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A COMPARISON OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF  
DEARBORN AND HAMTRAMCK, MICHIGAN

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## ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS

### *Abstract*

American mainstream media outlets often portray Muslim communities in the United States as a single homogenous entity whose members generally share the same experience. Yet, academic researchers often emphasize the high levels of internal diversity displayed by Muslim communities in the United States. This thesis examines how the shared experience and internal diversity narratives are influenced by the similarities and differences in the socioeconomic status and political participation between the two most visible Muslim communities in the United States; Dearborn and Hamtramck, Michigan. By means of a thorough analysis of scholarly material, reports from Islamic civil rights and advocacy groups and official census data on demographics, this thesis shows that the relation between socioeconomic status and political participation and notions of universality and multiplicity within Muslim communities is in fact bilateral. This implies that both shared experiences and internal diversities can be found between, and within, the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck. As both the general public and academics seek to better understand the growing group of Muslims in the United States, this thesis suggests that comparative analyses of Muslim communities' socioeconomic statuses and levels of political participation are especially helpful in detecting both broader patterns and internal idiosyncrasies among and between ethnic and religious minorities.

**Keywords:** *Dearborn; Hamtramck; Michigan; Muslim community; political engagement; socioeconomic status; ethnicity; internal diversity; shared experience*

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## INTRODUCTION

Before newly elected President Trump signed Executive Order 13769, also known as the Muslim ban, Muslims did not seem to occupy much of a pivotal role in American society to me. Although I knew many of the larger cities in the United States accommodated considerable Muslim communities, they remained virtually invisible to me during a good part of my studies in Nijmegen. However, when newspaper headlines reported on the massive crowds that gathered at airports across the nation to protest the signing of the executive order and detainment of nationals from multiple Muslim-majority countries at the end of January 2017, I became acutely aware of the Muslim presence in the United States.

From John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York to San Diego's Lindbergh Field, demonstrators seemed to provoke a sense of pride and harmony among American Muslims with various ethnic backgrounds (Alter, pars. 8-11; Pollock, par. 4). The protests made it seem as if President Trump's executive order genuinely united American Muslims, regardless of their ethnocultural backgrounds, through a shared experience of prejudice and vulnerability (Ad-Dab'bagh 178). The nationwide rallies not only increased the Muslim community's visibility to me, but also seemed to confirm my presumption of the American Muslim community being a single, homogenous entity whose members all had similar political objectives.

When I started investigating the Muslim presence in the United States, however, I started noticing that scholars who studied Muslim American identities frequently highlighted the immense degree of internal diversity that exists within the Muslim American communities. This made me realize that the coverage of the Muslim ban airport protests might perhaps have painted a rather rosy picture of the Muslim community's collective cohesion, and that the general public outside of this small group of experts might not be fully aware of the complexities within the Muslim communities of the United States.

Encouraged by the dichotomy that appears to exist between the academic field and public domain on the perception of Muslim communities in the United States, I set out to document the aspects that play a role in the understanding of the Muslim experience in the United States as either based on commonality or multiplicity. To achieve this, I will describe, compare and

analyze the socioeconomic status and degree of political engagement of members of the most visible Muslim communities in the United States: Dearborn and Hamtramck, Michigan.

The Muslim communities of these cities on the edge of Detroit were involuntarily thrust into the limelight following the 9/11 attacks, when questions were raised about their role in the terrorist attacks (Jamal and Naber in Omanson 16). Islamophobic rhetoric and expressions of racism sharply intensified in the United States in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Vaisse in Monshipouri 62), so when the nation's first ever Muslim-majority city council was elected in Hamtramck (pronounced *ham-TRAM-ik*) in November 2015, a massive public outcry over the potential institution of shariah law and invasion of Muslim terrorists was sparked (Aghajanian, par. 2).

The Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck hence had similar experiences of condemnation and prejudice, but discussions on the experience of these communities generally tended to overlook their internal diversities. This, combined with their high visibility, is what makes the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck to duly qualify for further analysis.

Previous research on the topic of this thesis has been conducted by several experts in the fields of history and politics, ethnography and anthropology, but their research was primarily centered on the universality of Muslim experiences in the greater Detroit area. Relatively little academic research has however been conducted on the internal diversities that seem to exist within Muslim communities of specific cities, but a handful of scholars did provide information valuable to the scope of this thesis.

Andrew Shryock, professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, has conducted extensive research on the internal composition of greater Detroit's Arab and Muslim populations. Shryock found that after the 9/11 terror attacks, many Arab and Chaldean adults living in the greater Detroit area grew rather anxious about their safety, were disrespected for ethnicity or religion reasons and experienced severe prejudice towards them (Shryock and Lin 282). Despite that, Shryock also found that the Arab and Muslim enclaves of greater Detroit are flourishing, as they achieved great political prominence, are "highly institutionalized" and their principal organizations are very effective (Shryock and Lin 282). Shryock emphasizes both the negativity and high levels of political attainment that Detroit's Arab and Chaldean citizens

experienced together, but barely takes any notice of internal variances that may exist along ethnic or racial demarcations. His work on itself will therefore be helpful, but insufficient for establishing a thorough comparison of the socioeconomic and political status of Dearborn and Hamtramck's ethnically and racially diverse Muslim communities.

Another expert in the field is Sally Howell, associate professor of history and director of the Center for Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan in Dearborn. Howell has written numerous books and articles on Arabs and Muslims in greater Detroit and argues that although Arab and Muslim immigrants had similar socioeconomic characteristics to other ethnic and religious minorities when they came to the Detroit area, the Muslim community nowadays demonstrates both incredible solidarity and polarization across the different cultural divides ("Muslims in Detroit"). Even though Howell is a highly respected authority in her field of research and she contributed greatly to the corpus on Muslims in metropolitan Detroit, her work tends to focus primarily on Arab Muslim experiences and consequently pays less attention to Muslims from outside the Arab world, making it difficult to relate some of her findings to Muslims of other ethnicities who live in the Dearborn and Hamtramck areas too.

Shikha Dalmia is a senior policy analyst at the Reason Foundation, a nonprofit libertarian think tank, and is one of the few researchers who analyzed the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck and their respective socioeconomic statuses and degrees of political participation specifically. In "Muslim in America" and "A Closer Look", Dalmia suggests that the Muslim community in itself is not the coherent contingent it is often believed to be and that the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck should rather be perceived as two different points on the narrative arc of Muslim assimilation in America. Dalmia has closely studied the topic of this thesis and admirably succeeds in incorporating the internal diversity aspect in her work. However, as she frequently discusses the power of exterior factors in the unfolding of a Muslim experience, she often seems to understate the empirical information that underlies the internal socioeconomic and political status of Muslim communities in Dearborn and Hamtramck.

