayers specifically mention "churches and synagogues," not including mosques. That exclusion was noticed by American Muslims. Such exclusion implies that only within "churches and synagogues" are Americans encouraged to pray for the release of the hostages, disregarding the inclusion of mosques. Consequently, Muslims are portrayed as collectively excluded from both civilized society

and the group of patriotic Americans who should and would show support for their countrymen in distress.

The horrific events of 9/11 and their leading to subsequent attacks on American Muslims and their institutions have contributed to an increased need to include this population in future scholarly work that aims to enrich the theoretical and empirical knowledge of institutions in crisis. In addition, as a side effect, such inclusion can foster understanding between a still young evolving American Muslim institution and the American society in which it is embedded, seeking to learn from and contribute to its context.

The project of doing research to raise awareness of an excluded group might be more likely to be undertaken by a member of that group. That sense of belonging and commitment to the religion being studied gives motivation to the work but can also pose challenges. Such a project has meaning and is guided by values but needs to be undertaken with a measured stance if it is to be regarded seriously and make a difference. That standpoint is what I consider next.

The Faithful Ethnographer

In the first half of the 20th century, researchers' inclination to explore unfamiliar territories often positioned them as outsiders, resulting in issues related to access, intrusiveness, and rapport with the research community (Mercer, 2007). Griffith (1998) differentiated between insiders as individuals possessing a lived familiarity with the researched group and outsiders who lacked intimate knowledge before entering the group. However, a shift occurred in the latter half of the 20th century, where researchers began systematically studying familiar aspects encompassing their culture, gender, religion, and ethnic backgrounds (Hockey, 1993). This approach emphasized the notion that researchers

sharing similar values with participants held privileged access to certain knowledge (Merton, 1972).

While being an insider might seem to ease the pathway to establishing trust and rapport, particularly when sharing familiarities, there could nonetheless be barriers to accessing participants for the purpose of research. Considering the geopolitical climate was a crucial factor, as recent years saw Muslim communities labeled as suspect (Busher et al., 2019; Ragazzi, 2016). This environment led to heightened suspicion, hindering investigations concerning Muslims in the United States. Research to question stereotypes and myths was all the more needed with the rise of Islamophobia, but that same rise meant research became difficult. Even who might be regarded as an insider could be questioned. Therefore, for me, my visibly authentic insider identity, being an Arabic speaking female who was already a community member, played a pivotal role in gaining access, building trust, and overcoming suspicion.

This insider perspective could allow me to address gaps in the literature on FBOs by offering a nuanced view of the increasingly complex debates surroundings mosques, their members, and their legitimate standing in a community. My own identity incorporated shared religious, social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and theological values between me as a researcher and the participants in a research project. Furthermore, as a practicing Muslim I had a much deeper comprehension of the participants' complex values. This standpoint could enrich the research, contribute to in-depth data gathering, and offer some original insights. At the same time, there were risks that my interpretations would tend toward explaining or even defending the institution and might miss uncomfortable moments or tensions. What I found helpful was to embrace a mix of an insider identity and an outsider identity, as an insider to

the institution but an outsider in terms of being trained in the U.S. social sciences to keep a certain skeptical distance.

Acknowledging the insider/outsider dynamic as a continuum rather than a dichotomy (McNess et al., 2016), I positioned myself in relation to the participants. Recognizing similarities while acknowledging differences was crucial. I straddled roles as both an insider and outsider (Miller & Glassner, 1997). Despite sharing religion, language, and some educational background with many participants, differences in culture, age, experiences, class, and status were also apparent. Reflexivity was pivotal, allowing me to contemplate these differences and their influence during the study. I acknowledge that my attitudes, values, and worldview inevitably can shape the interpretation of participant discourse (Temple, 1997), an aspect often beneficial as a representative of the community but also one that requires continuous inquiry and rereading of my interpretations. Familiarity with the participant's world aided in understanding cultural new nuances (Bhopal, 2000) and was integral to making sense of my personal world through the process of engagement and interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

There are difficulties attached to the endeavor of the faithful ethnographer. "The religious and academic lines between outsiders and insiders are still difficult to cross. As a side effect, primary sources are approached less and less with curiosity and passion" (Belhaj, 2023, p 10). While many religions aim to answer big questions for their followers, research requires remaining in a questioning stance and not readily accepting answers. Indeed, the word "faithful" is a bit of a play on words. It is incumbent upon the social science researcher to give a "faithful" rendering of what they discover in the world they are entering (whatever they see and however they feel about it) and doing that while also being a "faithful" member

who has already entered that world is at once enriching and challenging. Interestingly, many writers on Christian FBOs are likely to have Christian backgrounds, but the same legitimation pressures—to own their stance and its impact on their work—have not generally been applied to them. Thus, in another way, studying Islam with awareness of the praxis of being a faithful ethnographer—somewhat of an imposed necessity required for the seemingly more provocative aspects of my project—becomes its own contribution to how to do research on FBOs.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have reviewed the history and rationale for studying FBOs in organization studies. I examined some of the insights—particularly about commitment and identity at the individual level—that arise in studying voluntary and meaning-filled organizations. I explained the American Muslim institution and how it offered a case for studying institution level issues about persistence and change. I also offered critiques of the FBO research tradition, particularly its anchors in Western assumptions and its unexamined starting point that organizations are focal to link the individual and the faith. I begin to form an alternative approach to the study of organizations, informed by the case of the American Muslim institution, with its relatively greater comfort in acknowledging that religion is at the heart of (not in tension with) individuals' lives in society and also its emerging organizational forms in response to societal pressures. As with studies of FBOs in the past, this new approach to FBOs may yield insights more broadly for organization studies, perhaps most notably at the organization and field levels, to understand the role of emerging organizational forms and practices in how institutions persist, adapt, and respond to crises.

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CHAPTER 3

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION IN RESPONSE TO FIELD PRESSURE: THE AMERICAN MUSLIM INSTITUTION POST 9/11

Introduction

Institutions have both a structural dimension, including formal and informal rules and systems, and an ideational dimension, including normative and cognitive schemes (Djelic & Quack, 2008). Although institutions are hailed for their ability to resist change, a field level pressure questioning the alignment of a particular institution with societal expectations might force the recognition of the need for extensive institutional change. For a far-reaching change to materialize in an institution, the structural as well as the ideational dimensions will have to be targeted by the change efforts leading to what scholars call "institutional transformation" (Bertels et al., 2014). Once the need for a transformational change has been accepted and pursued by the institution, a process to profoundly change the institution would have to start. According to Parigi (2014), institutional transformation is "the result of incremental strategies that mobilize insiders and outsiders" (p. 374). Through the utilization of sense making, to the inside audience, and sense giving, to the outside audience, change aiming strategic actions would gain the participation of the insiders and the support of the outsiders needed to succeed. This conceptualization of institutional change as a process moves it from being a rare event to being a lengthy, ongoing one. In addition to sense making and sense

giving, this process could involve boundary blurring and or boundary building, or a negotiated piecemeal process (Schneiberg & Lounsbury 2008).

In the context of fields characterized by multiple and conflicting logics, like those that modern places of worship inhabit (Bertels et al., 2014), examining such an instance of institutional transformation becomes particularly relevant as an ongoing, ever-present process (Zilber, 2013). In addition, considering the holiness and centrality of religious logics to religious institutions, a field level that triggered a push to change the entrenched institutional practices to accommodate the demands of other societal logics would be expected to face fierce resistance from multiple stakeholders. Some competing logics can be shifted over time or hybridized, such as how market logics and creativity logics both imbue the institution of publishing, though shifting in their predominance over time (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). However, religious logics often have a sacred core that does not admit well to hybridization, change, or adaptation in combination with other logics. There are notable tensions, which makes the study of the contested institutional transformation process all the more protracted and visible. Observation of follower responses to colliding logics can uncover how this process might work and add to our understanding of the broad notion of jolts prompting transformation.

The focus of this paper is to understand how and to what degree social institutions operating under the influence of multiple societal logics, with one of them being a dominant logic treasured at the institution's core, can pursue an institutional change path when the need arises. Religious institutions are of special interest, because they have logics that are not negotiable and not readily or easily resolved by making hybrids with other logics. However, while religious institutions' distinct organizational principles are a strong influential feature

of the transformation issue that I study, the general issue can still apply across multiple types of institutions. My research question of interest is: How does an institution with a strong core logic respond to multiple competing logics at a time of strong external pressure? One of the main contributions of this paper is to enrich the theoretical and empirical understanding of the processes of institutional change in the field of religious organizations. This approach can guide research inquiries concerning "forced" institutional navigation of pluralistic institutional contexts brought on by some form of "jolt" to previously established institutional equilibriums. Below, I summarize my case study area, and before further exploration of this area of research, I offer some needed justification for the analytical emphasis on the religious organization.

Using case study methodology and employing the lens of institutional theory to analyze the findings, I explore the case of the post-9/11 American Muslim institution to determine the effect of field pressure on religious institutions characterized by the presence of multiple contradictory and sometimes conflicting societal logics. Societal logics such as democratic governance and transparency in the political arena, particularly valued in the American context in which the American Muslim institution is navigating, are among those that become newly salient.

I start with an in-depth look at the recent history of the American Muslim institution and the American mosque as its main organizational form to establish the "taken-for-grantedness" baseline that is a defining characteristic of an institution. Then I take a look at post-9/11 field pressure and its various sources. Following that, I offer details from the study of one of its young yet prominent organizations, which I shall refer to by the pseudonym ISC. General examination is conducted of internal as well as external documents pertaining to

early events accompanying ISC's physical founding to explore the tangible manifestations of field level pressures. I analyze qualitative interviews with different members (management, volunteers, worshipers, and external stakeholders) of this organization to probe the presence of transformational mechanisms, suggested by previous research findings, such as sense making and sense giving, boundary building or boundary blending. Being a member of the Muslim faith, I operate as an "observant participant" (Seim, 2021) to interrogate the physical, the behavioral as well as the attitudinal aspects of the organization to pinpoint the changes taking effect. My purpose in using this case is to illustrate how the study of such transformation in religious organizations can offer contributions and insights to institutional theory by linking crisis-prompted logic (re)interpretations taking place at the micro level and manifested in practices, to the macro level of ongoing-maintenance of an institution.

Theoretical Context

One of the hallmarks of institutional theory is "its recognition that actors are not motivated solely by self-interest" (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Yet the self-interest may creep up unnoticed to influence actions of actors, through what Tracey et al. (2011) call the actors' "historical conditioning." Furthermore, as Delbridge and Edwards (2013) point out, actors "have differing perceptions and depth of knowledge of their context" which directly impact how they experience structure" (p. 9). Unlike the traditional conceptualization of "imbedded agency" as actors strapped to one institutional logic that offers limited possibility for alternative actions, the concept of "historical conditioning" depicts individuals' embeddedness in multiple logics of the social world as they inhabit institutions. Such depiction of "actors' embeddedness" offers the institutional inhabitants a much wider selection of possible enactments of scripted behaviors based on individualistic "internal

deliberations." In other words, the experiences and disposition of individuals are informed by the plural institutional settings of their life inside and outside the organization, leading to different agentic outcomes. This conceptual space opens new ways to refine our understanding of how actors inhabit institutions.

A literature review on "pathways of institutional change" sheds light on how previous research has explored revolutionary changes in institutional environments and how they "trickle down" to transform fields, organizations, and practices, whereupon it is much more "gradually and unobtrusively [that] new practices introduced within an organization 'moved up' to the level of the field and stimulated a shift in institutional logics" (Micelotta et al., 2017, p. 10). However, still notably missing is research exploring the interplay between different triggers and forms of agency alongside "temporal variables such as pacing, sequencing, and duration" that may result in different outcomes and trajectories of institutional change (Micelotta et al., 2017). I read this review as an invitation to explore consecutive, on-going jolts as a temporally different kind of trigger, different from the major one-time jolt that has been the focus of previous research. Therefore, I probe the forces leading to agentic on-going efforts that balance the demands of different, and some time competing, logics by taking into account the pacing, sequencing, and scope of the outcome.

Institutions and Religious Organizations

Institutions are defined as those collective frames and systems that provide stability and meaning to social behavior and social interaction and take on rule-like status in social thought and action (Douglas, 1986, pp. 46-48; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Through self–activating social processes of reproduction, institutions stabilize and survive (Jepperson, 1991). Despite being one of the oldest forms of social organizing and institutionalized

practices (Bertels et al., 2014), religious organizations have drawn relatively much less attention from theorists or researchers in the area of organization studies (Jeavons, 1997; Tracey, 2012; Tracey et al., 2014). This marginalization of the religious organization in organizational studies stems from a host of reasons speculated about by Tracey and other scholars in their 2014 introductory article to the *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (volume 4), which was dedicated to "Religion and Organization Theory." In particular, institutional theorists and researchers may find it useful to consider religious institutions as a valuable subject of study given the reliance on the concept of "faithful reproduction of a set of agreed upon practices" as an explanatory mechanism that uses "faithful" in its metaphoric or vernacular sense, rather notably. In addition, organized religion is committed to continuity and long-term survival, a focal concern of institutional theory. In fact, the centrality of these core concepts of faithful reproduction and long-term continuity to both areas of study makes religious institution the most tangible and authentic illustration of institutional theory's reliability in explaining institutional stability.

Furthermore, for institutional scholars looking to expand knowledge about institutional phases (creation, maintenance, and disruption/death), religious institutions provide clear instances of long-lasting institutionalized practices. For example, looking at new emerging practices within a religion can provide a more nuanced conceptualization of how proto-institutions might come to exist in early stages, in comparison to what a researcher can conclude from an examination of historical records that are limited in their validity and scope.

Likewise, religious organizations could present an attractive area of study for institutional theory for at least two reasons related to some of its specific characteristics.

First, religious organizations are free, to a large degree, from the imperatives of the market logic, because they largely depend on member donations or membership dues paid as expression of deeper commitment to the organization and do not confer livelihoods to most members, which makes them excellent candidates for a new line of inquiry into the dynamic of change in institutions that are independent of market. Second, religious organizations could be studied on multiple institutional levels. A macro-level research would study them as part of a larger body of followers, which is usually transnational. On a micro level, they embody the daily struggles of participants who want to stay true to the essence of their religion while accommodating the challenges of modernity so as to ensure the continuity of the religion.

Then there is the national meso-level, where actors representing a transnational religion have to claim a legitimate national placement where they are respected, and their contributions recognized. It is in this context that I have named and bounded what I refer to as the "American Muslim institution." In a secular country, where the church-state relation is characterized by a total separation, a study of religious organization facing extreme conditions could shed light on institutional survival despite its isolating institutional context. In other words, religious organizations represent a noteworthy organizational form that is in actuality the closest manifestation of Selznick's (1957) original conceptualization of institutionalization as "organization infused with value."

The American Muslim Institution: A Case in Point

The American Muslim institution presents a particularly interesting case for institutional theorists exploring institutional change. It is a relatively young institution, dating to around the 1920s in its American instantiation, which marks its distinction as its own

institution for consideration within the broader global institution of Islam. It is interesting to study regarding change, because it endured a major shock, the events of 9/11, and subsequent smaller "jolts," such as the Fort Lauderdale shooting, the Time's Square failed bombing, and the Boston marathon bombing. Such events can be considered, using institutional theory concepts, as leading to field level pressures for institution-wide changes. Meyer's (1982) concept of "jolts," defined as "smacking into stable institutional arrangement and causing indeterminacy" (p. 532) can precipitate the entry of new players into an organizational field (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). While the jolt creates the need for some kind of response or transformation, the question remains open as to what forms that transformation will take, especially to preserve some fidelity to the core institutional logics.

