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My Role as a Policy Writer in a Non-Profit Religious Organization

My devotion to the English language started in middle school. In India, we are expected to study and learn multiple languages throughout our schooling. Over 20 languages are spoken in India, and it is not unlikely that an average student takes up 3 to 4 different language courses during their secondary education. Over time, I realized my passions resided in the English language. Since I was performing poorly in my Telugu and Urdu classes, my father found a way for me to drop those classes and simultaneously enroll in multiple English courses. Subsequently, I was given the opportunity to read English literature and poetry. I was able to learn complex ideologies of Western philosophy and society. The once barred doors of feminism, western history, and culture were finally opened wide. I happily embarked on the journey that studying English paved the way for. English had become my savior and I internalized the culture that came with it. Although I am a proud multi linguistic individual, the beauty of English Language and Literature always fascinated me and will continue to do so.

After immigrating to the United States, my studies in English rhetoric and composition further developed and proved necessary to function as a competent leader, advocate, and professor. My mastery in this language granted me the professionalism and responsiveness I needed in order to be cognizant and understanding of the complex nationalism among the Muslim population in America. I was elected to serve as a Board of Trustee for Islamic Foundation North (IFN), Libertyville. The organization provides religious, cultural, educational, and social services to approximately 1000 families in Lake County. My primary responsibility includes designing and creating policies for these 501 (3) (C) nonprofit organizations. I take on

my role as a BOT member with great pride and honor, as I can serve my community by utilizing my unique knowledge and expertise in the English language.

I aspire to write policies that embody voices of concern that can be attributed to the Muslim community. My voice is firm and assertive, confining the legal and constitutional guidelines of the organization's bylaws as an active member and a volunteer. My voice as a policy maker in a non-profit organization resonates with ethos and pathos, as I situate myself conveniently by championing western philosophies of feminism that are concurrently represented in my religion. These philosophies influence every individual's character development within the community. My relationship between western culture and religion is profound and divine and I work to bridge the similarities and differences in my writing process. My writing voice is as complex and situational as is the topics to which I address as a Muslim American leader.

At times, the relationship between my life's perspectives and religion caused problems of dissonance within my sense of identity in the Muslim community. It was challenging for me to demonstrate my faith-based teachings to the Muslim community, as these teachings were directly connected and associated with western philosophies rather than the cultures many of us were raised in. During these times, my writing techniques became especially important. I had the task of uprooting cultural norms and ethics in the organization's structure in order to replace it with true Islamic, solely faith based, ideals. The deviance in my writing at the time was supplemented with ethos and pathos, which became central to my writing process. It gave my writing a confident, evidence-based voice that was incapable of being challenged by the current religious leaders.

The methods of policy writing involve specific criteria and conventions. This includes selecting a material, focusing on the concept, debating about it in the committee meetings, and finally properly referencing and presenting it in a clear logical structure. This genre offered me immense power and authority. Irene Clark further explained that “Genre influences not only the text itself but also the roles played by both writers and readers as they are constructed by that text in a social context” (146). Irene Clark’s statements were in fact applicable to me in the IFN community. The members provided me with the authority to compose a policy to control the socio-cultural situations of this organization. They did this by granting an equal and respectable position to a woman within this organizational hierarchy. The genre of policy making influenced my role in the community’s social context.

With the same acquired authority, I went on to successfully initiate and design the organization’s first Sexual Harassment Policy. The policy aimed to ensure that we maintain the community dynamism in a healthy manner to respect women in the utmost pious environment. I assumed the authoritative role as I yearned to learn from the paralleled American society’s methods of response and intolerance of any forms of sexual misconduct and harassment. My study of the English language mirrored candid philosophical thoughts that other members of the board mistakenly believed were purely western and foreign. An excerpt from this policy is written below:

“Once the allegation of potential sexual harassment is raised, all persons who have knowledge of the issue are on notice, and the IFN is responsible for ensuring that a proper investigation is undertaken and investigate all claims, including accusations that later turn out to be false.” (Sexual Harassment Policy)

My writing often did not reverberate with the religious leaders/clergies and their level of religious expectations. I faced difficulties and overcame overwhelming odds in order to convince my audience to adopt this harassment policy that could potentially be used to hold priests and clergies accountable- if in fact the policy's rules and processes were disobeyed. This principled genre of policy writing empowers the writer to create a change that could serve as a moral compass to the entire community.