Although the extensiveness of Shryock's, Howell's and Dalmia's previous research has verified the relation between the shared experiences and internal diversities of greater Detroit's

Muslim communities to be a highly significant subject matter, and in-depth, comparative and explanatory analysis of the socioeconomic status and political participation of the two most visible Muslim communities in the United States appears to be absent.

This thesis therefore seeks to evaluate how the relation between similarities and differences in the socioeconomic status and political participation of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities contribute to the shared experience and internal diversity that seems to exist within Muslim communities in general. The research question that comes with the subject of this thesis is; How does the relation between the similarities and differences in socioeconomic status and political participation of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities contribute to shared experience and internal diversity narratives? Subquestions that will assist in answering this research question include questions such as; What is the history of the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck?; Why do the socioeconomic status and political participation of these Muslim communities differ from or resemble each other?; How does the ethnic composition of Muslim communities in Dearborn and Hamtramck affect their socioeconomic status and political participation?

In order to be able to conscientiously conduct research I will employ a variety of analytical techniques. First and foremost, I will examine an extensive body of academic literary texts that deal with the historical and current socioeconomic and political positions of Muslims in the Detroit metropolitan area. Interpretations of newspaper publications, interviews with parties that have an interest in the research subject, reports on the social, economic and political status of Muslims from Islamic advocacy groups and census data and statistics are part of the research procedure as well.

The facts and figures that will be used in this thesis have been collected by the United States Census Bureau and were included in its annual American Community Survey. This survey is a prime source for detailed information on Dearborn and Hamtramck's population composition, housing situation, employment rates, education levels, and poverty rates. As 2017 is the latest American Community Survey available (the 2018 survey has not been released yet) and a five-year time span is long enough to distinguish and interpret explicit changes, this thesis largely draws on data from the 2013-2017 American Community Survey.

The United States Census Bureau's online database however often fails to provide specified information on ethnicity and demographic distribution in particular, and therefore this thesis includes data retrieved from the website [StatisticalAtlas.com](http://StatisticalAtlas.com) as well. [StatisticalAtlas.com](http://StatisticalAtlas.com) is a website created by Cedar Lake Ventures, Inc., a small company based in the Minneapolis area which develops interactive web-based tools. On this website, data from the 2012-2016 American Community Survey is presented in neatly arranged graphic charts and maps.

Although the data on this website comes from an earlier version of the American Community Survey, I will use the data from the 2012-2016 and 2013-2017 American Community Survey interchangeably, as I consider the one-year difference to be of minor effect to the large-scale developments regarding Dearborn and Hamtramck's ethnic, religious, socioeconomic and political demographics. Unless otherwise indicated, numbers and percentages on matters such as ethnicity, demographic distribution, housing costs and income in this thesis are therefore provided by both [StatisticalAtlas.com](http://StatisticalAtlas.com) and the official United States Census Bureau website. As the collection of information and statistics was such a labor-intensive process and I was limited by time and space, this thesis primarily revolves around empirical evidence found in factual data instead of theoretical frameworks and dynamics. A complete list of official census tables that were used is then also included in the bibliography of this thesis.

Other potentially problematic issues may be that the United States Census Bureau does not collect data on religious affiliation and that it designates ethnic Arabs as being "white", thereby impeding the possibility of an accurate count of Muslims and ethnic Arabs in the United States. Estimates and analyses made by scholars, independent research centers and reports from Muslim civil rights and advocacy groups possibly compensate for the lack of ethnic differentiation in the official national census, but require due caution as well. Understating or exaggerating the estimated size of the Muslim population might be supportive of the objectives of particular advocacy groups. With this in mind, this thesis is designed to become a well balanced research project which adds valuable substance to the existing discourse on shared experiences and internal diversities within the Muslim communities in Dearborn and Hamtramck and the United States in general.

This thesis consists of three chapters and a final conclusion. In order to create a coherent and comprehensive overview of my findings, I opt to discuss the subject of this thesis by means of a comparative structure which will ultimately yield an adequate answer to the research question. By inquiring into the socioeconomic and political characteristics of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities separately, I will not only be able to discern resemblances between both communities, but distinguish qualities specific to each community as well.

The first chapter deals with the socioeconomic and political position of the Muslim community in Dearborn and analyzes how the initial, largely Arab and blue-collar Muslim community has evolved in an ethnically diverse, increasingly middle-class mouthpiece for Muslim America. Chapter Two has a similar structure to Chapter One, but discusses how Hamtramck's Muslim community turned a small, almost exclusively Polish Catholic town into a Muslim immigrant haven that is extremely diverse and impoverished at the same time. Chapter Three then offers an analysis of the resemblances and discrepancies between the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck, in which their histories of migration to southeast Michigan, ethnic composition, socioeconomic status and degree of political engagement will be critically compared.

This thesis concludes by suggesting that the similarities and differences between the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck show that for a truthful depiction of any Muslim community to occur, internal diversities should perhaps be considered as important as shared experiences, as the former in fact signify much more about the community's (often overlooked) uniqueness. Were this the case more often, then broader socioeconomic and political patterns within other Muslim communities or different ethnic and religious groups could be distinguished sooner and more easily as well.

## CHAPTER ONE — DEARBORN: SHARIAH LAW OR SHAWARMA LAW?

Dearborn, Michigan is not just any municipality on the outskirts of Detroit but a city in possession of a captivating and controversial history. Next to being the official home town of Henry Ford, godfather of the American automobile industry, and site of Ford Motor Company's world headquarters, Dearborn once was the domain of mayor Orville L. Hubbard. Also known as the "Dictator of Dearborn", Hubbard was infamous for being "the most outspoken segregationist north of the Mason-Dixon line" (Good qtd. in Loewen 157). While Dearborn residents enjoyed swift snow removal and prompt trash collection programs, Hubbard's vigorous campaign to "Keep Dearborn Clean" is generally understood to have been a euphemism for his desire to keep Dearborn *white* (Ramirez and Dickson, par. 8). When he left office after a thirty-six-year reign in 1978, fewer than twenty African Americans resided in Dearborn — a city with 90,000 residents at the time (Loewen 157). Hubbard's views on race and ethnicity extended beyond African Americans, though (Warikoo, par. 8). His grievances toward the financial and political power of Jewish people, ubiquitous Irish Catholic corruption, and immigration from the Middle East led Dearborn to become a white enclave of exclusivity surrounded on three sides by the predominantly African American city of Detroit.