In addition, institutional change efforts could result in the formation of new organizational forms. The new form may be defined as "the combination of an organizational structure and an organizational strategy" (Ingram, 1996, p. 85) or it could more simply be referred to as "an alternative to conventional bureaucracy" (Child & McGrath, 2001, p. 1135). The neo-institutionalists regard forms in general as the "incarnations of beliefs and values" (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 30), that is, "an organizational form is an archetypal configuration of structures and practice given coherence by underlying values that are regarded as appropriate within an institutional context" (p. 30). Therefore, as the new organizational form emerges from the change efforts, an observer can conclude whether the change could be considered transformational or not based on how close or far the new organizational form is from the previous one. Having recognized the "jolt" as an igniter of institutional change, the next aspect to explore is 'where' the change could organically or deliberately be initiated and tested.

To explore the nature and direction of change, I consider three concepts. First, I examine center versus margins to understand the sources of change. Second, I consider the idea of field, and how the very interconnectivity of a field of organizations might be a result of—rather than more commonly regarded a source of—transformation. Finally, I introduce the specific content of one of the core logics—the Muslim concept of "Ummah"—to show how it matters what the core logic actually is, not just that there is a meaningful core logic. The very concept of meaningfulness in institutions (Selznick, 1957) suggests that researchers may need to pay more attention to specific meanings in institutions, and thus I elaborate upon one that will matter for understanding the trajectory and boundaries of any institutional transformation.

A majority of institutional scholars argue that "organizations at the field's center are more informed, continually socialized, better advantage, and thus more embedded" they would likely be "resistant to change" but not always immune to it (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). On the other hand, organizations "at the margins of a field" have a much better placement conducive to recognizing the need for intuitional change and therefor initiating it "because it is there that organization are less embedded, less privileged, and more exposed to institutional contradictions" (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 29). The "at the margins" placement of the American Muslim community within the transnational Muslim Ummah, a concept I will explore below, makes it an ideal testing-ground for new institutional practices. Furthermore, although the event of 9/11 places the American Muslim institution at the center of the "initial shock," the fact that none of the perpetrators were American Muslims kept the institution fairly detached from the horrific act but more inclined to come up with new

practices to further separate itself from the practices that are blamed for the radicalization of the planners and executors of 9/11.

The notion of fields makes it possible to bring simultaneous attention to the different types of social structures relevant in American Muslim institutions. Fields are understood here as local social orders or social arenas where actors gather and frame their action vis-a-vis one another (Fligstein, 2001, p. 108). Davidson (1999) explains how the rules and standards of an institution serve as parameters of organizational fields. Organizational fields are defined as "recognized area of life" by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) that, according to Bourdieu (1993) and Jepperson (1991), comprise sets of subject positions bound together by institutionalized rules and standards. As such, legitimacy in an organizational field is predicated on an actor's understanding and conformity to these rules. To maintain legitimacy in an organizational field, Lawrence (1999) argues that "actors require practical rules that respond to at least two questions: 'where can I go?' and' what can I do?'" (p. 165). Therefore, an analysis of subject positions, of membership, is essential to an understanding of the dynamic of organizational fields (Beckert, 2010). Utilizing the concept of field, we can look at the American-Muslim institution as having three levels of field configuration, transnational (Muslim Ummah), national (a group of organization representing the interest of American Muslims like Islamic Society of North American [ISNA], Council on Islamic-American Relations [CAIR]), and local (Islamic university, community centers, and mosques) that are bound by conformity to a universal set of Islamic rules, practices, and behavioral standards, which are the meaning-laden core of the institution as discussed above.

A brief, but I argue necessary, elaboration on the concept of Ummah and the source of its relevancy to American Muslim institute is merited. The Islamic Ummah is a vast

transnational network of interacting people and groups, with considerable diversity and yet some sufficiently common elements so that it is possible to speak of these diverse communities as being part of the "Islamic Ummah." As such, Ummah does not necessarily depend on any particular political structure or state system. In fact, it is built on an elaboration of concrete social forms of Islamic concepts and symbols providing a social-moral foundation for trans-regional communal identity. Through the yearly pilgrimage to Makah, this sense of community is symbolized and emphasized in the belief system of followers who belong to the place where they live and who, in their totality, exemplify the universality of Islam (Grewal, 2014, p. 7). This sense of universality puts an extra emphasis on a set of universal rules that have an ideational dimension. So, to belong to the Muslim Ummah, an individual living in the United States, Bangladesh, or anywhere in the world would have to adhere to that set of rules or at least accept them as imperative. Such logic renders non-conforming practices as non-Islamic, which makes any proposed change bounded by the rules if it is to gain legitimacy. Surrounding this core, there are locally adapted practices and traditions that may themselves have meaning as ways to honor the Ummah but might have some room for adaptation. This context gives specificity to the meaning of an institution that has a meaningful and fixed core, to which other practices respond and interact. My focus is on the level, timing, and sequencing of institutional transformation and the acceptance of that transformation as a necessary step in the abandonment of the old practices and the enactment of the new ones en route to their potential institutionalization.

Method

The research method used in this study is a combination of "historical" and "interpretative case study" methods utilizing the strength of each to answer the research question. Since the main issue is institutional transformation, the historic method was used to establish what practices had existed before the jolts to pinpoint what actually got transformed. In addition, historic methods open room for context and multi-level analysis. Increasingly in the arena of organizational studies of institutions, "an understanding of context becomes a central element of any historical narrative. As a result, historical methods are helpful in adopting a multi-level analysis—connecting individual actors … and large-scale institutions (e.g., media)" (Prasad et al., 2014, p. 230). This approach to making connections of the individual actors to the broader institution informs my approach.

Interpretive methods read the historic data alongside other understandings to get to deeper subtexts and meanings. The interpretative case study method is particularly appropriate for discovering relevant constructs in areas where theory building is at the formative stage. It allows for the emergence of the construct of interest through intensive examination of "a phenomenon over time within its natural setting" (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 107). Furthermore, it provides more "contextualized, and more authentic interpretation of the phenomenon of interest" especially when the researcher is aiming to understand complex, temporal process (p. 96).

Research Design

This study started from an interest in answering calls by institutional scholars to capture the earliest moments of institutional change as it arises from the day-to-day actions of individuals at work (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). However, in contrast to the approach taken

there (Powell & Colyvas, 2008), my interest evolved into, not how institutions are built up from micro level building blocks, but how mundane activities are suddenly activated in ways that relate to existing institutions and create pivots rather than gradual evolution. To examine the question of change in a meaningful institution, I choose to interrogate the case of the American Islam institution in the United States after the shock of 9/11. Innately, the changes in the institutional environment of the American Muslim institution post 9/11 and the war on terror could put the institutionalized local practices at risk of change. Thus, the research looked for linkages between triggers in the institutional environment as identified by Zucker (1987), like the passage of new laws or media coverage, and their eventual outcomes at the organizational level, specifically the discontinuation of old practices and the creation of new ones.

Data Sources and Analyses

I collected data across levels. First, I collected national level accounts of the events that represented the jolts, in addition to media analyses indicating that attention to these jolts was intensive in the media. Second, I selected a local organization in the northeastern United States as the vector for how these issues were handled. I collected local level accounts, such as from the *Boston Globe*, a regional newspaper, of the responses to these jolts at an organizational level. Third, I added intertextual reading from the content of the Islamic faith to understand the meaningful elements of the faith, and how worship is organized, that provides the context for some of the historic and interpretive work. Fourth, I conducted interviews with actors engaging with responses to the jolts to capture interpretations and theorization of changes. Finally, I drew upon field observations, an approach suitable for

micro-institutional research. These multiple and somewhat nested types of data permit multi-level study and the determination of linkages between macro events and micro adaptations.

In analyzing the historic data, I was aiming to establish such linkages (Zucker, 1987) through examination of timing, sequencing, and reasoning for abandoning the old behavioral script and the theorization and enactment of the new ones (Micelotta et al., 2017). While I was mainly seeking to address how jolts at the macro level impact organizational level practices, I was also interested in seeking initial evidence of the inverse. I scanned for instances when the changes in local practices might net back up to broader institutional change, or whether instead those local changes were somehow operating as sufficient to bugger the wider institution from a crisis of legitimation and pressure to make more profound change.

Findings

I present my historic analysis of the pre- and post-9/11 American Muslin institution. My main focus in using the term institution, in this section, is the broad set of understandings, logics, and practices that compose the institution. In presenting the historic analyses, my findings consist of an intertextual reading of specific empirics and a body of theoretical literature for making sense of them. The organizational level—not initially critical for the American Muslim institution—emerged as important, and it takes on relevance as part of the response to legitimation pressures.

The Pre-9/11 American Muslim Institution

In the pre-9/11 period, American Muslim "institutional work" was marked by efforts to attain conformity to the normative expectations among different Islamic organizational forms, allowing these organizations to achieve legitimacy, acquire resources, and enhance

their chances of surviving. In accordance with organizational institutional studies that mainly focused on exploring mechanisms through which different organization achieve conformity (Djelic & Quack, 2008), the American Islamic institution prior to 9/11 was trying to homogenize itself with organizational practices and forms of the Salfi (pure) Islam as a response to isomorphic pressure coming with the majority of the new waves of immigrants looking to practice a cultural-free and more authentic form of Islam (Howell, 2009, p. 271). Nevertheless, because of its young formation and consequently weak influence, the American Muslim institution was not able to achieve conformity among its organizations, chiefly among them the American Muslim mosques where the institution should have been most visibly enacted.

Considering the establishment of congregational space by the followers as the first substantial step in institutional building efforts renders mosques as the starting place for studying the American Muslim institution. This notion is supported by Putnam's (2000) statement, "Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository for social capital in America" (p. 66). Furthermore, for all the major religions, physical space was always a key element of the institution. In Islam, the mosque was very central to practicing the religion. At the time of the prophet, a time referred to frequently in the Islamic faith, the mosque served as the government headquarter and even as a starting point for creating universities in later centuries. In the Muslim holy text, the Quran, the reference to the practices within the mosque made the difference in its classification as non-Islamic if its inhabitants used it for what was called 'evil practices,' aimed toward personal gain more than religious observance.

In the American society, however, mosques were used not just in these ways but also as a lifeline to the new immigrant. The first generation of mosques, in the early 1900s, was built by immigrants as places for worship, helping them, as well, to preserve their particular culture and Islamic practices until they and their families could return home. Many immigrants did not expect to remain, in this first wave, but were in the United States typically for the purposes of study, giving a mosque a more transient rather than permanent community. In contrast, later waves of immigrants did plan to make their home in the "New World" where they might hope to practice their religion with some freedom from state oversight.

Some specific empirical examples will help to illuminate the institution I am describing and to clarify what would constitute a transformation. The physical layout tended to be a close replica of mosques in the places the immigrants regarded as "back home," where gender segregation was a supreme element of a building code. There were separate spaces for men and women to worship and to socialize, and the preservation of these spaces, not to be found in secular American life, was regarded as very important in most mosques. Imams, the religious leaders in each mosque, were usually recruited from the homeland based on strict religious qualifications. These qualifications entitled them to perform the different religious functions like Friday's sermons, funerals, marriages, and divorce, and also to be the teacher of what translates to English as "Islamic sciences," referring to scholarly interpretations and the sharing of Islamic religious knowledge. No requirement of English proficiency was required of the imam because the sermons where either in Arabic or in the specific language of that mosque's founders. Mosques did tend to center around specific national or ethnic identities.

The management of the mosque was usually done by the imam, who would be the only paid staff person. He would be helped by volunteers in accordance with the directive of a board of trustees comprised of the founders and major donors. Minimal interaction or cultural dialogue with the host society was sought as it was regarded as of little future relevance for immigrants intending to return home, often after attaining a degree. In fact, in this early era, the idea of a deep interaction with the American society was greatly discouraged for fear of polluting what was regarded as the "purity" of the Islamic way of life. This early period of the American Muslim Institution was a genuine reflection of the temporary attachment those early Muslim immigrants felt towards their host society. As such, boundary building was the main aim of the institution in its desperate effort to keep the influence of the American way of life at bay.

Over time, with institutional leadership positions getting filled by members from the second generation of immigrants and families of immigrants who stayed, the aim of the Islamic institution in the United States changed. The new leadership pursued the realization of long-term success in the country where they were born and where they wanted to raise their children. The United States for them was the "back home" whenever they traveled to their parents' ancestral land. Boundary thinning and blurring between the world of the mosque and the daily realities of Muslims living in a non-Muslim environment became more acceptable (Waugh, 2010, p. 277).

Under the leadership of this American-born and educated generation, mosque organizations extended the scope of their functions. These activities required larger budgets that came mainly from the "Ummah" abroad, leading to a strengthening of the sense of transnational belonging. The growing independence of the emerging American Muslim

institution was already thus already dual edged, with links to American practices and ongoing dependence upon, and even fidelity to, the global Islamic institution. With more sophisticated managerial practices and budget management, it forced the issue of having paid full-time staffing.

Transnational belonging and local adaptation sometimes created different sets of imperatives. The Islamic functions (such as prayers and religious education) and the social functions (spaces to meet that were more comfortable than secular spaces) were obviously still the main concern, but the mosques added to them non-religious functions to facilitate a fuller participation in the larger U.S. society. Islamic institutions had to be able to provide a bridge between the old, imported cultures and the new surroundings. Courses like computers and language were offered at Islamic organizations (particularly at mosques that also included community centers) to promote connectivity between Muslim immigrant communities and their new country. Such activities helped strengthen the position of mosques and Islamic community centers as major institutions for the American Muslim population.

Second-generation American Muslim tried to achieve a symbiosis of conservative or more traditional interpretations of Islam with the requirements of life in a modern secular society that facilitated fuller societal participation. Nevertheless, the results were mostly in the form of hyphenated manifestations of both. To illustrate this point: A Muslim youth, who got his/her Islamic education at the mosque's "Sunday school," might go to the weekly Friday prayer, listen to the sermon, be respectful towards the elders, and avoid mixing with members of the opposite sex. Nevertheless, as soon as he/she is out of eyesight, the now "American youth," might have no issue skipping the next daily time for prayers, swearing, or

mingling with their mixed gender friends, and waiting until the next Friday to show up at the mosque again. This example shows how individuals deployed compartmentalization to manage multiple identities. The question upon which I focus, building from here, is how institutional transformation generates practices that might—in varying ways—limit, support, ignore, or attempt to contain this kind of institution-challenging compartmentalization.