As a part of the policy writing process, I acknowledged the need for scripture based evidence for my persuasive, challenging arguments that policy was founded upon. The following set of statements focus on the role of men in Islam as mentioned in the Quran. I had difficulty in translating these verses in the English language because the current religious leaders were hesitant in accepting a translation that may make them seem inferior and deviant in the eyes of the Islamic law. However, my goal was to summarize the main ideas presented in the Holy Scripture, which proved to be a daunting task.

[Quran 24:30] "Tell the believing men that they shall subdue their eyes (and not stare at the women), and to maintain their CHASTITY. This is purer for them. God is fully Cognizant of everything they do."

The respect for the woman was given in a conditional manner in Muslim culture. This depended upon her modest dress style that included covering her hair with a scarf. I wrote this policy by emphasizing the expected behavior of men irrespective of women's dressing style. The Quran mentions clearly that men should subdue their eyes and maintain respect for women. This is not conditional upon whether or not a woman covers her hair or maintains a wardrobe of modest clothing. Following true Islamic ideals, men should respect women unconditionally.

Hence, my voice encompassed credibility, evidence, and passion. I wanted men and women to freely mingle in an atmosphere of respect and trust as it happens in an American society.

After the successful implementation of this policy, I composed several other policies and procedures. These included the Sexual Harassment Policy, Code of Conduct Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy, and the Grievance Policy. As Irene Clark rightly explains that writers at times have to pretend to be experts in the field, when they acquire the responsibility of composing policies, “Of course, it also must be acknowledged that any new writing task intended for an unfamiliar discourse community requires some form of pretense: the necessity of pretending to be an expert when you are really a novice and to write as if you have been long acquainted with information and perspectives that you learned only recently”.

When I started researching the material required to write these policies, I was overwhelmed. It was intense as it involved legal statutes involving the US Constitution, Bylaws, and the Department of Homeland Security. The writing is defined by circumstances to conceptualize the scholarly information, the legal information, and lastly the constitutional guidelines of a religious organization. My composing process is the illustration of ideas or concepts presented in a logical structure following the conventions of proper formats of genres; adhering to the writing techniques of different forms of genres to fulfill my writing commitment with a clear purpose to inform and argue.

I write with an authoritative voice of pathos that emerged and flourished during my Board of Trustee position. The position was given to me via cultural expectations of society that are deeply rooted within my own perception of my ethnicity. I try to follow the form of writing the policies, which involves first identifying the problem, establishing the process, researching,

preparing a draft and then presenting it to the committee, adoption, communication, review, and evaluation. These policies are meant to align the behavioral expectations of individual members in a religious organization. I had an important role and responsibility of reaching out to the religious community as the constructed audience with information that is clear, readable, and concise. I was a confident writer, and the assurance is being reflected in the written document as I was informing the affected people (community) with clear explanations, guidelines, and correct procedures to follow and comprehensible practical details to implement the policy.

I wrote another policy titled, The Conflict of Interest Policy. I followed the conventions of the composing process of the genre of policy making by doing extensive research and aligning the guidelines with federal expectations of good governance. This is especially important when you are presented with leaders who are associated in business relationships with vendors that are contracted to a nonprofit organization. The Internal Revenue System gave me the protocol I built upon, as it contains a detailed explanation of the term “Conflict of Interest”. The messages in both the policy documents are clear and I followed the steps thoroughly. My voice was of concern and passion that places of worship should exhibit the highest code of conduct. The policy was used as an instrument to gauge the elected members’ credibility in terms of dealing with financial situations and it must be signed yearly. The Conflict of Interest Policy Statement included: Purpose, Definitions, Procedures

The policy-making genre entails policy statements, describing and defining the key concepts, and implementation. When I was writing the last phase of implementation, my tone was clear and followed the logical order of sequencing of events and actions reflecting my voice of ethos and pathos. Barbara Lui asserts that “genre and situation are so linked as to be inseparable, but it is genre that determines situation as well as situation that determines the genre” (Lui 75). My

role as a policy writer encompassed a socio-cultural responsibility that was embedded in researching and composing a process in catering to a then uninformed community on legal guidelines. Religious places of worship are managed differently in different parts of the world. I sought a mission to incorporate moral values into the already established laws of American society. Hence the genre of policy writing determines the writing situation that enforces moral and legal responsibility upon the writer. I find my interests immensely aligning with this genre. My passions in religion, activism and philosophy are incorporated into my style of writing most effectively in this genre and I am confident in my ability to convey my voice as ethos through this approach.