Times have changed, however. Fast-forward forty years from Hubbard's departure and one can see that Dearborn's ethnographic makeup has changed dramatically. Dearborn now holds one of the most substantial Arab and Muslim communities in the United States. The first wave of Arab immigrants arrived in the Detroit area in the late 1880s and consisted mainly of Lebanese and Syrian Christians who left their homeland for better economic opportunities in southeast Michigan (Khater, par. 9). Industrial development and the automotive industry boom spurred further immigration of people from the Middle East, including many Muslims from Yemen, Iraq and Palestine, to the Detroit area in the teens and twenties of the twentieth century.

The Immigration Act of 1924 temporarily put a halt to immigration from Asia and imposed quotas on the number of immigrants from the Middle East. Migration from the Middle East however resumed in an increasing tempo when the 1924 immigration act was replaced by the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. Hordes of Arab immigrants consequently arrived in

the second half of the twentieth century, mostly due to political and civic turmoil in their countries of origin. The foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli wars, the bloody fifteen-year Lebanese civil war, the Iraq-Iran war, the civil wars in Yemen and the Gulf War caused many Arab Muslims to relocate to the United States, of which a reasonable number settled in the Detroit area (Jouppi, pars. 21-26).

Today, roughly forty percent of Dearborn residents are of Arab descent, many of whom are Muslim (Wigle in Ingle 236). Although not every Arab is Muslim and not every Muslim is Arab in Dearborn, this former Detroit suburb has undeniably become epicentral to the national public debate on Muslim assimilation and the existence of an Islamic threat in the United States. Critics, mainly from the conservative side of the political spectrum, occasionally claim that radical Muslims turned Dearborn into *Dearbornistan*, an Islamic bulwark which enforces shariah law, is off-limits to local police forces and functions as a hotbed of homegrown terrorists (Allan, par. 5; Mathias, par. 9). The persecution of Jews and the imposition of regressive sexual norms on women are believed to be additional consequences of Muslim settlement in southeast Michigan, mostly due to Muslims' fundamental incapability to embrace American liberal democratic values (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 5).

Whether these allegations are true or not has to be determined by a close analysis of Dearborn's largest and ethnically diverse religious minority, which is believed to be infinitely more complex than the train of thought which leads to public outcries that castigate the city's Muslim community in its entirety. Some Dearborn Muslims have already mocked the shariah accusations by saying that they rather adhere to "shawarma law" (Zaniewski, par. 2), but it might be especially useful to look at classifications of education, occupation and income in order to debunk negative misconceptions and offer more constructive narratives about the different socioeconomic and political positions of Muslims in Dearborn.

### 1.1 MUSLIM DEARBORN TODAY

According to data collected by the United States Census Bureau, Dearborn today has a population of 95,000. While the exact number of Muslims in Dearborn remains hard to determine as the official census does not collect data on religious affiliation, the Muslim

community of Dearborn is generally known to be highly visible and deeply influential (Shryock 1).

The Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS), an extensive survey of greater Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities which aimed to explore their post-9/11 experiences, sense of identity and belonging and general well-being is considered to be one of the most valuable sources on the Arab and Muslim characteristics of metropolitan Detroit. Although the DAAS findings might be regarded as somewhat dated and apply to a larger area than the topographical subject of this thesis, I will extrapolate its estimates and ratios to my case study of Dearborn as the study continues to provide highly useful information to this day and the proportion of Muslim immigrants in the Detroit region has only increased over the years (Shryock and Lin in DAAS Team 44). Estimates regarding the Muslim community of Dearborn will therefore only be conservative and numbers may be significantly higher in reality. DAAS findings show that forty-two percent of Arabs living in metropolitan Detroit are Muslim. This religious entity can be further categorized into a Shia majority of fifty-six percent and a Sunni minority of thirty-five percent, which is at odds with the Shia-Sunni ratio worldwide (Shryock and Lin in DAAS Team 43).

If these estimates are extended to the Dearborn case study, then forty-two percent of the approximately forty-four percent of Dearborn's residents who reported to be of Arab ancestry are Muslim. The expected Muslim population of Dearborn is therefore reckoned to be 18,000, which is about twenty percent of Dearborn's entire population if African American, Asian and other smaller ethnic Muslim minority groups are taken into consideration as well. Other sources estimate Dearborn's Muslim population to be 40,000, which is about forty percent of its entire population (Bryan 2012; Dalmia 2016). Despite the size and rich history of the Muslim community of Dearborn, its status as representative of the entire American Muslim population that has been imposed on them was only reluctantly accepted by the community itself (Cainkar 191).

Dearborn's Muslim community may be an established one, with many of its members able to trace back their ancestors to the earliest waves of immigration from the Middle East, but not every Dearborn Muslim has been exposed to the same amount of American daylight. In

2017, 27.8% of Dearborn's residents were foreign born, of which two-thirds have become a naturalized citizen. Of the foreign born population, 36.8% was born in Lebanon, 21.8% in Yemen, and 11.4% in Iraq. Dearborn's Muslim community does not only consist of established Arab American families whose ancestors came to the Detroit area for economic opportunities in the early twentieth century. Reunited families of refugees in the 1970s and '80s and more recent arrivals from war-torn countries in the Middle East also cause Dearborn's Muslim community to hail "predominantly from the Middle East" (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 12).

Dearborn's Muslim community can therefore best be described as a largely Arab body in which internal polarities prevail. The factional divide between Dearborn's adherents of the Shia branch of Islam (a large Lebanese majority) and their Sunni counterparts (an Iraqi minority) has greatly complicated the opportunity to collectively condemn what many Americans perceive to be acts of Islamic violence. The possibility to alleviate tensions between Americans fearful of Dearborn-bred domestic Islamic terrorism and Dearborn's Muslim community is being dismissed due to a "sectarian rift" in which:

Shiites see Al Qaeda and ISIS — the worst twenty-first century terrorist groups — as Sunni terrorists, not "Islamic" terrorists. They do not think 9/11 or the San Bernardino and Orlando attacks have any more to do with them than the Catholic pedophiliac priest scandal has to do with Protestants. (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 49)

Shikha Dalmia's argument shows that the Muslim community of Dearborn simply cannot be perceived as a uniform contingent of indistinguishable ethnic and religious constituents, but consists of a rather heterogenous collection of distinct branches of Islam whose members often wish to be recognized as such. Religious variance is however not the only aspect that distinguishes the ethnically diverse members of Dearborn's Muslim community (Cwiek, par. 42). An exploration of Dearborn Muslims' urban dispersal, housing conditions, educational achievement, occupational fields and income levels will demonstrate that these factors are conducive to the Muslim community's internal multiplicity, too.