The Post-9/11 American Muslim Institution

Since the terrorist attack of 9/11, Muslims in the United States have experienced varying degrees of discrimination and mistreatment as well as social, cultural, political, and legal backlash (Kabir, 2016, p. 3). Within this context, the American Muslim institution found itself having to respond to acute and increasingly widespread field pressure. The American Muslim institutional project of breaking barriers and fostering fuller integration into the American mainstream ideals came to a complete halt and in some instances started to be fueled by feelings of victimization and "otherness." For Muslims in the United States, life took a turn to the worse after 9/11. The American Muslim minority status suddenly changed from the "Invisible Citizen" to the "Visible Subjects" (Jamal & Naber, 2008). The role of Muslims in the 9/11 attacks placed into question the very essence of being a Muslim in the United States. A wide-ranging discussion about the religion of Islam, its nature, and its effect on the behavior of its followers took place at all different levels of society, seriously jeopardizing the legitimacy of the American Muslim Institution. For example, debates on whether American-Muslim rights deserve to be protected or whether the population was a legitimate target for discrimination occupied a large portion of mainstream politics and media. These debates were at the core of the institution's legitimacy to exist.

The “war on terror” turned America against a segment of its own citizens, therefore pushing members of that segment to “conscientize the daily active negotiation of multiple identities” (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 154). In fact, the declaration of a “war on terror” has forced many Muslims to verbally negotiate and assert who they are, with whom they are allied, and to whom are they an adversary (Bhatia, 2008). Muslim identity became the subject of constant explanation, justification, and defending. In spite of the fact that the American-Muslim population has various origins and is one of the most racially diverse religious groups in the United States, according to a 2009 Gallup poll (Gallup, 2009), to the American public at large they were considered one homogenous group. American and non-American Muslims had to constantly explain how they are different from the attackers and why they should be considered valuable as part of the wider American society based on their lack of certain “problematic” beliefs and associations. Local mosques promoted community organizing, public protest (such as against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), and expanding solidarity networks (e.g., interfaith dialogue groups). By this point, even the affiliation with a mosque and other Muslim organization or associations could cast suspicion on the individual. Mosques in particular became a favorite target for systemized infiltration and surveillance by the FBI and local law-enforcement agencies that were trying to show diligence in protecting the American citizen from ‘practicing Muslim’ potential threats (American Civil Liberties Union, 2011, 2012).

In the struggle of the American Muslim institution to respond to the post-9/11 upsurge in anti-Muslim rhetoric, a greater emphasis had to be placed on mosques and community centers to provide faith-based support and direct social services to care for their distressed members. Both internal and external resources and activities were needed. Facing

externally, issues like explaining controversial matters in the faith to non-Muslim media and publics, encouraging voter registration and voting, and connecting to political campaigns took up most of a mosque's community resources. The community employed strategies and tactics similar to those used by historically excluded groups in the United States. Different institutional levels got involved early on in a multiplicity of "damage control" actions.

Unlike the earlier eras of the American Muslim institution, there was new emphasis on Muslims coming together with a shared identity and presenting unified responses. While this kind of unification might have begun to happen gradually as later generations assimilated into neighborhoods and began to mix at local mosques, the crisis of 9/11 hastened this work and provided not just an opportunity, but an urgent need, to respond in a coordinated way. National Muslim organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), whose main mission according to its website is to defend the civil rights of American citizens including Muslim organizations and individuals, crafted targeted messages in advertisement campaigns. CAIR was itself a relatively new organization, having been founded only in 1994. In one of its campaigns, for example, to reclaim the word "Jihad" and its original sense of being in an active struggle or engagement, it showed pictures of ordinary American Muslim individuals studying, volunteering, exercising, or taking care of an elderly family member. These images were shown on buses and billboards at major cities with captions that read, "This is my Jihad, what is yours?" (Yaccino & Teng, 2013). The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) held annual meetings and in 2014 became the host of educational and cultural forums to appropriate the narrative of self-definition by American Muslims (ISNA, 2014). The hyphenated "American-Muslim" existence had been quickly losing ground, and they sought to reclaim and support it as an identity.

Comparing the Pre- and Post-9/11 Features

In summary, the pre-9/11 American Muslim mosque, as the main form of Islamic organization in the United States, was the embodiment of the pre-institutionalized organizational stage, as a "'technical instrument' designed as means to definite goals" (Selznick, 1957, p. 17), as cited by Scott (1987) in discussing technical and normative institutional forms. It was focused on creating a place for worship and belonging for immigrants with mostly a short-term lens. The mosque did not develop intensive social and political auxiliary purposes, because the focus was on private worship and preservation of the key tenets of the faith. It was rather quietly on the margins of U.S. society.

In contrast, the post-9/11 American Muslim mosques were being cast as an incubator and promoter of violent anti-Western ideals and practices by what was dubbed the "Islamophobic industry." In response, mosques started to counter such narrative by expanding and centralizing the role of the mosque in the life of the American Muslim community and embracing a set of Americanized practices. Some examples of these newer practices included allowing the mixing of genders in the mosque's public space, giving more visibility and recognition to women's roles within the community, and adapting democratic means in the management of the mosque. Through these practices, mosques as carriers of the American Muslim institution sought to represent themselves as fully integrated entities within the broader American religious fabric. In doing so, they even went beyond what many other religious organizations in the United States, from other faith traditions, did in terms of civic engagement. These self-preservation tactics oriented toward longer-term integration into U.S. society. As such, they may change the status of the American Muslim Mosque from a technical organization to an institutionalized one, "becoming valued, natural communities

concerned with their own self-maintenance as an end in itself" (Selznick, 1957, as cited in Scott, 1987).

From a quiet place on the margins, the American Muslim institution became focal in a way that was scary, threatening, and all-consuming—rather ironically in the very quest to preserve an institution and its legitimacy. This historic comparative approach situates the study of institutional transformation. At the local level, new organizational forms and practices emerged, within this broader field context, as I will discuss in the next section.

Local-Level Organizational Responses

The Islamic Society Center (ISC), a pseudonym, offers a case for studying the local instantiation of the dual change and preservation efforts of the broader American Muslim institution. The local chapter of a national Muslim American organization was the owner of the ISC. Inaugurated in 2009, it became the largest Islamic center in New England. By 2014, it enjoyed the support of its congregation in addition to that of the local community, including different faith groups and the local and regional government. Public officials from all levels of government considered the ISC as the representative of the American Muslim community in New England. The Chief Justice of one state's highest court was one of several official figures to visit the center in the wake of a recent new jolt, the San Bernardino shooting, and to address its Friday prayer congregation to assure them of the protection they would enjoy under the law from unfair accusations or prejudices. However, this recognition, inclusion, and legitimate acceptance did not come by naturally. It was in part the result of the ISC's winning a hard-fought battle waged by local adversaries who aimed to prevent the construction and establishment of the center. In the following sections, I give some history of the ISC and show how that history intersected with the jolt of 9/11 and following events.

In 1988, the center was envisioned by the Muslim Council (MC), a group that represented the primarily African American Muslim leadership of the central area in the city. About one-third of the Muslim population in this major urban area was African American and American born. This indigenous population of American Muslims had long stood alongside, but in occasional tension with, the transnational and diasporic Muslim community. The group saw an opportunity to realize their vision when in 1998 the City Redevelopment Authority, CRA, formally requested proposals for the development of a parcel of land that is located across the street from the local Community College. The location was called Malcolm X Boulevard, interestingly as the African American Muslim community sees Malcolm X as a key convert and leading figure. Only one proposal was submitted to the CRA and it came from the MC, which was to develop a mosque and with it a community center on the offered land. After representatives of the neighborhood, city, and state authorities expressed their support to the project, the CRA accepted it.

In 1998, fundraising challenges forced the MC to seek the help of another locally based Islamic Society, with the pseudonym ISB, to become the primary group that would oversee the project and carry it forward with explicit approval of the CRA. After some delays, because of regulatory requirements and funds availabilities, the groundbreaking ceremony was held in November 2002. The timing, coming just after 9/11 rather than before it, was unfortunate. The groundbreaking at the site was attended by the mayor of the city and a U.S. congressman for the state in attendance. Nevertheless, fierce oppositions fueled by suspicion and fear lead to a campaign to stop the project altogether. Accusation of alleged ties of ISC leaders to radical Islamic persons or groups made its way to local major newspapers like the *Boston Herald*, which printed its first article about the proposed mosque

before the construction began with the title: “Radical Islam—Outspoken cleric, jailed activist tied to new Hub Mosque.” A series of follow-up articles were published in the same newspaper and by the same journalist months later after the construction of the center began in January 2004, carrying titles like “Local Mosque tied to extremist Muslim Cleric” and “Mosque Leaders’ Mosque of Hate.” The uncontested media attack, although presented as the work of investigative journalism, was a reflection of the changing public attitude towards American Muslim communities and their rights to build places of worship. On the other hand, the lack of response by the Muslim community represented the pre-9/11 mentality of living quietly at the margin of U.S. society, “to be seen, not heard” and to be as non-confrontational as possible. Having to fight several upcoming lawsuits, the Muslim community was forced to consider other unconventional tactics like reaching out to members of the other local religious communities from other faiths for support and legitimacy-enhancing partnerships. As a result, a set of post-9/11 strategic changes started to take shape.

As the media-fueled suspicions of the intended center mounted, lawsuits started to be filed. In September 2004 a claim was filed by a resident of the local neighborhood called against the CRA, ISC, and the ISB trust alleging that the land deal violated the constitutional separation of church and state because the CRA sold the land for less than the market value to the ISC. The lawsuit, while putatively about a land sale, represented a symbolic attack on the legitimacy of the institution. Although the claim was later dismissed on the grounds that it was not filed within 30 days of sale, in its aftermath a three-year legal battle took place between the ISC and individuals affiliated with it and their different opponents. These opponents were led by the David Project, Fox Television, the *Boston Herald*, Inc., the Investigative Project, and the Citizens for Peace and Tolerance. After mediation efforts by

the Interreligious Center on Public Life (ICPL), a closed meeting was held on April 2007 between members of the progressive Jewish community, leaders from the ISC, a representative from the ICPL, and a board member from the David Project, and an agreement was reached to drop all pending lawsuits and begin working to improve relations. After the ISC dropped its counter lawsuit, the leader of the David Project considered it an admission of guilt to having terrorist ties.

Getting out of their comfort zone and reaching out to other religious communities, trusting them to be fair minded and supportive, represented a major shift in how this American Muslim organization sought legitimation. Proactively building relationships with different religious group and addressing their concerns, while not feeling victimized by them, gave those external stakeholders the sense that the "new kid on the block" was a reliable, transparent partner who can be trusted and defended. On the other hand, a sense making process started to take shape as will be evident when the young organization starts to transform internally.

On September 15, 2008, the *Boston Globe* published an article titled "Local Mosque Opens Door as Controversy Fades" noting that daily prayers were taking place at the ISC (Paulson, 2008). By November 19–24, 2008, a new series of articles critical of the ISC appeared in the *Boston Phoenix*, regarded as an alternative newspaper that focused on the arts and leaned progressive. These articles reiterated old allegations and added a host of new concerns, including failure to maintain the adjacent park, divisions between immigrant and indigenous Muslims, homophobia, and a lack of fulfillment of a promise to the city of contributions to the local community. In response, a letter of support for the ISC and its owner organization was signed by more than twenty local religious and interfaith leaders. A

copy of the letters was published in the *Boston Phoenix* under the title "Building a Dialogue" in December 2008. Such a letter is an example of how multiple internal and external stakeholders engaged in both sense-making and sense-giving around contestation in an institutional realm.

The official inauguration of the ISC took place on July 26, 2009, with public officials, residents, and an estimated 3,000 people in attendance. A small gathering of opponents attended the events holding signs to protest it, which shows that external stakeholders remained divided among those supporting the adaptive transformations that ISC was attempting and those opposed to the perceived fundamental premises and illegitimacy of the ISC, which in turn necessitated further strategic adaptations. Despite being small in actual number, these opposition groups were very well financed and therefore influential, which was evident in their placement as the third source of information in a Google search for the center at the time.

Since its soft opening in 2008, the ISC has been involved in four types of activities. I argue that these activities are interesting in that they reflect both pre-9/11 root approaches of the American Muslim institution as well as post-9/11 expansions of the institution into new domains, such as cross-generational succession and training for both local and immigrant families who plan to stay as well as deliberate efforts to respond to and integrate into the wider community.

First are the activities related to the central pillars of Islam: being the place to declare the conversion to Islam by anyone who wants to, establishing daily prayers, collecting and distributing alms (Zkat), providing breaking-fast meals and holding night prayers during the month of Ramadan, and organizing Pilgrimages and Umrah (miniature, year-round Hajj)

tours to the city of Makah in Saudi Arabia, and hosting the two major festivals in the Islamic calendar. These core activities remained a strong tie to the core of the faith and its enactment globally.

Second, the ISC organized and administered activities that were directed at facilitating integration in the larger community, such as language and vocational courses. The ISC also provided monetary and educational assistance to the needy members of the community and free family mentoring and financial clinics. It offered personal development weekly activities, and it facilitated intercultural religious dialogues. These activities helped members manage their lives and thrive in the community.

Third, the center was the home to two Islamic schools: a full time Islamic school, for Grades 1 to 7, with a student body of 110, as well a Saturday Islamic school offering classes kindergarten to eighth grade focusing on Arabic, Islamic, and Quranic studies, serving 145 students. Having a school supported the aim of preserving the faith for the next generation that would be living in the United States.

Fourth, the center was directly involved in the representation of its congregation to the local media and the larger community. These types of "spokesperson" activities were new and drew upon less familiar skills than the first three types of activities. These activities included political advocacy with local government officials as well as proactively engaging with and answering the calls of the media, especially during times of crises.

Before 9/11, a mosque was typically led by an imam, whose focus was guiding the spiritual life of the members. Ater 9/11, mosques—and the multi-faceted centers that came to surround them—adapted to what would be called a more 'professional' and outward-looking style of leading. The ISC actually appointed a "CEO," not a typically religious leader title.

This CEO was skilled in the kind of political networking and alliance building that became crucial after 9/11. In an interview, I asked the CEO, "What organizational lessons were learned from the struggle?" Here is his reply, which to me is an indicator of how much had changed:

> As an organization. Yeah, I mean I think the major lesson from that period is that you really have to build strong relationships but before you embark on a project people really have to get to know you, understand who you are. You have to get support from the different city officials from the neighborhood and if you do that, then no matter who tries to organize it, if you have the local support you can survive. And in fact the reason that this project has arrived, is because the mayor was 100% behind it. And from day one the leaders of this center had met with the mayor and said, 'Mayor, will you be behind this center?' And even when the controversy went down, the mayor was very clear, that's a lesson for all of us.

The ISC brings together members who once would have prayed in smaller groups with people of similar backgrounds. Fifteen years after 9/11, the center had over 10,000 congregants, of whom about 1,400 attended the center weekly. This size allowed the community to move from the margins to the center and to be a visible spokesperson. It is the largest, and considers itself the leading, Islamic institution in the northeastern United States. At the time of my case study, plans were under way to construct phase two of the building. The goals were to host upcoming national conferences and to create a higher education establishment with the aim to "train future Imams and community leaders to speak to a modern context while deeply grounded in the rich, 1,400-years old Islamic scholarly tradition" (Boston Islamic Seminary, 2015).