## 1.2 SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Not only is Dearborn's Muslim community ethnically and religiously diverse, its members also have entirely different socioeconomic statuses. As Sarah Cwiek states, some of Dearborn's Muslims are "relatively wealthy and professional", while others are "predominantly poor and working-class" (par. 42). Dearborn's Muslim community's history of immigration did not only bring poorly educated, blue-collar workers for jobs in the automotive industry, but the conflicts in the Middle East caused Muslims with a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds to relocate to the Dearborn area. Under the Muslim migrants that settled in Dearborn due to conflicts in their homelands, many were highly skilled doctors, lawyers or engineers. Today, over fifteen percent of Michigan's medical doctors are Muslim, and so are ten percent of all pharmacists, more than seven percent of dentists, 6.9% of podiatrists and 6.1% of osteopaths (Jackman, par. 4).

By examining the socioeconomic status of Dearborn's Muslim community, one might gain profound insight into the economic and social relations toward others within and outside of the Muslim community. Socioeconomic factors are major determinants of, for instance, one's health (Hayward et al. 2000; Darin-Mattsson et al. 2017), mortality rate (Pillay-Van Wyk and Bradshaw 2017) and political participation among youth (Ahmad 2015). A study of these socioeconomic factors can be helpful in exhibiting patterns of similarity and inequity, and might indicate where the difficulties and possibilities to narrow the gaps between Dearborn's various ethnic and religious groups lay.

### 1.2.1 HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIVING PATTERNS

Dearborn is Michigan's seventh-largest city population wise, but its population is primarily concentrated along the city's western and eastern borders. Dearborn's residential living patterns moreover show that the city is fairly segregated, with Arabs living overwhelmingly in the city's densely populated eastern neighborhoods. In neighborhoods such as Hemlock, Salina and Eastborn, over three-quarters of the population claims to have Arab roots. This Arab contingent can however be divided into several subgroups. Whereas Hemlock and Eastborn are home to a substantial Lebanese community and have a modest Iraqi presence, it are Yemenis and Pakistanis who make up a large part of the population in Salina. Countless ethnic Lebanese and Iraqi restaurants and bakeries such as Al Ameer, Iraqi Kabob and the revered Shatila bakery can be

found in Hemlock and Eastborn. These neighborhoods are even home to a *Zaatar w Zeit* franchise, a Lebanese company with over seventy urban eatery franchises across the Middle East. Salina's Yemeni community is represented by multiple ethnic Yemeni restaurants such as Sheeba, Aden, Al Nawras and Arabian Village. Salina residents can moreover easily visit the Yemen American Cultural Center, a community center where parties and other cultural events can be organized, and Muslim women are welcome to buy their abayas at Al Wihda Fashion Plus. Each neighborhood also has multiple mosques, which are generally dominated by one ethnicity, but even more so in the Detroit area (Heft in Omanson 46). This situation, in which ethnic groups are not particularly stimulated to interact with each other as most of their daily necessities can be found within a few blocks from their houses, seems to contribute to the previously mentioned division within Dearborn's Muslim community.

Despite the apparent absence of communication between Dearborn's various ethnic groups of Muslims, the city seems to have been able to preserve its reputation as an attractive destination for Muslim immigrants from the Middle East. The median home value in Dearborn increased by 20.2% between 2013 and 2017 to \$124,200, an amount that is only slightly below the Michigan average. The housing stock of Dearborn's eastern neighborhoods is, according to Suleiman Hamdan, low-cost and of decent quality (34), and has historically been reserved for blue-collar workers (Howell in "Old Islam" 105). The percentage of vacant housing units declined by only 0.9% between 2013 and 2017, however, but Dearborn's percentage of vacant housing units is still well below the Michigan average.

What seems to be responsible for Dearborn's appeal to migrant Muslims, are precisely the mosques that play a part in the city's residential segregation. Many of Dearborn's vacant buildings have been filled by urban immigrant mosques. Persistent property vacancy does not contribute to raising local real estate values, but when immigrant mosques occupy these vacant spaces, real estate values within the neighborhood tend to increase significantly (Karam in "Rust Belt Revitalization" 258). The reason for the rising real estate values in neighborhoods where mosques are being established is that living in close proximity to a mosque is not only convenient but also a major status symbol among congregants (Howell in Karam "Rust Belt Revitalization" 258).

Dearborn's Muslim community and the ethnic minorities that are part of it hence appear to live fairly separated lives in small but well-maintained houses in the densely populated and predominantly Arab neighborhoods of eastern Dearborn. Mosques that now occupy formerly vacant buildings exerted a great attraction on Muslims from specific ethnic subgroups and have been instrumental in the revitalization of deprived urban districts. Not only did real estate values increase because of it, but dynamic ethnic business districts sprouted in the vicinity of these mosques as well (Karam in "Rust Belt Revitalization" 259), causing the necessity to venture outside the neighborhood's confines for groceries, employment and spirituality to become practically redundant.

### 1.2.2 EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

About one third of Hemlock and Eastborn residents of twenty-five years and older do not have a high school diploma, while this rate is as high as 53.8% in Salina. Only eleven percent of these neighborhoods' local residents of twenty-five years and older have obtained a bachelor's degree, compared to Dearborn's average of 17.2%. Gender differences in educational attainment are also noticeable in these neighborhoods. Women are 185% more likely to have no education at all than men in Eastborn, while men in Salina are over a thousand times more likely to attain a doctorate than women. More generally though, women in Dearborn are becoming better educated. The proportion of women of twenty-five years and older with only a high school diploma dropped by 1.1 percentage points while the ratio of women with a graduate or professional degree increased by 0.8 percentage points between 2013 and 2017.

Although women accounted for 42.9% of Dearborn's civilian employed population, they are still overrepresented in traditionally female industries such as education services, health care and social assistance (74.4%). The Impact Report of Muslim Contributions to Michigan, carried out by Muslims for American Progress (MAP) in cooperation with the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), however found that "many Muslim women are leading the way to increasing gender parity in the field [of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] and spurring new developments in their respective areas of expertise" (Karam in "Muslims for American Progress" 8). Muslim women in Dearborn and Michigan more generally are becoming better educated and are increasingly encouraged to pursue careers in fields that are being

regarded as traditional male domains. The salience of education as an indicator for one's socioeconomic mobility has therefore been demonstrated by Dearborn's female Muslims and is supported by Shryock and Lin, who contend that education and income predict each other (DAAS Team 49).

### 1.2.3 EMPLOYMENT, JOBS AND INCOME

Dearborn used to be a vital component of the automobile industry's global capital, Detroit. Thousands of migrants from the Middle East followed when Henry Ford moved production from Highland Park, where greater Detroit's first mosque opened in 1921, to Dearborn's vast Rouge plant and offered laborers a five-dollar daily wage. A large part of the earliest Arab American community in Dearborn worked in the area's booming auto industry at the time, but as the population grew rapidly, so did the need for grocery stores (Cwiek, par. 30). Arab Americans gradually began building their own ethnic shops, restaurants and other businesses, and eventually ran hundreds of them, creating an "enduring and visible commercial legacy" (Stiffler qtd. in Cwiek, par. 31). Additionally, Iraqi Chaldeans, a group of Catholics who often do not identify themselves as Arab, ran many liquor stores as this was the task they had been assigned in Muslim-majority Iraq (David 155).

The stereotype of Arab Americans owning most of the grocery and convenience stores in Dearborn therefore actually seems to be an accurate fact which roots can be traced back to the earliest waves of Lebanese and Syrian immigration (Stiffler in Cwiek, par. 32). Arabs in the Dearborn area are often active in the small-business sector and own and manage a variety of businesses. Dearborn's ethnic Arab restaurants, fruit and vegetable markets, convenience stores and gas stations are usually family-owned and generate employment for a considerable number of kin and other members of the Arab community (Abraham et al. in Omanson 52).

Arab Americans in Dearborn can be found working a wide variety of jobs, however. The variety of fields of employment Arab Americans find themselves working in seems to reflect the area's ethnic heterogeneity. In 2017, the main fields of industry in which Dearborn residents were employed were manufacturing (17.1%), retail (14.4%) and healthcare (12.8%). Foreign born residents and those who are not an American citizen are represented most in the educational services, healthcare and social assistance, retail trade, and manufacturing sectors. The most

common occupations in Hemlock are sales and related, administrative, and production. Relatively few Hemlock residents have a job in the fields of science, engineering, or are health technicians. In Salina, production, food service, and transportation are the most common occupations, while not a single person in Salina has a job in the legal, science, or engineering sector. Transportation, sales and related, and production are most popular employment fields in Eastborn, where relatively few people work in the legal, healthcare, and computers and math sectors compared to the Dearborn average.

Perhaps foreseeably, Hemlock, Salina and Eastborn are among the neighborhoods with the lowest median household incomes in all of Dearborn. The median household income in Salina is reported to be as low as \$21,700, which is 55.2% lower than the Dearborn average. Income inequality between the predominantly Arab neighborhoods and areas without a large Arab presence is not the only issue in Dearborn. Differences also exist within the confines of the ethnic and racial realm of Dearborn's Muslim community. Muslims of Arab origin tend to occupy the higher-income jobs, whereas the lower-income jobs are often occupied by African American Muslims (Omanson 44). Moreover, African Americans (although not necessarily Muslim) are significantly overrepresented in Dearborn's poverty charts. African Americans constituted for a mere 3.8% of Dearborn's population but simultaneously accounted for 19.3% of Dearborn residents who lived below the poverty level in 2017. Of Dearborn's black households, twenty-six percent are on food stamps, a number which only increases in Dearborn's eastern neighborhoods. More generally, the proportion of Dearborn residents living below the poverty level increased by 1.6% from 2013 to 2017. At the same time, Dearborn's median household income increased by 7.7%, the median home value increased by twenty percent, the civilian non institutionalized population without health insurance coverage dropped by 5.9 percentage points, and the city's unemployment rate dropped from 12.4% to 8.4%, declining at a faster pace than the United States' national unemployment rate during the same years.

These statistics seem to indicate that income inequality in Dearborn has risen and that the economic gap between the predominantly Arab and Muslim neighborhoods and the western districts without a large Arab presence is remarkable. Shryock and Lin's presumption that "being Muslim significantly increases the probability of having the lowest, rather than the highest,

household income even after controlling for education” and that “being born in the United States or having American citizenship has exactly the opposite effect” therefore appears to remain valid in Dearborn today (DAAS Team 49).

### 1.3 POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Although a large part of Dearborn’s Muslim community suffers from socioeconomic setbacks, opportunities to increase upward mobility might be found within the city’s civic and political domains. Multiple human services, Muslim civil rights and advocacy groups are based within the city limits and endeavor to look after Dearborn’s Arab and Muslim interests. On a state level, Arabs and Muslims have actually made more progress in electoral politics than elsewhere in the nation according to Emily Regan Wills, associate professor of political studies at the University of Ottawa, who also deems the Arab community in Michigan to be “highly institutionalized and politically organized” (186). Dearborn, as the center of Arab and Muslim activity in the United States, assumes an important role in the recognition and distribution of Muslim political power on a local, state, and national level.

Locally, Arabs and Muslims are well represented in Dearborn’s seven-seat city council. Four of its elected members, that is Susan Dabaja, Michael Sareini, David Bazzy, and Robert Alex Abraham, have Arab origins, and two of them are Muslim. Susan Dabaja became the first Arab and first Muslim to be elected to the city council president’s office in 2013. While the city council mainly concerns itself with comparatively trivial issues such as trash collection programs, granting parade and festival requests and the repair of potholes, Dearborn also prides itself on being home to several Arab and Muslim advocacy groups of national stature. ACCESS, an acronym for Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, was founded by volunteers in Dearborn’s poverty-stricken south end in 1971 in order to stimulate Arab immigrant adaptation to a new life in the United States and describes itself as a nonprofit organization focused on community-building which is able to assist, improve, and empower those in need (“Our Roots”). Its 2018 annual report reveals the wide range of social, economic, health and educational services it offers to a variety of people. In a single year, ACCESS raised \$400,000 to support sixty refugee families, distributed two thousand backpacks to children of

underserved families, and awarded a grand total of \$125,000 in scholarship funds to forty-three students (“2018 Annual Report”).

ACCESS is not the only institution in Dearborn in favor of Arab and Muslim advancement, however. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, abbreviated to ISPU, is a think tank and research organization which aims to empower American Muslims to develop their community and fully contribute to democracy through conducting objective, solution-seeking research (“What We Do”). Founded in 2002, ISPU has a Dearborn-based office, while another department is located in Washington D.C. By educating the general public on their research findings, ISPU intends to raise public awareness of burning issues such as the impact of internalized Islamophobia and widely accepted misconceptions about American Muslim communities (Chouhoud and Mogahed 15). Its annual report from 2018 not only shows that ISPU provided 1,906 national, state, and local policymaker and community leaders with vital resources, data, toolkits, and recommendations, but also that their research was cited 1,166 times in media articles by nationwide and worldwide news outlets (“Facts Are Fuel”).

Despite the presence of elected Arab and Muslim Americans in Dearborn’s city council and strenuous efforts of local Muslim civil rights and research organizations like ACCESS and ISPU to empower and mobilize Dearborn Muslims, involvement in the political process from the Arab American community appears to be lacking (Hanooti in Harb, par. 13). Although many organizations have encouraged Arab and Muslim Dearborn residents to vote in the August primaries for the city council elections in November 2017, the turnout was as low as ten percent in the predominantly Arab neighborhoods in east Dearborn (Harb, par. 2).