In addition to fulfilling its envisioned purpose as primarily serving the local diverse Muslim community by providing a big enough place of worship and network building, the leadership of the ISC sought to communicate to its internal "stakeholders," itself an interesting, secularized view of religious members, a sense of belonging to the local community. They emphasized that this belonging was important to their own wellbeing and sense of citizenship. This strong newfound sense of belonging to the local community—and insisting on belonging even in the fact of prejudice—emboldened the organization to pursue vigorously a policy of sense giving to build trust and garner support from all levels of the larger community if needed. The ISC initiated cross-faith activities, like hosting the first large gathering of community members of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization. It had been typical for leaders across faiths to meet and sometimes for youth, who were attuned to diversity, to have cross-faith gatherings. not the usual leaders or youth level meetings. In this new approach, ISC was asking ordinary members from the Christian and Jewish communities to come to the center, first to listen to how their own the leaders would make proclamations of the good intentions that everybody has. Then, there were discussions among people of a mix of faiths, at round tables to allow for personal and more intimate introductions, to share stories of when they had felt as the "other," and to have their curiosity met with organic respectful explanations. These kinds of completely new approaches went well beyond a reactive response to a crisis toward a transformational change that represented a whole new role for the ISC beyond a traditional mosque and the possibility of a new sense of identity and inclusion for members.

Discussion

Although the ISC is relatively a young organization, only six years old at the time I began my study of it, it has gone through several changes since its foundation for various reasons. As a historic analysis shows, one of the main reasons is its unfortunate timing. Institutional theory has urged deeper consideration of timing and sequencing, and this case study reveals that to be an important factor. Although the vision of the center was conceived well before the horrific events of 9/11, the actual building did not start until right after, which made its very existence a main point for debate. Some factual concerns were brought up and some fictitious claims were made against the people who associated with or supported the project.

Institutional Transformation and the Concept of "Soft Revolution"

There were a number of changes that would appear radical from the vantage point of the time before 9/11. Each one unfolded somewhat gradually in a way that seemed relevant and appropriate for the situation, but also with some sense of disruption for members. The first imam from when the center opened decided, mutually with the leadership, to move on, and a new imam came in who was selected in part for his ability to be a spokesperson and not just a faith leader. The center changed its ownership and governance structure from independence with a board of trustees to becoming part of a local chapter of a national Islamic organization. To be more representative of what it perceived to be some kind of "American ideal, the new board is equally divided between male and female, unlike its former all-male board. That move seems a departure only in light of the historic study of small autonomous mosques that flourished in the years prior. This move to link to an overarching organization could be seen as a way for the center to act as a more, not less, free

agent, away from controversies and censorship of the old guard, to move away from what tainted its beginning, namely the alleged antisemitic remarks of one its founders.

To move away from it all, the ISC went through a form of what I will call a "soft revolution." I offer that this concept is useful for understanding how significant transformative activity, which might be considered revolutionary from the perspective of aims to preserve an institution, is softened or buffered, such that both long-time internal members and newly vigilant external members can be comfortable with the level and nature of change.

Whether intended or not, this strategic decision to seek local entrenchment—as a way of acquiring and cementing the organization's legitimate stance in the city and amongst its people—had a spillover effect of gradually replacing the traditionally defining transnational belonging to the Ummah. An unseen boundary started to encircle the American Muslim community legitimizing the local belonging and weakening the pull towards the Ummah. This effect can be easily detected in imams' skirting the traditional commentating on the issues plaguing the Ummah in the weekly sermons, which are almost always attributed to the meddling greedy West in other contexts. However, that theme was abandoned in place of an acceptance that the United States is now the homeland, and especially so for the young Muslim population. As American Muslims, they were seeing themselves as much as Americans as Muslims.

However, some internal resistance to this agenda, in its planned and more gradual and unintended effects, could be seen among the members. The ISC leadership struggled to get enough members of its own community to show up for the interfaith meetings held once every two or three months. To some extent that was understandable, as the questions asked of

Muslims at the round table were sometimes quite pointed and even rude. I asked some members why they did not like attending these interfaith meetings. One woman, who was one of the regular mosque attendees, said she had stopped attending because it just felt like the management of the ISC was pushing for those meetings out of a misguided notion to bring societal recognition. She insisted that would simply never happen, saying, "Just listen to Fox news and you'll see what I mean. It's futile." I asked her what the alternative was, expecting she might say that she would simply move to affiliate with another mosque. The possibility of member "exits" was a real one for leadership seeking internal legitimacy at the same time as external legitimacy. Instead, she replied, "Canada is looking very attractive to a lot of Muslims." She was thinking of leaving the U.S. version of how Islam was adapting, where the United States is understood as a "melting pot," where traditions merge, and Canada is seen more as a "mosaic," where traditions keep their origins side by side.

It seems like the sense making effort has a long way ahead before it could be considered fruitful. It is worth noting, as well, that some of the targeted population is feeling alienated by what they consider to be a top-down and unrealistic quest. They seek refuge in sarcasm, as in the reply about Canada (she was not planning to move), which is a well-recognized method of more subtle resistance. The "soft revolution" is a very tentative process that is ongoing and not fully resolved.

Contributions

This paper contributes to an understanding of how fields and the organizations embedded in them can navigate competing logics, particularly in response to an external jolt, which is the occasion on which such often taken-for-granted logics become visible and potentially contested. My findings show how religious logics, often just listed among the

multiple societal level logics for institutional theorists to consider (Friedland & Alford, 1991), are of a special type, in that they do not lend easily to hybridization, compromise, or transformation, precisely because of their sacred nature. However, a jolt in the field does necessitate organizational responses in the face of potential threats to that which is sacred and worth protecting for the organization. The response of rigidity in the face of a threat to legitimacy is a classic problem in organization studies. (Staw et al., 1981). When rigidity is not a path to organizational legitimacy, and even survival is at stake on contested terrain, then other responses

My findings contribute the useful new concept of "soft revolution" to understand how deeply cherished logics might be preserved even as organizations nonetheless make slight adaptations in their enactment in the practical realm, to buttress an organization in times of crisis. I expected that field level pressures to change some previously entrenched institutional practices, in order to conform to other societal and secular logics, would meet fierce resistance from multiple stakeholders. However, what I found was that the nature and intensity of the external jolt was such that small adaptations became possible as members realized the threat to legitimacy. At the heart of this situation is the impulse to protect the core, in this case the religious canon and some of the practices whereby members honor and enact it, while making some adaptations that enhance legitimacy. Soft revolution better describes this scenario than the more commonly used idea of "small wins," because there were not changes agents moving incrementally toward bigger wins, but instead, members reluctantly accepting something revolutionary, but with a "soft" cushion so it was not too harsh.

I found that soft revolution has three main elements as an approach to navigating the competing pressures of multiple logics while holding onto a core logic. First, leadership repositions itself as both inward-looking and outward-looking to manage challenges to legitimacy in a way that satisfies both believers on the inside and questioners on the outside. Without deft leadership movement and realignment, soft revolution is difficult to achieve. Second, a secondary logic can be activated, not as a hybrid, because the religious core is literally sacred, but as a hook to allow some experimentation and to buffer against critiques. In my case, it was the adoption of some elements of what was perceived to be the "American ideal" of participatory democracy that permitted some of the changes channeled via the soft revolution. Third, important external relationships to others whose core logic is a religious one is important, as these allies will not urge a change in the central religious logic, just as they would not accept such a move, but will help locate an allied organization as legitimate partners in a pluralistic field of organizations.

The concept of soft revolution is particularly relevant for religious organizations but could be applied in other settings that have a cherished core logic, such as activist organizations or labor unions. It is especially important to note that the study of religion and organizations can bring new insight to the dynamics of change and preservation in fields and organizations (Tracey, 2012). That said, very little has been done by drawing upon insights from the Islamic religion, with the few citations often related to issues of attire and identity management at work (Tracey, 2012). Studying an Islamic organization and field context in the United States revealed new dynamics for institutional theory to consider, unique to the Islamic context for discovering these dynamics, but applicable upon reflection to other contexts.

Limitations and Future Directions

Qualitative findings involve a mix of weaving a story out of many elements, such as interviews, and showing what those interviews look like. A took a higher-level view, so used only a few direction quotations. Future research can paint in more detail the processes by which the soft revolution was taking place. I first had to locate that a soft revolution was happening. A limitation of this work is that such a claim is a broad one to make, and it therefore needs more backing up with very specific data, especially on members' views. That becomes the next project.

Another future direction is to consider how many of the moves that the center made, in order to prove that it fit into the local field of religious organizations, were actually not at all moves that those religious organizations would be expected to make. Organizations based in other faiths did not have a "CEO" nor offer computer courses to their members. Some conservative religious organizations in the United States just assume they have legitimacy and will not budge on many issues that have wider societal or political implications. The center seemed to move in what would be called a somewhat more "progressive" direction, but that may not be asked or required of other religious organizations. It is an area for future research, engaging comparatively across faith-based organizations, whereas the literature is more likely to dig into them one at a time. Members who have well-connected professional lives outside of the center will surely notice these comparisons, and that may add to their wondering about the extent to which they have to participate in the elements of the "soft revolution."

Conclusion

Institutional theory has been instrumental in understanding the role of value systems and their related criteria for accepted practices in shaping the behavior of individuals and organizations and consonantly providing stability and fostering integration. Later streams of research pivoted to understand institutional change and its various mechanisms. This paper aimed to fill a void in the institutional change literature that addresses the religious institution in general and the American Islamic religious institution in particular. Religious institutions can be of interest to scholars looking to understand how institutions with a strong central logic that operates at the intersection of multiple societal logics can be responsive to extreme societal challenges.

The main issue here is that religious doctrines derive their legitimacy in the heart of their followers from their perceived ability to resist change in the face of all kinds of more secular challenges. If these kinds of institutions change too fast, they risk losing their intrinsic legitimacy and consequently may be abandoned by their own constituency. On the other hand, if they take too long to be responsive to the societal demand to change, they risk being labeled as anti-social and losing not just societal legitimacy but also their status as an integral part of the social fabric.

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CHAPTER 4

USING "STRATEGY AS PRACTICE" TO UNDERSTAND THE BALANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL MAINTENANCE AND DISRUPTION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Introduction

My main contribution is in enriching the theoretical understanding of the processes of institutional change in the context of institutional maintenance in time of crisis. I will assess the use of the tools of "strategy as practice" (SAP; Whittington, 1996) to capture instances of change as they happen at the micro level as a result of external institutional shocks and demands at the macro level. The SAP toolkit allows me to capture actions and reactions of practitioners as they perform their daily tasks and follow their footprint to macro level implications for the institution.

My goal in this paper is to show the complementarities between the conceptual toolkit of SAP and the currently quite popular "institutional work" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) as the theory that links micro level actions to macro level institutions. In particular, institutional work shows the hand of agents in the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions. While an institutional crisis sounds like an occasion for analyzing disruption, I argue that institutional maintenance is often the goal when institutions face an unexpected external crisis. Institutions are long lasting and deep-rooted because they have meaning and offer cognitive comfort for institutional members (e.g., Zucker, 1977), so institutional maintenance

would be the kind of institutional work triggered by a crisis. My focal question is: How does SAP further our understanding of institutional maintenance during time of crisis? I will argue that SAP permits exploration of institutional change-in-the making, examining dialectically the micro level in macro context.

In this paper, I first offer a definition of institutions, then I explore the dialectic of agent actions and structural constraints that animates current institutional theories. Then, I briefly review how crises or exogenous shocks have been considered particularly useful moments to examine how institutions respond. Specifically, I note that the predominant tendency has been to explain how crises generate either institutional creation or disruption. However, if what is meaningful or even taken for granted about an institution is to be preserved in the face of a crisis, then institutional maintenance is relevant. After this setup, I then introduce how institutional maintenance, as a form of institutional work, has been studied. As the main contribution of this paper, I then review how strategy as practice (SAP) offers institutional scholars an alternative framework for understanding how organizational members respond daily, within structures and guidelines, in improvisational yet strategic ways when a crisis erupts and how such a response can be a platform for institutional-wide change.

To study institutional maintenance during a crisis, where the tools of SAP guide the method, I introduce the case of an urban Islamic center facing pressures after both the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and then a local bombing incident, with fatalities and injuries, fourteen years later in the urban area itself, with those responsible claiming a Muslim identity. These became a crisis for the center because anti-Islamic sentiment was strong, and in particular, local Islamic centers faced intense scrutiny and pressure to prove

they were not somehow complicit. The specific moves made by the center translate everyday practices, strategically chosen but with varying ramifications on the ground, into the wider project of maintaining a cherished institution that was under external threat. At the same time, any actions taken raised internal challenges to institutional stability, as different stakeholders view everyday strategic practices differently. I discuss where SAP is a promising way forward with several advantages for the study of micro actions and their macro ramifications for institutions in times of crisis, then introduce how the specific case is appropriate for this investigation.

Institutions and the Macro/Micro Dialectic

Institutional theorists have considered a variety of factors that affect how those who are governed or influenced by an institution might react to outside forces. Forces such as regulatory, normative, and isomorphic pressures create reinforcing sets of institutional practices at the macro level (Scott & Meyer, 1994). These parameters set expectations for institutional actors about what would be appropriate within the institution in a way that impacts behavior in organizations. That is, the institution itself governs individual behaviors rather than some kind of strategic assessment of what might be the optimal response to the so-called "real" forces that might affect an institution. In the strongest form of this argument, the concepts of "taken- for-granted" norms and beliefs are invoked as all-powerful governors of institutional actors' behavior. In a less strong form of the argument, actors do not respond automatically so much as through an appraisal of what is legitimate as defined by the institution.

From inside these constraints, it is difficult to see how any change could arise, yet change does occur and must be accounted for; thus, institutional theorists pivoted toward

allowing and explaining a greater role for agency in change (DiMaggio, 1988). This project of agency within institutions now has a long history. Nonetheless, there remain ongoing and renewed calls to reinvigorate this project with a wider set of analytical strategies, especially for micro to macro translations (Hwang & Colyvas, 2021). This invitation prompts my investigation of whether SAP could add to institutional theory, especially for understanding how micro activity nets up to macro changes. My main contribution is to shine a light on institutional changes that are at once strategically sought but also somewhat the accidental product of multiple everyday activities.

The SAP approach initially shifted the lens on strategy from organizational level planning to on-the-ground activities that composed strategies (Whittington, 1996). It was taken up more broadly in organization studies as a way to bridge the macro / micro dialectic emerging in institutional theory. "The power of this [SAP] perspective lies in its ability to explain how strategy-making is enabled and constrained by prevailing organizational and societal practices" (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 285). Using SAP to empirically study everyday institutional activities could be a way to gain access to real-time power dynamics. Institutional theorists urge the inclusion of agency and power (DiMaggio, 1988), but have made greater strides in including agents than power (Munir, 2015). I argue that SAP will allow researchers to pinpoint influencers and centers of power, as practitioners seek to do their daily work and make some adaptations to the institution. SAP thus may help address both the agency/structure mystery and the absence of power, both of which have eluded organizational scholars for so long. SAP would help researchers in looking inside the "black box" of embedded agency (Smets et al., 2017) by using the SAP concepts, praxis, practitioner, and practice—to identify different episodes of actual causal moments/events of a

practitioner exercising agency in defiance of business-as-usual organizational atmosphere. It will provide an answer to why, when, and how a practitioner/practitioners will choose to travel a "path less taken" to change the organization from within, which may end up providing a new template/practice for the way things are done in the institution. In addition, the research into the source of a new practice might lead to a discovery of a macro-level inspiration that the practitioner employed to legitimize his/her praxis. To augment the pure theorizing based on a "look back" methodology associated with institutional work, the use of SAP will provide a grounded theory approach. Specifically, praxis refers to the reflexive awareness that actors have about the practices in which they are engaging, and SAP emphasizes how to track that in the moment of attempted changes.

An enduring tension in the study of institutions is between the micro level of agents' activities that shape institutions and the macro level of institutions as strong and enduring entities that shape and constrain agents. My opening argument is that SAP might offer institutional researchers a fresh view of everyday agency within institutional contexts. In this section, I briefly review the micro/macro dialectic first from an institutional viewpoint and then from a practice-based view. Institutional theory tends to explain "micro-level phenomena" by its submissive position to or entrapment within the confinement of the "iron-cage" of "macro-level structures or systems" (Smets et al., 2017, p. 7). It focuses primarily on structure, exploring agency as an explanation for the forced choice of the path (the cognitive process of acceptance and adaptation).

Such an explanation resulted in regarding individuals as institutionally embedded actors who lack the agency needed for reflexive interpretation and enactment of institutional logic, which might lead to diversity in organizational shape or behavior. Therefore, early

institutional theory was effectively limited to explaining institutional or organizational change as a naturally occurring phenomenon. Reproduction and change have been in tension from the beginning of institutional theory since the theory's account of institutional stability solely emphasized the faithful-reproduction of the "taken-for-granted" norms and roles, free of contestation or rebellion, thus blissfully ignoring the role of power or the linkages between micro-processes and institutional outcome. This rigid explanation forced institutional scholars to actively seek an alternative explanation that could account for institutional change being observed in all kind of settings while staying true to the institutional theory blueprint (DiMaggio, 1988; Hwang & Colyvas, 2021).

At this stage, institutional theorists looked to explain variation in organizational responses to institutional pressures (Oliver, 1991) but not to explain why or how institutions change. Then came the heroic figure—the institutional entrepreneur—who can sense the need to change, although he or she is just as embedded as the rest of the individuals occupying the organization. These institutional entrepreneurs are somehow enabled by their unique dispositions, timely positioning, and access to resources needed to instigate and implement change (Battilina, 2009). Even with all the criticisms such an explanation had to endure, a practice-based reasoning started to emerge. This approach aimed to acknowledge the role of the individual's occupying organizations and the struggles they encounter while trying to perform their daily activities amidst a changing resource landscape and unstable power relations. The focal point became how these struggles forced individuals to actively seek creative solutions to their daily dilemmas for the sake of maintaining the institution, which in turn might end up changing 'the way things are done' (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

From a practice perspective, “change can originate in the inglorious level of the ‘praxis,’ but trigger ripples that reverberate throughout space, time and interrelated phenomena” (Smets et al., 2017, p. 387). Such phenomena could be understood as institutional fields. Practice-driven institutionalism focuses on ongoing activities, undertaken by practitioners with a mix of strategic intention and guidance by institutional norms, rules, roles, and routines.

While the micro level of everyday action and interaction is influenced not just by the “taken-for-granted” rules but also by the cognitive maps with which individuals negotiate social reality, there is no denying the fact that institutions play a crucial role in defining the quotidian reality of individuals and organizations. After all, “institutions are sustained and made real by being acted out” (Collins, 2004, p. 16). Nevertheless, institutional scholars have conceded that the causal relationship between institutions and social activities does not point to one direction. To the contrary, the very inception of institutions is conceptualized as being shaped by contingent human activities (Scott, 1995).

So how does such a dialectical process happen? We need to understand how individuals who are socialized by their organizations into expected sense-making activities (DiMaggio, 1988) experience daily organizational activities, get affected by them, and act upon them. The question is how individual actions and institutions are recursively related (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The answer would require "diachronic analysis" (Archer, 1982) that examines the modification of institutional scripts by individuals as they perform their daily functions over a period of time. Seo and Creed (2002) extended Brown’s (1978) path-breaking article on bringing praxis into organization studies, by advancing a “dialectical framework” to examine when and how institutionally embedded actors, hindered by the

inevitable “institutional contradictions” that surround them, come to a collective realization of the need to change the very institution they enact. However, since institutional processes take a long time to be realized, targeting a more manageable period of time in an institution would make research more feasible.

Analyzing such recursive relationships during institutional maintenance would constitute a more realistic and more readily available task than during institutional creation, which is often the focus of institutional entrepreneurship. One compelling reason would be the almost impossible task of recognizing an institution in the making, rendering data collection on relevant ongoing actions and interactions necessary for documenting the link between everyday acts and the creation of an institution an immense obstacle to research (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Instead, examining maintenance activity in institutions that are experiencing crisis has the potential to offer unique insights into the importance of everyday acts to the wellbeing of the whole institution. These acts can be observed in the moment, as they are pushed out of the category of repetitive, ordinary, everyday activities and into the category of extremely significant to the very survival of the institution. As institutions face unprecedented levels of environmental turbulence, institutional actors may be forced to prioritize solving urgent problems, experimenting with flexible adaptations, disregarding the conventional wisdom, and utilizing different alternatives. This urgent experimentation may lead at the end of the process to modification or total abandonment of the old ways of pursuing institutional goals (Vermeulen et al., 2014).

Institutional Change: Sources and Trajectories

Accounting for institutional change has been a major strand in institutional research (Micelotta et al., 2017). Institutional scholars who studied institutional change discovered

different sources and paths for the process. Prior to 2001, work on institutional change was dominated by macro-level, quantitative methods that track institutional change, usually as a diffusion process within a specific field over time (Soule, 1997). However, examining localized dynamics using qualitative methods may generate a more robust understanding of the actual journey of institutional change.

In regard to studying the process of institutional change, one of the main existing literature propositions is that new ideas occur more "at the margins of a field because it is there that organization are less embedded, less privileged, and more exposed to institutional contradictions" (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 35). In contrast, "organizations at the field's center are more informed, continually socialized, better resourced, and thus more embedded and resistant to change" but not always immune to it (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 36). In addition, institutional transformation, according to Parigi (2014), could be "the result of incremental strategies that mobilize insiders and outsiders" (p. 374) through sense-making and sense-giving, which moves institutional change from being a rare event to being a lengthy process, that involves boundary blurring and or boundary building (Schneiberg & Lounsbury 2008). Change is an ongoing process.

Institutional change happens in one of two modes: "continuous or first-order change, occurs within a stable system that itself remains unchanged, and discontinuous, or second-order change transforms fundamental properties or states of the systems" (Meyer et al., 1990, p. 520). Regardless of its origin or kind, institutional change efforts could result in the formation of new organizational forms. The new form may be "an alternative to conventional bureaucracy" (Child & McGrath, 2001, p. 1135) or an "incarnation of beliefs and values" (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 30). Change is not a matter of a solution imposed but a

solution evolving. “Institutional change does not always occur as a solution pre-formed, to a problem that may not previously have been acknowledged” (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009, p. 2). Despite inertial pressures, institutional change is inevitable; "institutionalization bears, if not the seeds of its own destruction, at least openings for substantial change" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 287). Nevertheless, acknowledging the constraint of time, considering the slow nature of institutional change, the moment of a crisis often becomes a time to look at how institutions shift. Hence, an institution in crisis would present the perfect opportunity to examine institutional change in real-time. A crisis mode would definitely accelerate change and perhaps also reveal more clearly the types of practices undertaken by institutional actors in response.

In addition, because the dialectic of micro/macro makes it difficult to pinpoint how compliant institutional insiders become institutional change agents, the mechanism of an exogenous shock to an institution is handy to theorize, rather than trying to find internal drivers of change.

Theorizing Crises in Organization Studies

The term crisis in organizational studies has come to mean “the privileged moment in a system’s operation when an event reveals the structure” (Burguière, 2009, p. 108). For institutionalist scholars, crisis represents an especially important event in an institution’s life, since “critical events expose underlying societal mechanisms, they can also trigger a trend of progressive questioning regarding the slower moving layer of history” (Clemente et al., 2017, p. 22). Crises can be caused by institutional factors, with tragic results (Wicks, 2001), not just addressed by institutional responses. Crises are significant, because “critical events reshape slow-changing systems (such as structures or conjectures), modify significance, and reshape

interactions, both spatially and temporally" (Sewell, 1996, p. 875). Scholars from a game theory background offer the following definition: "institutional crisis occurs when the institutional structure of an organization or policy sector experiences a relatively strong decline in legitimacy which may persist for a long time" (Boin & Hart, 2000, p. 12). Taking legitimacy as a key concept for institutions, Coombs and Holladay (1996) define crisis as "an event that threatens or challenges an organization's legitimacy or image" (p. 280). Crises may not be exceptional, but something an institution is likely to face. Spillan (2003) declares "no organization is spared having to go through crisis during its lifetime" (p. 160). The temporal perspective emerges as distinctive characteristic of crises. A definition of institutional crisis thus references it as an unstable time in the life of an institution in which swift decisions must be made to fend off survival-threatening perturbations, thereby creating a window of opportunity for changes to occur.

We can see that at the heart of institutional crisis is a widening gap between external expectations and perceived performance where behaviors governing norms, rules, routines, and outcomes, that used to be satisfactory, are suddenly thought of as unacceptable or inappropriate by external stakeholders. Internal actors get caught in tensions of dealing with revised expectations versus familiar routines. Caused by acute discrepancy between societal expectations and perceived or actual organizational performance, and aided by media attention and political forces, crises can lead to the erosion of institutional legitimacy. As institutional actors, organizational and individual, feel the pressure to rescue the institution, a multitude of possible actions are newly considered. From trust restoration efforts in the existing institution to conducting major overhaul of the underlying structure of the institution, institutional actors find themselves at a crossroads that requires strategic action.

Such actions become aimed at leading the institution to better fit its environment while internally dealing with the expected challenge of how far the institution should or could change without losing the essential crux of its previously taken-for-granted or normatively laden existence.

Because crisis has three key components—threat, uncertainty, and urgency—it could definitely lead to second-order transformative change. Therefore, the demands of institutional maintenance in times of crisis could be as follows: collaborative activity by practitioners; on the spot praxis; flexibility in eliminating old practices or adopting new ones; ongoing evaluation of praxis and practices through a reflective interaction between the practitioner and institutional processes, culture, and relationships effectively leading to strategizing on the go. It is during times of upheaval or existential threats that actors must actively work to preserve the institution. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) suggest the applicability of the strategy-as-practice approach to study events taking place in and around an institution. It can be useful inasmuch as it examines how organizations come first to recognize the need for strategic change and then actually achieve the proposed change. The SAP approach draws on many of the insights of the process school but returns to managerial level concerns to address the issue of how strategists 'strategize,' by examining the work and talk of practitioners themselves (Whittington, 1996).

Under the extreme circumstances of institutional crisis, it is possible for the majority of actors to become agents of change or what is called institutional entrepreneurs. The roles allocated to institutional entrepreneurs include what are essentially strategic activities. Researchers may then look for three kinds of strategic activities: bridging divisive stakeholders, theorization of new practices, and connecting these practices to stakeholders

routines and values (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 657). What is distinct about SAP is that it allocates these roles to insiders already engaged proactively in practices. Strategic action in time of crisis could mean several additional kinds of actions, either in successive steps or together: modifying the existing strategies to achieve better alignment with the environment; improving internal competencies (building resilience); exploring alternative domain of actions (forming new alliances).

With institutional crisis established as an opportunity to study institutional change in real-time, the next step is to consider which theoretical and empirical tools enable the researcher to study the phenomena with more precisely directed efforts. As it has been noted, crisis management requires strategic work that aims to maintain the institution either by defending the status quo or changing it to better fit the environment. Therefore, what a researcher needs are tools to identify strategies and theory to explain their linkages to institutional maintenance and adaptation.

Linking "Strategy as Practice" (SAP) to Institutional Work

Seeking the establishment of a bottom-up approach to the study of institutional life cycle, institutional work (IW) was conceptualized as "the purposive action of individuals and organization aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). This concept opened avenues for researchers to study the interrelation between structure and agency of actors, but often only after some amount of change has noticeably occurred—"retrospective accounts embedded in interviews and archival data" as basis for their analysis which limits the capacity to understand the day-to-day practices of IW" (Lawrence et al., 2013, p. 1027). This area of research aims to answer "how" IW occurs, "who" does it, and "what" constitutes its domain. Contemplating that

"pattern of actions" results from "purposive action," one can find the link between strategy and institutional work in early definitions of strategies as "patterns of organizational actions concerned with the formation and transformation of institutional fields, and the rules and standards that control those structures" (Lawrence, 1999, p. 167). However, considering that institutional strategy focuses on the organizational meso-level actions, SAP would be a better fit for researchers looking to explore the micro-foundations of institutional theory. SAP's micro-focus allows it to attend to the actions of the individuals as they enact their daily rituals with purpose. A comparison of SAP from its origins in strategy research to its promising applicability in institutional work is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

"Strategy as Practice": From Strategy Research to Institutional Research

	SAP in Strategy Research	SAP in Institutional Maintenance Research
Unit of Analysis	The actions and background of middle manager, consultants, and senior executives (Jarzabkowski et al., 2015)	The actions of organizational members, managers and non-managers, as they are forced to abandon conventions in the hope of preserving the organization and the institution it serves.
Types of Actions	Formulation, application, and transfers of strategies as part of everyday activities.	Pattern-following actions that end up formulating strategies under extreme circumstances.
Aim of Action	The maintenance and improvement of the organization.	Legitimacy restoration while upholding the core values of the institution.
Approach to Data Analysis	Discovering how strategist "strategize" or how they act and interact in the whole strategy-making sequence.	Discovering how organizational members strategic actions aiming to maintain an institution in crisis could lead to the formation of new practices which in turn get accepted as a new "way of doing things" on the institutional level. Discovering the path of modifying or formulating a new "taken-for-granted roles and rules" from individual novel actions inside organization to institutionally recognized practices. Linking the micro to the macro.

In answering the question of why use SAP's tools to analyze organizational actors' actions as they try to maintain their institution, either by defending the status quo as legitimate or by implementing enough changes to regain legitimacy status, at times of existential institutional crisis, I offer the following argument, starting with invitations issued by institutional scholars as well as SAP scholars to combine the two streams of organizational research. From the SAP camps, Seidl and Whittington (2014) called to enlarge the agenda for empirical SAP research by connecting it to the wider social phenomena.

Researchers explicitly warn against studying practices in isolation from their institutional environment (Jarzabkowski et al., 2015). From the institutional side, the "integration of strategic negotiations researcher illustrates a powerful direction for the study of institutional work" (Lawrence et al., 2013, p. 1031). In addition, in a recent examination of the role of power in institutional analysis, Kashwan (2016) asserts that, "reliance on the micro-foundation of institutional analysis doesn't necessarily exclude an examination of the broader social, cultural, political, and economic context, including historically entrenched power asymmetries that manifest in individual choices bound by an upper ceiling of social identities, such as caste and gender" (p. 27). The micro level retains context and power dynamics.

By drawing on the empirical strength of SAP in collecting relevant information and the theoretical strength of institutional theory for analyzation and interpretation, the researcher can fully realize the explanatory power of the practice tradition, a common root of both, and he/she can offer an empirically grounded explanation of the link between the micro-level of action and the macro-level of institutions. Enabling a simultaneous consideration of the impact of human agency and institutional structure on the different institutional phases through a dialectic interpretation of observable social actions and their subsequent effect on practices.