According to Sami Khaldi, a Jordanian American activist and head of the Dearborn Democratic Club, an organization which encourages political participation by all Dearborn residents, the disappointingly low voter turnout could be attributed to the “political immaturity” of some of the Arab community’s members and their inability to “understand the importance of local politics” (in Harb, par. 15). Khaldi adds that especially first-generation immigrants tend to overlook local politics because they are preoccupied with political news from the Middle East, where their “political focus” continues to be set (in Harb, par. 15).

Shikha Dalmia argues that a large part of the first-wave Muslim refugees stayed out of politics because politics was considered to be “dirty business” where they came from and only mobilized when they were directly affected (in “Muslim in America” par. 36). This tendency seems to have become palpable during the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the enactment of the USA PATRIOT Act, when the entire Arab and Muslim communities of Dearborn were placed under close public scrutiny and consequently became more anxious about their destiny in the United States. Furthermore, as Ayers and Hofstetter contend, these events “heightened American Muslims’ political interest and increased political participation” and caused the “cognitive processes” of American Muslims to shift “from autopilot to alert attention”, which in turn morphed into political behavior (20).

This particular sequence of responses appears to have also been visible after president Trump implemented Executive Order 13769, better known as the Muslim travel ban, in early 2017 when mass protests ensued at various American airports to prevent the deportation of refugees and other visitors to the seven Muslim-majority countries that protesters believed to be unsafe. While ACCESS and ISPU are doing their utmost to get those living in predominantly Arab neighborhoods like Salina, Hemlock and Eastborn to the voting booths to advance the agenda of their community, Arab American and Muslim political engagement remains a difficult to obtain process in an environment in which the American mainstream often erects its barriers of exclusion.

## CONCLUSION

Muslims have maintained a long and visible presence in Dearborn. Although the city has been predominantly white for a significant part of the twentieth century, waves of Muslim immigration from the Middle East have managed to induce a great extent of institutionalization and political organization among the Muslim community of Dearborn. Despite the fact that Muslims from broad ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds have found their way into Dearborn, the city appears to be highly segregated. The neighborhoods along the city’s eastern border are predominantly Arab and score relatively poorly on household income, educational achievement and gender parity. Muslim women in Dearborn are however becoming better educated and might attain higher-income job positions in the foreseeable future. Politically,

Dearborn's ethnically diverse but established Arab and Muslim communities are well represented in local politics and have several nationally esteemed civil rights advocacy groups within reach, but they appear to be participating politically only when they are directly affected.

## CHAPTER TWO — HAMTRAMCK: THE WORLD IN TWO SQUARE MILES?

*Adamczyk, Kuzniewski and Gryszkiewicz*. A mere selection in the myriad of archetypical Polish surnames of customers who visit local Hamtramck bakeries. Each year, forty-seven days before Easter Sunday, the Polish community of Hamtramck celebrates *Thusty Czwartek*, a festivity equivalent to the *Mardi Gras* of Louisiana, and Polish bakeries flourish. Local Hamtramckans also call this feast *Pączki Day*, after the sweet Polish delicacy of which thousands are being distributed, sold or given away throughout the entire city on this particular day. *Pączki Day* is one of the most noticeable signifiers of the city's substantial historical Polish presence (Smith, par. 5). The city, which is now almost completely surrounded by the city of Detroit, is named after Jean-François Hamtramck, a French-Canadian soldier who fought in the army of the Thirteen Colonies in the American Revolutionary War. After he took possession of Detroit after the British troops were evacuated, Hamtramck was established as a township in 1798 (Kowalski 4).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Hamtramck was an insignificant rural settlement of about five hundred, mainly German farmers. As rapid industrialization reached greater Detroit at the beginning of the twentieth century, European immigrants started flocking to the area for promising economic opportunities in a burgeoning automobile industry ("About Hamtramck"). More specifically, when the Dodge Brothers Motor Company started preparations for the installation of an automotive plant on the border of Detroit and Hamtramck in 1910, a massive influx of Catholic Polish immigrants ensued. Hamtramck's population skyrocketed to just under fifty thousand in 1920, of which approximately two-thirds were Polish-born and most of the rest was of Polish descent (Vinyard 182).

Hamtramck maintained its Polish appearance for much of the twentieth century, but its Polish residents began moving up and out to the suburbs and were progressively replaced by Yemenis during the 1970s and '80s and by Bangladeshis during the 1980s and '90s (Block and Nadworny, par. 4). Bangladeshi immigrants, many of whom are Muslim, did not exclusively arrive directly from Bangladesh, however. When rents were pushed up by New York's real estate market in the early 2000s, many Bangladeshis decided to leave Astoria and other Queens

neighborhoods for more affordable housing and promising job perspectives in Detroit's east side and nearby Hamtramck (Kershaw, par. 8). A large part of Hamtramck's Yemeni diaspora developed from ongoing conflicts in the motherland, and although it was mostly a male population in the early years of immigration, Hamtramck's Yemeni community's size and composition changed considerably when families started to immigrate in the 1980s (Howell in Newman, par. 13). Refugees from nations marred by war, conflict and human crises are still trickling in and Hamtramck is currently believed to be Michigan's most internationally diverse city (Nagl, par. 2). Hamtramck's status as a safe haven for immigrants from across the globe is reflected by its demographics. About twenty-three percent of Hamtramck residents do not hold American citizenship, a number sevenfold the state average. The sustained arrival and departure of immigrant groups caused Hamtramck's ethnic and religious mosaic to change colors, but not its shape. Although only 5.5% of Hamtramck's current residents have been born in Poland and less than ten percent report to be of Polish ancestry, the city remains a community of immigrants from countries across the globe who must try to live together and should cooperate to solve each other's problems (Hassan in A. Perkins 169).

The election of the first Muslim-majority city council in the United States (its members had Yemeni and Bangladeshi roots) however resulted in a national pandemonium that once more exposed the widespread, generalizing post-9/11 xenophobia toward Muslims in the United States. As Hamtramck was reported to have surrendered to Islam and was dubbed *Shariahville, U.S.A.* by some critics, the necessity of a more substantiated observation which distinguishes and acknowledges the internal socioeconomic and political complexities of Hamtramck's ethnically diverse Muslim community has therefore become evidently clear.

## 2.1 MUSLIM HAMTRAMCK TODAY

The days of Hamtramck's auto industry prosperity are long gone. The oil crises of the 1970s caused severe problems to greater Detroit's auto industry, leading the Chrysler Corporation to eventually close the Dodge Main plant in Hamtramck in 1980 (Weiner 1053). Despite the influx of migrants from Yemen, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Ukraine, and Bangladesh and their efforts to resuscitate its economy (Wasacz, par. 6), Hamtramck today continues to be a city burdened by a dire economic condition. The United States census estimates that the

percentage of Hamtramckans living below the poverty level increased from 43.4 to 50.9 between 2013 and 2017. This percentage is extremely high compared to other localities in Detroit's vicinity.

While Hamtramck's economic facts and figures have been recorded extensively by the United States Census Bureau, the city's ethnic and religious composition remain hard to determine. As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, the lack of data on religious affiliation and absence of more specific ethnic and racial categories in the official census lead to difficulty in establishing accurate estimates of the number of Muslims in Hamtramck.

What is clear, however, is that an estimated 42.3% of 22,000 people currently living in Hamtramck were born outside the United States. Of the city's foreign-born population, 42.4% was born in Bangladesh, 30.1% in Yemen, and 8.6% in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Again, not all of Hamtramck's Bangladeshi, Yemeni or Bosnian population practices the Muslim faith, but data from the United States Census Bureau shows that it is safe to assume that a large part of Muslims in Hamtramck can trace their roots back to these countries.

Official numbers of Hamtramck's Muslim population remain hard to find, but a multitude of sources report that Hamtramck was not only the first American city to have a Muslim-majority city council, but is also the first city with a majority-Muslim population. These sources mention Muslim rates ranging from indefinite terms like "more than forty percent" (Dalmia 2016) and "a majority" (Bailey 2015; Aghajanian 2017; Block and Nadworny 2017) to more specific phrasings like "as high as sixty percent" (T. Perkins 2016).

There are legitimate reasons to assume that Hamtramck's Muslim population indeed comprises a majority, as academic researchers have estimated Hamtramck's growing Muslim population to comprise "approximately thirty percent" of the city's total population as early as the year 2004 (A. Perkins 170) and Hamtramck residents themselves frequently assume that the majority of the city's population is now Muslim (Weiner 1073).

Hamtramck's Muslim community can consequently be characterized by a rich ethnic diversity, with members hailing from South Asia, the Middle East and Europe, and can be perceived as a community which "tells you what Muslims look like when they first come to America" (Dalmia in "A Closer Look"). Recently arrived Muslim immigrants make up the lion's

share of Hamtramck's vibrant public space, and precisely because Hamtramck's Muslim community is relatively new, it brings an "air of innocence, as if it hasn't fully comprehended how much post-9/11 hostility there is toward Muslims in America" (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 13).

The aspect of innocence appears to be causative of the Muslim community's vulnerability to allegations of enacting booze bans, instigating shariah law, and propagating homegrown terrorism by conservative media outlets. Hamtramck appears to have become a target for traditionalists who lament the nation's shifting demographics and foresee "the end of Western civilization" (Garus qtd. in Dalmia "Muslim in America" par. 2). While the city is, just like many other municipalities in the United States, trying hard to overcome its economic and political challenges, Hamtramck's ethnically diverse Muslim community seems to have gone through rather linear, shared experiences of immigration, incorporation, assimilation and denunciation.

## 2.2 SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Hamtramck is a poor city, and its economy has developed synonymously with the rise and decline of the American automobile industry, as was the case for metropolitan Detroit in its entirety. While a thriving automobile industry kept Hamtramck's economy healthy through much of the twentieth century, its collapse, combined with early twenty-first century recessions, has had an enormous impact on the city's economic vitality ("Hamtramck Michigan" par. 2).

Back in 2010, the city requested the State of Michigan to be allowed to file for bankruptcy. Due to a dispute with the city of Detroit about the payment of overdue tax revenue from the General Motors assembly plant (which straddles the border of both cities), Hamtramck faced a towering budget deficit. Hamtramck's request was denied, however, as the neighboring cities struck a deal and settled the dispute (Linebaugh, par. 1). The General Motors Detroit-Hamtrack assembly plant has been Hamtramck's main employer for decades and currently employs 1,600 people. The end of Hamtramck's "manufacturing era" is nearby, however, as General Motors plans to close the assembly plant in June 2019 (Wu, par. 1). Although a seven-month extension of production was announced in February 2019, General Motors has stressed that the Hamtramck assembly plant remains "unallocated" which means that there are "no plans in place to continue production there" beyond January 2020 (Putre, par. 4).

Despite past and future job losses in the city's automobile industry, Hamtramck seems to be not solely reliant on the General Motors assembly plant anymore as the latest waves of mainly Muslim immigrants have "changed the nature of Hamtramck" and moved to establishing "small commercial and entrepreneurial businesses" to revive its economy ("Hamtramck Michigan" par. 3). Hamtramck's dire economic condition consequently seems to have proven not only immigrants' adaptive capacities, but also their status as the driving force behind Hamtramck's struggle for economic recovery.

### 2.2.1 HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIVING PATTERNS

As the city's area only covers two square miles and some 22,000 residents currently call it home, Hamtramck is immensely densely populated. In fact, census figures show that Hamtramck is by far Michigan's most densely populated city. The economic opportunities that attracted so many of its inhabitants in the past have led Hamtramck to become a city which housing stock is "modest but affordable for immigrants and native-born people as well" (Thomas and Bekkering 199) and "where people are crammed in 20-foot-wide, two-story, two-family homes with just enough space to fit maybe two trashcans between houses" (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 32).

Despite the loss of economic opportunity in the city, immigrants continue to flock to Hamtramck as they are attracted by the city's low housing costs. Hamdan describes Hamtramck as a city with a "relatively stable and well-maintained low cost housing stock" and argues that the "dire economic conditions of the entire area have caused housing prices generally to plummet" (34), thereby making it easier for newly arrived Muslim immigrants from Yemen, Somalia, Bangladesh or Iraq to find a home in Hamtramck rather than in other nearby cities. Statistics from the United States Census Bureau show that not only did the median home value in Hamtramck rise from \$46,600 in 2013 to \$53,900 in 2017, an increase of 15.7% in just five years, the city's percentage of vacant housing units decreased by 3.2% during the same time as well. Its extremely affordable housing situation and multicultural atmosphere appear to have turned Hamtramck into a city which is "up-and-coming" (Dunn, par. 1).

The geographical distribution of ethnic groups into particular areas throughout Hamtramck has been particularly notable as well. Although Hamtramck's neighborhoods are not

sectioned off from each other and people with different ethnic backgrounds coalesce to a great extent, patterns in settlement along ethnic lines can be distinguished. Hamtramckans with Asian origins, which includes many Muslims from Bangladesh and India, tend to settle in the city's northeastern area. Over forty percent of this area's residents report to be of Asian ancestry, which is reflected by the myriad of ethnic Bengali restaurants and mosques, South Asian spice shops, and West Asian halal poultry and grocery stores that can be found along Conant Street.