Elements of SAP: The Interwoven Strands of Practices, Practitioners, and Praxis

SAP theorists championed the observation of the everyday work as part of discovering how strategies, formulated at the executive suites, get enacted and probably modified by middle managers. In this study, I advocate the use of SAP tools as a way of discovering how everyday individuals, as 'carriers of institutions' in a reciprocal interplay

(Zilber, 2002), step up to defend or change the institutionally scripted practices, if they had too, in order to maintain the institution they hold dear.

The strand of scholarship on strategy that has come to be known as "strategy as practice" (e.g., Jarzabkowski et al., 2007) targets the individual actor' actions with analytical tools to examine them and explore their relationships to the institutional forces such actions are in negotiation with. In a review of the evolution of SAP, the "concept of practices is a broad one: they are accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinized over time" (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 287). SAP links practices to three key concepts: praxis (the activity underway), practice (routinized types of behavior that are pre-existing and socially defined, coming from institutional logics), and practitioner (the actor, who has a unique way of interpreting and engaging with work based on his his/her education and experience). SAP is an approach that allows researchers to scrutinize the organizational response to institutional pressures on the micro-level as it happens (praxis) and pinpoint who is constituting the response (practitioner or group of practitioners), while relating it back to the macro-level with the use of practice as a reference point that is used to inform the praxis of the practitioner.

Method

To bring to life and analyze my proposition that SAP is a relevant and useful toolkit in understanding institutional responses, and attempted maintenance, in times of crises, I needed a case that had three key features. First, the crisis had to be ongoing, not already solved and not approached as a retrospective study, so that the real-time practices could be observed. Second, the setting needed to have deep and meaningful value to its members, so that institutional discontinuation, disruption, redefinition, or re-creation would not be

acceptable ways out of the crisis. Crises can reset an institutional field as some members adapt or select out of the field, but the possibility of that response would not permit observing the engaged, on-the-ground activities aimed vigorously toward maintenance. Finally, an ideal site would permit participant observation by the researcher, so that practices are not hidden from view by a crisis response but available for observation and open inquiry. My chosen site is an Islamic community center, which offers these three features, making it appropriate to investigate my theoretical interests and proposals.

Using the lens of SAP, I observed the practices, practitioners, and praxis at this local organization as it made, or contained, adaptive changes in response to a crisis. This organization is embedded in major societal institutions, as identified by Friedland and Alford (1991), including religion and democracy. Examining how it responded to its immediate setting, I consider how the community center aimed to keep aspects of the religious institution preserved while mobilizing aspects of the democratic/civic institution to signal membership in U.S. society, balancing the imperatives from these two institutional contexts. The organization itself had an administrative leader, a faith leader, and broad community participation, focused in one location.

Such an organizational form constitutes an opportunity to conduct an ethnographic, in depth case study that aims to examine institutional work through the lens of 'distributed agency' exploring "how individual actors contribute to institutional change, how those contributions combine, how actors respond to one another's efforts, and how the accumulation of those contributions leads to a path of institutional change or stability" (Garud & Karnoe, 2003, as cited in Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 56). The contributions from this method are to bring to life how actors on the ground actually engage in these kinds of

practices toward maintenance of an organization within an institutional context that is cherished by members and not easily amenable to change.

Research Site

The research site, for which I will use the pseudonym Islamic Community Center (ICC), was selected based upon the above three criteria (ongoing real-time crisis, meaningful to members so not easy to change, amenable to participant observation of practices). Elements of the organizational form and environment of ICC are referenced by the U.S. national Islamic organization as the archetypical form of what a local Islamic center can and should become. The ICC was founded in 2008 with support from the mayor of the city in which it is located. The ICC added welcome urban development and community-facing space on several blocks that had become run-down. Its formation was in the wake of 9/11/2001 challenges for the Islamic community. In addition, it was in existence specifically during a 2013 bombing that took place in the city, to which it became forced to respond; that incident happened during my ongoing time in the field. In the broadest terms, my study is located in a religious institution that carries meaning, values, beliefs, custom, and lifestyle for its members. The local organizations that are the carriers of these institutionalized beliefs and observances are the mosques.

According to the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), American mosques can be considered institutions as they serve as important centers of worship, community service, and activism for Muslims in the United States. What is now ICC was originally a local mosque, organic to is community and with a simple street front presence that did not particularly look like a mosque. Because Islam focuses on personal worship, rather than places of worship, mosques offer possibilities to members but not required

participation. Mosques often provide a range of services and programs such as religious education, social services, and interfaith dialogue that contribute to the well-being of their congregation and the wider community (ISPU, 2017). In addition to serving their local communities, mosques in the United States have evolved to become involved in advocacy and activism on a range of issues including civil rights, immigration, and social justice. The local mosques do so under the umbrella of the religious institution and national organizations; for example, the Islamic Society of North America has been active in promoting interfaith dialogue and combating Islamophobia while the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) has been involved in advocating for the civil rights of American Muslims.

Regarding this last point, the overarching societal institutions also include democracy (Friedland & Alford, 1991), and my study pointed to the importance of an institution that I refer to as American Islam. There has been a Muslim community in North America for centuries (GhaneaBassiri, 2010), and recently, there is an emerging focus on shaping the Muslim experience for a context of democracy and civic participation, which is distinct from its enactment in more authoritarian or theocratic contexts. How this approach to the overarching American Muslim institution emerges and gets shaped is part of what is revealed through studying practices. It is both an organic response to context, but also a response to threats.

Because Islam does not focus on places of worship but on individual practice, there were no long-standing organizations in place to provide responses to external threats (in contrast, for example, to the well-established and visible churches in the U.S. South that mobilized in the face of civil rights threats). Nevertheless, as a place of worship in Islam,

mosques have a strict guideline in regards to permissible practices. Muslim religious doctrine is pertinent here. In the holy text of this faith, God gives an example of a mosque that no longer should be considered an appropriate mosque because the practice within the mosque has deviated from what is considered right, "There are also those hypocrites who set up a *mosque* only to cause harm, promote disbelief, divide the believers, and as a base for those who had previously fought against Allah and His Messenger. They will definitely swear, 'We intended nothing but good,' but Allah bears witness that they are surely liars" (Quran, At-Tawbah 9:107). And it is also written in the sacred text, "Do not O Prophet ever pray in it. Certainly, a *mosque* founded on righteousness from the first day is more worthy of your prayers. In it are men who love to be purified. And Allah loves those who purify themselves" (Quran, At-Tawbah 9:108). These ideas stand in the background, as members would not want to participate in changes so extreme that their mosque might be considered somehow a bad or unworthy mosque.

The ICC was initially a simple, local, organic form mosque, and in 2008 was re-envisioned as a cultural center. Such an organizational form constitutes an opportunity to conduct an ethnographic, in depth case study that aims to examine institutional work through the lens of "distributed agency" exploring "how individual actors contribute to institutional change, how those contributions combine, how actors respond to one another's efforts, and how the accumulation of those contributions leads to a path of institutional change or stability" (Garud & Karnoe, 2003, as cited in Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 56). In addition, such a simplistic form of an organization facilitates the researcher's effort to uncover patterns of behaviors in the observed actions and interactions of organizational practitioners, regardless of their formal or informal positions in the organization.

The organizational practitioners, or members, engage voluntarily with the ICC. There are about 1,800 members, of whom 300 are also sustainers who donate regularly to support the ICC. It is possible to be an active and dedicated practitioner of the faith without engaging with ICC. About 60 members might come to a particular event at the center. Thus, the ICC does outreach and strategically shapes and reshapes programs. Members have broadly four social identities: American born Muslims, Muslims temporarily in the United States (such as students or visiting scholars), converts (Americans from different ethnicities who choose to become Muslims), and new immigrants relocating to the United States from different Islamic regions, historically Aisa and the Middle East but more recently Somalia. These groups have different cultural traditions and different expectations regarding how the ICC should be run—whether democratically, paternalistically, or a mix. The dream of the center was actually started by another segment of the community, the African American Muslim community, which represents about a third of all Muslims in this urban area. That community was not able to raise the needed funds, so the ICC leadership with roots in the Middle East took over the project and its ownership. Thus, there were ongoing attempts to remain relevant and connected to the African American Muslim community, but that community ended up maintaining its own mosque with its own imam.

To understand this aspect of the local context, and how the indigenous community feels about the ICC and the way it has been run, I conducted a three-part interview with the leading imam and figure for the oldest Islamic establishment in the same urban area, which serves as the main Mosque for the African American Muslim community. In an effort to learn more about the structure and practices of Islamic centers more generally, and to be present in a setting where I was not a known member, I made several visits to three other organizations

outside this region, (two Islamic centers in two different cities and an accredited American Islamic college).

Case Study and Data Collection

The research method used in this study is an inductive, single-case study to gain rich insight into the micro-foundations of institutional work. I used three data collection methods: participant observation, interviews (expert interviews, member interviews, and opportunistic interviews), and archival documents (materials, such as pamphlets or PowerPoint slides, produced by the ICC).

Participant Observation

I conducted field observation as part of a participant ethnographic project over a period of two years. I was immersed in the community as a member. I was known to be conducting research about the ICC organizational strategy and to have explicit permission from the ICC leadership to do so. After approaching the management team at the center for permission to conduct the research via emails, I had to agree to be interviewed by the CEO and the Imam to discuss the main themes of the research and its intended audience. After agreeing to share the results of the research with management, I was granted full freedom to conduct the research and permission to interview the members of the staff. I participated in five quarterly interfaith meetings: two that took place at the ICC, two at two different Jewish temples, and one in a Christian church.

On the one hand, there are benefits to being a fully immersed participant observer. This position allowed me to interpret subtle cues. In a short period of time, such participant observation might make members self-conscious, but over a two-year time span, my frequent presence at events became taken for granted, and I believe I captured very natural actions and

discussions. On the other hand, there are limitations to being a fully immersed participant observer. Some members who do not like the direction of the ICC might have been reluctant to speak freely with or around me, although the fact that I did hear numerous concerns means that this limitation was not entirely inhibiting.

My study is distinct in that I was a participant observer before, during, and after the changes, so I do not rely upon retrospective accounts. I observed power struggles firsthand. Institutional change has been mostly studied in retrospect because of the temporal aspect of institutions (Micelotta et al., 2017). Institutional change is defined by Van de Ven and Hargrave (2004) as "a difference in form, quality or state over time in an institution" (p. 261), so making observations over a long timespan—but one with intensive and multiple pressures for change—was useful. Any study attempting to unpack the institutional change process has to look for the already established practices as well as the actions, or resisted actions, to shift those practices. The before and after comparison of practices is a focal point of my research. I identified a specific on-the-ground issue to study, which in turn informed my data collection of interviews and archival materials.

Interviews

At the center of the analysis are the individual practitioners, with whom I could engage by participant observation and have short informal interviews or follow-up discussions after a meeting, in which I raised questions about their reactions. These incidental interviews and inquiries were made during and after key decision-making meetings, for example, about the criteria for imam selection. This actor-centered analytical framework of SAP is used to study instances of introducing, developing, and adopting novel practices as examples of institutional work that strive for maintaining the institution.

I also conducted some formal interviews with the ICC leaders, including two interviews with the CEO, who was also serving then as treasurer, and one interview with the public relations director, as well as opportunistic interviews with members. As indicated below, the search process for a new imam emerged as a key moment in which older, newer, and borrowed practices were in active consideration, so I conducted formal interviews with key actors in this search, including three interviews with the outgoing imam, one interview apiece with two candidates for the imam position, and one interview with the head of the imam search committee. Finally, to understand the ICC in its urban context, I conducted two informational interviews with the imam of the oldest African American mosque in the community regarding traditional and newer practices.

Archival Materials

In addition, analyzing related written material while conducting incidental interviews with participants at different functions and meetings helped me understand the guiding principles that might be influencing individuals' reasoning behind their actions. I read the annual reports of the ICC, which stated its mission and aims. I looked at transcripts of interviews that were conducted by an outside organization hired for evaluation. Social media also indicated the types of messages that the ICC was trying to convey, so I tracked changes made along the way to the ICC website as well as postings to its Facebook page which were largely about youth-related activities. It was useful to see where there were echoes of the formal statements in the words and thinking of the members, especially those linked to the broad institution of Islam or to ICC responses to media challenges.

Data Analysis

Using the toolkit of strategy as practice (SAP), specifically praxis, practice, and practitioner, I focused on specific instances where replacement of taken-for-granted beliefs or practices was taking place. My study revealed a significant strategic issue, with multiple aspects and stakeholders, that became my focus. The timing was fortuitous, and I could capture the process as it unfolded. The ICC was in the process of selecting a new imam, in the context of using practices that were both new and old for members as well as giving signals externally in a time of crisis. Leader transition is an occasion to study actions. I analyze the various episodes or critical incidents during the senior imam selection process because it represents a type of event that embodies the general Islamic, as well as the particular American, aspects of a highly institutionalized practice.

In this set of findings, I go through the steps in the process of selection of a new imam which occurred during my time in the field, from search committee appointment to a meeting of sustainers being cued on how to welcome the ultimately selected new imam. I created a map to capture the old practices and the new practices regarding the imam selection, which became the basis for Table 2 below. I noted where members articulated the sense of external threat, where they spoke of changes, and where they offered insistence about what would not change. I observed physical movements and subtler quiet reactions. I consider how that imam search process was embedded strategically in a response to external threat. I examined how participants in the process wrestled with the place of the ICC in the American Muslim institution, and the broad institution of Islam. Members of the ICC observed, and sometimes helped create, some calculated moves, which were enacted inside the organization but with the intention of sending signals outside the organization. A practice

lens reveals how practices were determined, how they were pitched, how people reacted, and what new practices emerged from these activities.

Findings

Focusing on the imam selection process offered an opportunistic moment in the field to see how a core part of the center that was being strategically reconsidered was approached through a series of practices. I present a set of practices that characterized a transitional moment at an organization deeply embedded in meaningful traditions. I look at the new practices in terms of both leadership moves and member responses, over a period of time as a search process was shaped that would define many things about the character and future of the organization. Participants in this process, myself included as a participant observer, were deeply invested in this transition. By focusing on practice, I can see at a fine-grained level the mix of traditional practices that were reasserted as important, new practices that were imported from a secular context to guide notions about participation, and reinvented practices that were adapted along the way to preserve the old while accepting the new.

Leadership Practices

The board of trustees was totally overhauled in the early stages of my field work. The board had been all male and mostly what would be considered the "old guard." The former board members had all been from the "old country" or the "homeland" of Islam in the Middle East. The new leaders were American born and raised, to signify that ICC was a new legitimate player in the city, and perhaps subtly to signify that ICC is not a threat, in the face of both global and local crises. That board was replaced with young professionals, half of whom were women.

At the same time, the ICC appointed a role that was essentially a "CEO" and actually was given that title. Having a CEO is not part of the logic of a religious institution, but this role stemmed from a perceived need to manage both the ICC and the image of the ICC. From a practical perspective, it was aimed at showing potential critics and skeptics in the surrounding community that the ICC was a formal organization with features that were familiar to outsiders, not a religious organization that they would not be able to understand nor a rogue organization that was dangerous and unguided. The new CEO role appeared to curious members of the organization to be a way to provide a point of contact for external interrogations and media inquiries. The position created a role—fully defined in an ongoing way by the practices of its first occupant—that was separate from the imam and from the board. This senior executive intended to lead the community spiritually as well as strategically. He was the head of religious programming. He also was in charge of representing the ICC at local interfaith events and the spokesperson who crafted a public relations strategy to give the ICC visibility as a positive force in the community.

The CEO might have been decoupled from ICC operations and made just a public relations spokesperson. However, the newly appointed CEO was the first to hold that role and wanted to shape the role. He retained a position on the board, even after the board overhaul, and was appointed onto the new board in the formal position of treasurer. The budget of the ICC was $1.2 million, mostly from donations and partly from renting some of the building facilities. The CEO managed the ICC budget, events, and external relations, with support from a small full-time management team. The composition of this management team was 50% female, something that was frequently noted to me as a new practice. The percentage of women appeared to be an important legitimating feature to mention to external

parties. Internally, members mostly explained to me that they never felt there was gender discrimination in the first place and that they were puzzled, and sometimes offended, when external parties tried to equate religion, oppression of women, and terrorism.

The religious head of the organization was the senior imam, who left the organization at about this same time, somewhat voluntarily and somewhat involuntarily. The official word from the CEO was that the imam had chosen to leave. The stories I heard from members were that the imam was being kept at relatively low pay, as a reaction from management to his frequent travels to national speaking engagements. These engagements showed his prominence as a religious scholar and brought some attention to the ICC. However, in a time with new leadership and the urgent need for frequent and very local responses to external negativity, it seemed that management preferred a more on-the-ground and present imam. Members noticed that management was trying to shield the community from these conflicts taking place backstage. The role of the imam became more visible. Under prior imams, members were aware that their personal practice could be distinct from the imam. They were able quietly to go along with whatever the board of trustees, from the old guard, might propose.

The leadership team decided not to replace this imam with a similar imam, but to rethink the position and search for a new junior imam who would also be the resident scholar. This decision created the set of practices that I tracked, one that called upon the members to be more active participants rather than quiet and private practitioners of the faith.

The Imam Search Process

The process of searching for the new imam was done in a way that had not been seen before at the ICC or in the experience of most members. The CEO had been networking with

other faith leaders in the area as part of seeking legitimate inclusion in the interfaith community, which was generally admired and appreciated in the urban area as a source for thoughtful guidance, bridge-building in times of conflict, and values-based approaches. The CEO turned to the interfaith community for ideas on how to create and lead a new set of practices, specifically a consultative process for both defining the new imam role and conducting the search. In particular, the CEO turned to a Jewish rabbi for ideas, with some sense that he was also a leader of a religion that was in the numeric minority and sometimes subjected to bigotry or misunderstanding in a predominantly Christian area.

In an unusual move that blurred faith and secular practices, the CEO also turned to a professional strategic management company and paid them about $40,000 (US$ 2014) for their consultation. That money had been raised by members with professional skills who knew how to get grants to support that kind of external consultation for a non-profit organization. The management consulting company worked with the CEO to define the standards by which the ICC's Search Committee (SC) would be selected and how they would operate. The criteria for selecting the membership of the SC included representation from the particular communities of the ICC (immigrants, converts, etc., as noted above); bringing a particular kind of knowledge or skills (from jobs outside the ICC); being actively involved with the ICC; and having the best interests of the ICC at heart. The last one was widely perceived as quite vague, because it seemed like a lot could happen as long as somehow someone said it was for the good of the ICC. It seemed to some members to provide too much latitude for unfamiliar moves.

The composition of the search committee was quite varied and included many women. The presence of women on the SC was quite visible. There was also some attention

to including members with different types of scholarly backgrounds, in terms of both their disciplined study of the faith and their attainment of advanced degrees. At the first public meeting that the SC held to begin to gather community input, the CEO explained the use of the consulting company and the rationale for who was on the search committee. It was called a "public meeting" because any of the members could come, and outsiders from the public could as well, which turned into an invitation for media scrutiny at later meetings. I noticed quite a few people in the audience nodding their heads as the CEO took pains to explain that the SC would be consulted and actively involved throughout the selection process. Throughout the meeting, the CEO kept saying things to make sure everyone was engaged, like "Are you with me still?" or "Am I boring you?" My sense was that he was surprised there was not more questioning or pushback, but the community was accustomed to listening respectfully to leaders, and then maybe rendering their opinions in other ways, not raising a hand during such a meeting.

I observed, as did some others I talked with later, that the overall change in direction from the prior traditional senior imam to a more junior imam was already pre-determined and was not part of the consultative process. The search process was presented as an example of practices of inclusiveness, but members recognized that the inclusion was beginning after the initial decision to replace the imam. They were not included in that first layer of decision.

The search for the new imam did proceed in a way that was different from past practices. In previous imam searches, the members were not involved. They kept a deferential distance and were always respectful of whatever imam was chosen. In the new practices that reflect the Americanized ICC and its perceived ideal of democracy, members were highly involved in the imam search. They felt free to voice dissenting opinions as the

process got underway. The CEO was adept at both encouraging their opinions and managing their opinions. While he single-handedly made many decisions, he almost always used the pronoun "we." He saw his role as supporting harmony between the old guard and new leadership.

The CEO and leadership team were clear that they did not want to just select a new imam who was similar to the departing imam. Instead of having an imam who volunteered a lot of unpaid time, they insisted on good compensation. A senior imam, junior imam, and Quran reader would be the core religious roles, but at the same time, it seemed to some members and to me as if they were aiming to professionalize these sacred roles, as part of the professionalization of the ICC overall.

The members of the ICC recognized that there was this need to change the ICC and to synchronize its practices to common ways of doing things that signaled being American and embracing democracy. While the professionalization of the roles seemed more like a corporate logic, the holding of participatory meetings, the invitation to take participation seriously, and results that were informed by participation were all elements of what the members understood to be the logic of "American democracy." Members were initially a bit uncomfortable about stepping into these roles, having been willing to trust the center leadership as in former times. However, they knew that being taken seriously as 'Americans' was highly valuable, so they joined in with practices that might help them signal this belonging. Most members had themselves encountered bullying in everyday life, tough questioning in conversations around the community, and even surprisingly sharp accusations and biases at interfaith dialogues that were meant to build understanding. At the roundtables for interfaith dialogues, they were quizzed about terrorism, gender relations, and holding

"anti-American" sentiments, so anything that could signal they did not hold such sentiments seemed worth a try. In this sense, practices were provisional, and emergent, possibly coalescing into something more. In this shared context of being at a time of crisis and being under scrutiny, the members were willing to experiment with new practices.

Search Committee Practices

The SC elicited a wide range of ideas about who a new imam for the ICC should be in the eyes of members, checking with both internal and external stakeholders. At times, the SC seemed quite aware of the strategic significance of their operating in a visibly more participatory manner. The members were able to use some of the practices of a consultative search process to voice their preferences and try to shape the final choice.

After the meeting to announce the nature of the search process, the very first meeting of the SC to gather member input was held. The tables that were set up as mixed-gender tables. There were eight tables with seats for eight attendees at each. This setup was immediately noted and much talked-about with me afterward. Participants were ushered in, and waved to go sit at a table, by SC members who seemed to be trying to create a mix of people at each table. One ICC staff member did ask if anyone wanted to sit at a "mono-gender" table, but the event organizer went ahead and implemented a random way of assigning attendees to tables, resulting in mixed-gender tables. This practice was far from the norm at ICC. For context, in talking to parents about the cafeteria and meeting spaces at the ICC, I had often heard deep concern that teens were permitted to hang out in mixed-gender groups. Thus, the mixed-gender tables were surprising in that they felt to some participants like an intrusion into their preferred practices. Many came to the ICC, and encouraged their children to do so, to have these traditional practices of separate spaces for men and women,

which made them feel comfortable in coming to the center as a space quite different from other spaces in their everyday lives. At the same time, the mixed-gender tables were not surprising in the context of how the SC was trying to signal that the ICC was a modern place with women in important roles, ready to be part of its urban American ecosystem.

In reaction to the setup at this first meeting, several members rearranged some of the tables and moved themselves around in a fairly creative and deliberate fashion to generate two same-gender tables. The result was a mix of six integrated and two single-sex tables at the event. The table moving was quite visible and occurred before the discussions began. Adhering to the traditional practice of separated spaces for men and women set a tone for how the members were subtly protesting and setting their own boundaries, but still willing to stay and participate. The visual image of the two types of tables, mono-gender and mixed gender, was like a representation of change and resistance to change happening all at once.

Participants noticed right away that this meeting was facilitated by a woman. In my view, and from what I heard in discussions after, she was perceived as a "non-traditional" woman by many members. She was wearing pants and a top that fell only to her waist, with a makeshift hijab. In my reflective field notes, I wrote that in terms of faith and tradition, her outfit "did not leave much to the imagination" regarding her body, which was to me quite a jarring departure from how women typically covered their body shape more fully with draping rather than tight fabrics. I also learned that this woman was selected to facilitate the first meeting only two days before it was held, even though the search process by then had been formally set up for two months. Throughout my field work, I noticed the roles and self-presentation of the women who were involved. The females, both on the management team

and in attendance at events or presenting on panels, varied in how they presented themselves and whether they wore traditional Muslim attire and head coverings.

Member Identity Dynamics During the Search Process

The ICC leadership had clearly signaled that they wanted an American to be the new imam. They were concerned with the experiences that members of the ICC were having in the community. They were also concerned with the overall external relations with and perceptions from the broader community outside the ICC, especially at a time when Muslims were being presented in the press as a threat, after the bombing incident that was just one year prior to this series of meetings. The externally facing vantage point of the leadership did not align with the inward-looking experiences of members, who were thinking of the imam in terms of their faith and their practices of living.

The native-born American members, most of whom were converts to Islam, were not very concerned about whether the imam would be an American. It seemed like they were able to be comfortable in their identity as an American Muslim and did not need to offer further proof that they belonged as Americans. They were more concerned about having an imam who could provide interpretations of the religious texts and spiritual guidance to support them in issues that came up in their daily lives. The immigrant members liked the idea of having an American imam, because they felt more of a need to prove how committed they were to being American. They wanted an imam who understood the American culture and could be the face of the community when dealing with the American public. Some immigrants even went as far as asking for a white imam, which created some noticeable tension in the room. The ICC members were aware that many American-born Muslims in the

local area were African Americans, who participated in a different mosque of their own, so adding race to the discussion of being American seemed to me to be uncomfortable.

Reactions to the Practices

The process seemed to elicit from the community what the CEO wanted from the community. A female participant said to me that, by the end of the night, though the meeting was about gauging members' interests in what they want in an imam, nonetheless it felt like it was already decided. The people from the imam selection committee were dispersed among the tables, and they already had their ideas, especially that the imam should be a white American. She had the ICC's director of civic engagement seated at her table. She said that she felt like she was supposed to agree, to assimilate to their point of view, and to come to embody what they had already decided. She said, "I felt they were feeding the people what they needed to reflect back. It was still the old mentality of top-down governing. But they were not honest about it, because it was pitched as being inclusive and a listening session."

In previous imam searches, the members were not involved. They kept a deferential distance and were always respectful of whatever imam was chosen. In the new practices that reflect the Americanized ICC and how they thought about the ideal of democracy, members were invited to be highly involved in the imam search. Some said they did feel free to voice dissenting opinions.

Management made it clear that the new imam search was a high strategic priority for the ICC, and thus participation in such an important decision-making process was valuable. They shared that they would go visit the most promising candidates for the new imam position before flying any of them in for an interview with the SC and leadership. When the finalists visited, it would not be just an interview, but performance of meaningful religious

rituals in three key areas: Khutbah, Halqa, and holding a community service. Khutbah is a religious narration or sermon that usually refers to an address delivered in the mosque during weekly Friday prayer. Halqa is a discussion group or circle, often for a particular community such as women or college students.

Crafting New Imam Selection Criteria

The creation of new criteria for selection of an imam was striking mainly in its contrast to previous practices. The previous criteria were all related to formal religious roles and training, and used phrases interpretable only to insiders who new some Arabic and the specific meanings, such as being a "Hafez" so he can lead salah, having formal religious education with multiple "Ejazah," having experience to perform different functions (Iftaa, Khutbah, marriage, funeral, mediation, and consoling), being able to lead Quran memorization Halqa, providing classes to youth, and maybe teaching Arabic.

In contrast, the new criteria focused on internal accessibility and external ambassadorial capabilities, and they used phrases entirely familiar to any search for a non-profit organization's leadership, including being accessible to the community, being versed in the local culture, providing leadership in a crisis, and building bridges between cultures and communities. There was also a focus on youth, but less on training them for adherence to the faith than on figuring out how to connect to youth and support them in navigating American culture while staying close to their faith. When youth sat together at the ICC at tables with mixed gender, some ICC members saw that as an acceptable compromise and a way to keep the youth willing to come to the ICC for some connection to their heritage but in the context of the American Muslim institution. Others saw this shift to mixed gender interactions as a tragedy of one of the faith's core principles being given away.

Because of my participation in the ICC faith community from before it was officially ICC in its current form, I knew what prior imam searches looked like, and could form a systematic comparison, which is shown in Table 2. It was interesting to me, as a former and current member, how the members were so involved in the selection, in compared to the past, although still within some limitations given there were issues pre-decided by leadership and not fully by members. It was also interesting to me the new imam would have civic as well as religious duties, which seems to fit not just the broad institution of Islam but the specific institutional context of American Islam.

Table 2

Imam Search: Contrasting Old and New Practices

Dimension of Practice	Old Practices—"Traditional"	New Practices—"Americanized"
Governance	Board of trustees from the "homeland" of Islam	Representative committee including American-born members (converts or those with immigrant parents)
Leader of the center	Religious practice and whatever the board of directors deems applicable	Lead community spiritually & religiously Head religious programing Balance among the competing views of the supporters of the "old tradition" and the "new American way" Strategize external interfaith networks Give the ICC visibility as a positive force in the community
Workload and compensation for imam	Minimal, a lot of local unpaid time, some paid work during travel to other mosques or conferences	Professionalized pay level, with an assistant imam and a "Hafez Quran" for prayer and religious instruction
Member engagement	Not involved, personal religious practice, respectful of imam	Active engagement in imam selection process, willingness to voice opposing views (of process and criteria, not of religious doctrine)
Imam selection criteria	Be a "Hafez" so he can lead salah in addition Have formal religious education with multiple "Ejazah" Perform different functions (Iftaa, Khutbah, marriage, funeral, mediation, consoling) Lead Quran memorization Halqa Provide classes to the youth Maybe teach Arabic	Accessible to community Scholarly knowledge Versed in American culture Provide leadership in a crisis Bridges cultures and communities Interact well with the youth Be spiritually uplifting and open to different thoughts and ideas

Balancing the Faith Focus and the External Focus

The new changes were not just a drift away from old practices, nor were they an internally prompted quest for change. Instead, they were a very deliberate response to external pressure. The members wanted to preserve certain key messages, about their own relationship to their faith and about the relevance of the faith for the next generation. However, in changing the messenger if not the message, they allowed new leadership to broker connections to outside parties and to make changes that were of relevance and interest for these outside parties, such as Americanization of the imam search, active presence of women, participation in interfaith dialogues, answers for press releases after terrorist actions, and availability to be visible in the local religious, civic, and security domains.

A significant moment happened at a planning retreat at the time of the search process, when the assembled group of about 60 members brainstormed a list of "what is not changing." This list was explicit, and it was gathered up and then projected on a slide at the next meeting, which was attended by about 30 sustainers who were being primed to welcome the new imam. The PowerPoint slide included the following bullets (note that "pbuh" is a common shorthand for "peace be upon him" and the underlined words were in red on the slide):

- Living and instilling Islamic ideals: Quran & life of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh
- Preserving diversity: Being open and welcoming
- Building strong families, loving our neighbors, serving humanity
- Nurturing and strengthening the youth—our future
- Championing and supporting marginalized (Women, New Muslims, Low-Income, Refugees)

- Being an intellectually & professionally strong community

This very explicit statement was informed by the core values of the broad religious institution of Islam, but also had some elements distinct to the American Muslim institution, particularly the concepts of 'diversity' and the 'marginalized.'

This list is at the heart of why the set of practices can be framed as institutional maintenance rather than institutional disruption or creation. All the changes actually buffer the core, which is the faith at the heart of the institution. It was mainly the symbolic moves to signify a new process that changed and sent a message to the outside world. The content was maintained, and the processes were disrupted.

Discussion

Using the lens of SAP helped me to see institutional maintenance as it was enacted starting from the local, everyday praxis by the formal members of the organization, elevating it into an acceptable and generalized practice across different organizational activities, to be finally adopted as the new best-practices by the institution on the field level, as other centers nationally watched the local ICC. The new practices represented change, but in a spirit of ongoing maintenance and buffering the core from change.

Perceived threats and opportunities generally change the consciousness of field actors by exposing rules that had been taken for granted, calling into question the perceived benefits of those rules, and undermining the calculations on which field relations had been based. Although when institutional scholars address the maintenance phase, they usually refer to a period of relative stability and gradual incremental changes. However, in time of existential crisis, I found that maintaining the institution led to the acceptance of drastic changes in the "taken for granted roles" while preserving as much as possible of the core values of the

institution. Thus, maintenance was not a passive time occurring between institutional creation and institutional disruption; instead, institutional maintenance was a dynamic and ongoing set of practices.

Through the SAP Lens

In this section, I summarize the types of activities seen through the SAP lens, many of which have been urged in theoretical articles (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), but with less detailed empirical attention in the literature. My findings show how on-the-ground changes occur in a way that both permits and limits change. Specifically, I consider how my SAP lens examined: everyday acts, just getting things done, engaging members, and filling in silences.

Everyday Acts

SAP depends on observing the everyday acts, seemingly sometimes mundane, and labeling and categorizing them for their possible broader significance. Particularly when a crisis arises, actors respond with a flurry of actions. Some of these actions will persist and create the building blocks of changes. Others are experiments that will not take hold. SAP has the advantage of acknowledging agents and practices without imposing a purposive or determinative logic of how the actions convert into change. It permits the multiplicity of actions, while noticing which ones take on a strategic cast.

Just Getting Things Done

Practice is concerned with all the meetings, the talking, the form-filling, and number crunching by which strategy actually gets formulated and implemented (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Getting things done involves the nitty-gritty, often tiresome and repetitive routines. In its original strategy realm, practice as craft still was as important as technical facility, essential knowledge as much tacit as formal, local as general, and persistence and detail may

win over brilliance and inspiration. For institutional theorists though, the concept of practice would encompass the prevailing institutionally scripted behaviors. During times of institutional upheaval, researchers would be looking at which practices are preserved, which ones get modified, or altogether replaced. Going further towards institution-wide change, researchers can track the diffusion process to other institutional entities. Indeed, it turned out later that the imam search process developed at the ICC was written up to be a model that was shared by a national level Islamic organization.

Engaging Members

Some members welcomed the opportunity to become actively involved. At the same time, some members were quite worried that core principles of the broad institution of Islam were being compromised to an unacceptable degree. These members did quietly voice their concerns, which is how I became aware of them, but they did not register concerns loudly. They seemed to practice what I call "passive agency," making a deliberate and conscious choice not to oppose the new directions of the ICC, largely in recognition of the need to accommodate to external scrutiny and pressures. Passive agency is not disengaged. It is a form of strategic, choiceful, emergent action. The table rearrangement incident captures what that looks like and how it is different from macro strategic responses. Research has addressed organizational window-dressing in response to external pressures, such as creating a corporate social responsibility strategy, but little attention has been given to whether and how highly invested and concerned insider members might cope with changes in on-the-ground practices that accompany that external signaling. They might wish to resist or protest but choose instead to go along.

Filling in Silences

The newer literature on SAP says that attention to practices allows for reading between the lines and filling in silences (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). As a participant observer, and as someone who is a devotee to the faith as well as a social scientist, itself a challenging balance (Majumder, 2022), I could read between the lines. For example, I could understand the discomfort at mixed gender tables or with a woman leader who was casually rather than traditionally dressed. I could know what passages of the sacred texts were relevant for a key moment, and above I included a few of those in describing what makes for a good mosque. In general, I did not weave religious texts into the findings, but the values that these texts carry are what was at stake in each moment of making change or subtly resisting change.

Contribution: SAP Enhancing Institutional Theory

My contributions are in the areas flagged in the literature review as vital for the next enhancements to institutional theory: agency and awareness; returning meaningfulness of institutions; and power dynamics.

Agency and Awareness

The embedded agency paradox stems from the fact that individuals in institutional theory are considered not just cultural dupes but also one-dimensional characters, with no self-interested motivations, who operate in a social situation under the mesmerizing influence of one institution at a time. Power and power struggle were considered to be the prerogative of institutions and not the people occupying them. Integrating the insights of SAP helps advance theory in the face of this persistent paradox.

There has been a tendency, with the rise of institutional entrepreneurship, to re-include agents into institutional theory by framing them as highly purposive, aware, and strategic in their actions toward the mobilization of change. In contrast, SAP questions whether the actors are quite so purposeful, giving credence to human actions whether deliberate or not and considering experimentation and uneven changes to be worthy of study. SAP views practitioners as agents whose ordinary practices do make a difference. Using the concept of practitioner to observe how actors utilize their individualized set of abilities, from their own standpoint, helps the researcher see scripted or unscripted actions in a situational context. Through SAP's triangulated look at the action in question (praxis, practice, and practitioner), it was easier for me to see the actual work taking place and its relationship to institutional maintenance and change.

Returning Meaningfulness of Institutions

There has been a dominant tendency to see agents as interested in breaking free from, fixing, or changing their institutions, particularly under times of threat. Unfortunately, other than the stream of research on institutional entrepreneurship, the existing literature in institutional theory provides little guidance regarding how organizations, far from the initial event, respond when an entire field's legitimacy is threatened (Desai, 2011).

Less has been considered about how agents who cherish an institution might respond when the entire premise and legitimacy of an institution is what is under threat at the time of crisis. While practice retains the notion of all that is mundane about institutional work, the notion of agents with a sense of meaningfulness—not about each and every strategic act but about the institution as a whole—can remain in sight through SAP. The path from the micro to the macro can be traced, not through actions that are always purposive or effective, but

through a flurry of attempts, experiments, failures, and renewed efforts that arise under frightening conditions of external threat to a meaningful institution. SAP preserves the notion that "response to crisis" is not a one-time move, such as creating a new regulatory compliance body or sending out press releases, but a multi-faceted, multi-practitioner, and ongoing set of activities.

Power Dynamics

As discussed above, one of the concerns in institutional theory is that, not only should agency be more fully considered, but power dynamics as well (Munir, 2015). The power dynamics captured in everyday practices in my case study had three elements. First, the leadership obviously had a particular kind of power to set the agenda and the direction, but still engaged in decision-sharing activities that appeared to share power more fully than under the old entirely top-down governance structure. Second, facing externally, the "reputational power" of other religious leaders in the area was keenly felt, and hence they were consulted in order to craft practices that would more likely be seen as appropriate and legitimate. Finally, a surprising amount of external power was exerted into the ICC through the presence of the media. While the media presence was mostly unobtrusive and even became taken for granted, that is in some ways the strongest exercise of power, subtly and without evident exertion of any force. The ICC deferred to the power of the media and the public that it represented. These aspects of the power dynamics are most evident through looking at practices, such as member involvement, cross-faith consultations, and media engagement, and they might not be as obvious in more arms-length or retrospective accounts.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research discovered a pivotal moment and tracked it while it was ongoing, using the real-time approach of SAP and moving beyond the retrospective tendency in institutional work. While that was a strength, there is the limitation that the study does not extend to the point of examining which new practices took hold in the longer run. Because SAP emphasizes that there are always ongoing renegotiations and re-enactments of strategies, there is not really a resting point at which it can be said that change has occurred. I did observe substantial changes, that were somewhat startling in their extent given that I had prior experience in this community, but it is possible that leadership changes or continued member resistance, perhaps even subtly, could reset or undo some of these changes. The dynamism of SAP is at once a strength and a limitation.

That limitation can be addressed in part by returning to the broader question at hand, about these changes satisfied the external parties who were clamoring for responsiveness and demonstrations of the kind of "appropriateness" that classic institutional theory addresses. The new practices were crafted, and accepted even if reluctantly, in the face of external surveillance. Future research can consider more fully how the practices were transmitted and receive to create the desired legitimacy. Legitimacy, and even more specifically "moral legitimacy," is generated when appearing to use "accepted techniques and procedures," especially where there is more signaling of belonging than actual outcome measures (Suchman, 1995). While legitimation and de-legitimation have been more richly studied, the concept of "re-legitimation" is a pertinent one to examine in future research. In my case, the ICC and the American Muslim institution in which it is embedded are seeking to come back after a legitimation crisis.

Conclusion

Institutions are defined as collective frames and systems that provide stability and meaning to social behavior and social interaction. Taken-for-granted scripts are a core construct that generated a wealth of research exploring their effect on individual and organizational behaviors. The prevailing focus of institutional scholars was studying the institution's capacity to constrain individual actions and shape organizational life. Institutions were viewed as distinct from those who comply, and more importantly, from the activities of compliance itself (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

Institutional theorists tended to recognize any occasion of institutional change as a sudden ‘successful’ occurrence spanning the whole institution and caused by exogenous shock or perpetuated by an institutional entrepreneur who in most cases has to deal with institutionally embedded actors determined to preserve the status quo (Lawrence et al., 2011). The grand scale theorization of institutional change led to the exclusion of the lived day-to-day institutional enactment by organizational actors and its modifying effects, small or large, on the institution they aim to serve and maintain. Looking at institutions as part of the larger society helped me locate the process of institutional change as one that is at once of large scale in its significance but mundane in its everyday enactment.

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CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE

This research project has allowed me to discover how theorizing is a pathway to understanding, and more broadly, to making sense of situations that would just be troubling and puzzling without the lens of theory. Instead of theory taking me farther afield from my topics of interest, it is theorizing that allowed me to dig into rich details and to make sense of them. It is an old and often cited idea in organization studies that "nothing is as practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1945, as cited in Van de Ven, 1989, p. 486). I found in institutional theory a body of work that could be abstract but was also deeply practical. It provided me with new ways of thinking about situations that were initially just filled with confusion and startlingly spiraling changes. Theorizing allowed me to replace certainties with questions. In the end, my questions and my research setting allowed me to speak back to the theories, with ideas about what could be extended in the theories and perhaps used by future researchers with their own questions. Institutional theory had placed the maintenance and disruption of institutions into separate categories, or perhaps a sequence that would play out over time, as old institutions that were once maintained become disrupted. However, my case study allowed me to see the simultaneity of maintenance and disruption, particularly with application to a faith-based organization. I showed the usefulness of the "strategy as practice"

toolkit as a methodology for studying institutional work and added the concept of "soft revolution" to the literature on institutional transformation during crises.

One of the open questions now is whether and how the insights from a deep probe into one very specific and meaningful institution can be extended to other settings. In many ways, I think these concepts could apply to other organizations, perhaps organizations based in other faiths, or community organizations that are highly meaningful to their members, or volunteer organizations where people engage because they choose to and not because they must. At the same time, there are elements that are very particular to my case, and not even just to the American Muslim institution, but to the specific center that I studied. Even as mosques and centers in the American context begin to relate to one another and share practices, each retains some distinctiveness, perhaps especially in the racial, ethnic, nationality, and class dimensions of who its members are and where they are located in the often-segregated geography of the United States.

It is important at once to try to generalize but also to resist generalizing. Van de Ven (1989, p. 488), in discussing the work of Chimezie Osigweh, presents the ideas of "concept travelling" and "concept stretching." With concept travelling, we can see where a concept might go to be useful in its application to varied settings. The idea of interweaving maintenance and disruption might travel far to unexpected settings. Perhaps it will not apply so much to other faith-based organizations that have attained deep legitimacy in the United States, particularly where some faiths are viewed as instrumental in creating the very idea of what is "American." The concept might travel instead to more distant settings, such as the contemporary labor movement, which is at once maintaining unions' historic practices of how to negotiate while also completely disrupting who is being mobilized, how, and for what

ends. Concepts can travel in unexpected ways. At the same time, "concept stretching" is a reminder not to overdo how we stretch a concept to fit another setting. For example, what I found about how faith-based organizations (FBOs) were understood in organization studies did not actually "stretch" very well to the case of Islam, so I used the ideas of FBOs as a starting point, eventually crafting my whole first paper around redefining and reconsidering the components and meanings of FBOs. I also have to watch out for overly stretching my concept of using "professionalization," as my case study organization did to seek legitimacy and steer closer to its view of the American ideal. It could be argued that this particular strategy of "corporatization" can even seem vulgar in a religious context, and therefore other organizations within the American Muslim institution might proceed differently. They might not have the professional cultural capital or might prefer not to use it. Perhaps they orient their integration into their neighborhoods around social entrepreneurship, setting up restaurants and offering the sharing of meals as a way to connect; there seem to be some examples of this approach among recent immigrants, such as the Somali community, even nearby to the organization that I studied. Overall, the next directions for me will involve continuing to test and refine the new approaches I offer, steering between concept travelling and concept stretching.

I envision taking this next step in my theorizing journey by probing additional issues that emerged during my field work. For my dissertation, I focused on the creation of the center itself and the imam search, which were such pivotal moments. I also learned that the center was struggling to both maintain and disrupt its practices regarding how it socialized its young members. I interviewed many parents, who hoped very much their children would continue to be interested in coming to the center, while also realizing that the center might

have to adapt a bit to keep the youth engaged. For example, the center bent its usual rules in allowing the genders to mix in its cafeteria, which was open to the wider community as part of its commitment to the development of the neighborhood. However, when it hosted an event to watch the World Cup Soccer games together, there was no alcohol served, which is a basic tenet in the practice of the Islamic faith that was not going to be renegotiated. Many people said they were glad to have a place to watch the games and cheer and be together, because there were otherwise no choices but to go to sports bars that emphasized alcohol. These balancing acts offer me some future directions for probing the question of how much to change and what not to change, the overarching question for my dissertation and a question to guide my future research.

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