The city's south end, which begins south of Holbrook Avenue, is known for its substantial Arab presence. As over forty percent of residents claim to have Arab origins, the area's Arab character is underlined by the presence of two mosques that provide services in both English and Arabic, the Yemen Cafe and the Sunset Hookah store, where people can buy the products they need for smoking their water pipes. The remaining Hamtramckans with Polish ancestry typically live in the city's northwestern parts, where streets are named Poland Avenue, people stroll through Pulaski Park, hear the bells of the St. Florian Roman Catholic Church, and *kielbasa* sausages can be bought at Srodek's. Clear divisions can therefore be recognized in the ethnic makeup of Hamtramck's neighborhoods, causing the city to be still somewhat segregated despite its abundance of different ethnicities.

This form of ethnic segregation shows that Hamtramck's Muslim population is "hardly a monolith" and separate Muslim groups "do not intermingle much", mostly due to language differences (Radzilowski qtd. in Bailey, par. 28). Hamtramck is nevertheless not only characterized by cheap housing and a significant segregation of ethnically distinct groups into particular neighborhoods, as contrasts in educational attainment, occupation and income *between* its neighborhoods can be distinguished as well.

### 2.2.2 EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Hamtramck does not score too well on educational attainment rankings. About twenty-nine percent of its population aged twenty-five and over does not have a high school diploma. This makes Hamtramck the city with the highest percentage of people without a high school diploma in the metropolitan Detroit area, despite an increase of almost six percent of those who are high school graduates or higher between 2013 and 2017. Educational attainment in Hamtramck differs

from neighborhood to neighborhood, however. When zooming in on the areas where particular ethnic groups tend to live in, general disparities in educational attainment arise straightaway.

People living in areas which are marked by a strong South Asian Muslim presence are relatively well educated, but still about a third does not have a high school diploma. The ratio of people with a master's, professional, or doctorate degree is relatively high when compared to Hamtramck's other areas. The areas characterized by a large Arab presence are Hamtramck's least educated, with the lowest ratios of high school graduates and post-secondary degree holders, and the highest ratio of people with no educational attainment at all. Areas with the largest Polish presence are Hamtramck's best educated, as the percentage of those without a high diploma is relatively low and the ratio of those with a post-secondary degree is at least double as high as the areas where many Arab and South Asian Hamtramckans live.

Differences in educational attainment between the distinctly ethnically marked geographic areas are not the only remarkable differences, though. Gender is also a major determinant in educational attainment within Hamtramck's borders. Women aged twenty-five and over are 1.52 times more likely to be undereducated (i.e. no high school diploma) than men in Hamtramck, while men of the same age category are 1.68 times more likely to be overeducated (in possession of a professional or doctorate degree) than their female counterparts. A more general development that can be discerned, however, is that women living in Hamtramck are becoming increasingly better educated. The share of women aged twenty-five and over that are high school graduate or higher increased by 4.8% while the percentage of women with a bachelor's degree or higher increased slightly between 2013 and 2017 and has been on the rise since 2009. Not only does this development of increased female educational attainment have a positive effect on gender parity in general, it also seems to translate into Hamtramck's gradually changing labor force composition.

### 2.2.3 EMPLOYMENT, JOBS AND INCOME

As a city which has continually been challenged by economic hardship, Hamtramck's unemployment rate was roughly twice the size of the United States' national average of 6.6% in 2017. Jobs do seem to have been created between 2013 and 2017, however, as Hamtramck's unemployment rate dropped significantly from 20.9 to 12.9%. Even with declining

unemployment rates, the median household income in Hamtramck shrunk by five percent between 2013 and 2017, and Hamtramck's median household income was not even half the size of the Michigan average in 2017: \$24,369 versus \$52,668. These facts seem to imply that although more jobs have been created, these jobs are of poor quality and do not pay too well.

Considerable disparities in household income between the city's particular ethnic neighborhoods exist as well. The median household income in the area in which most of Hamtramck's ethnic Poles are concentrated is almost twice the size of the predominantly Arab area in the city's south: \$34,348 as opposed to \$18,836. Areas with a large South Asian contingent seem to conform to the city average, which means that Hamtramck's Arab-dominated neighborhoods are the city's most impoverished.

Next to that, Hamtramck may have managed to include more residents into its labor force, but only 33.4% of females aged 16 years and over were members of Hamtramck's labor force in 2017, which is extremely low when compared to the national average of 58.4%. Women in Hamtramck tend to stay at home to take care of the children and seem to be prevented from seeking jobs by a variety of "old traditions" which are still prevalent in Hamtramck's largely conservative Yemeni community especially ("Low Participation" par. 1). The framework of traditions which appears to sustain Hamtramck's disproportionately low ratio of women in its labor force is said to have begun a gradual transformation. Both activists and local Hamtramck professionals have witnessed a "change in views" on Yemeni women joining the workforce and say that "progress is being made" toward the acceptance of Yemeni women in the work field ("Low Participation" par. 2). Moreover, the fact that Hamtramck's enhanced female educational attainment levels play an important factor in the changing attitudes toward women participating in Hamtramck's labor force is emphasized by women from Hamtramck who own small businesses themselves:

There is no shame in work, [...] and this will inevitably change. It's changing already. I think the new generation will be more accepting and encouraging of working women in our community, especially that our girls seem to be doing better in school than their male counterparts. (Aljahim in "Low Participation" par. 3)

Then what kinds of jobs do Hamtramckans have? The occupations which are most common in Hamtramck are in production (20.3%), sales and related (14.8%), and food services (12.2%). Men clench a disproportionately large percentage of the jobs in manufacturing, scientific and technical services and in the field of entertainment, art and recreation, while Hamtramck's women are overrepresented in the fields of education, healthcare, and perhaps surprisingly, government, as this field can still be regarded as an overwhelmingly male domain ("Quick Take"). The female pervasiveness can however be regarded to be a moot point in the workings of Hamtramck politics, which seems to be more widely associated with its ties to ethnicity and religion (Almasmaari in Vande Panne, par. 33).

### 2.3 POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The election of the nation's first Muslim-majority city council in late 2015 was bound to stir up controversy. In a city marked by such a diverse ethnic makeup, identity politics appear to have played a fundamental role in shaping Hamtramck's ranks of administration ("American Occurrence" pars. 5-6). The unique status of Hamtramck's politics also seems to have led to an extreme scrutinization of its operations. The addition of Yemeni American Saad Almasmari to the city council was lauded by many as "a very American endeavor" (Walid qtd. in Bailey, par. 15), but comments from Ibrahim Algahim, a political activist within the Yemeni community, were fiercely criticized. After the results of the 2015 election were announced, Algahim claimed that "we [Muslims] showed the Polish and everybody else that we are united", a statement which is believed to "widen the rift between the growing Muslim and shrinking Polish community in Hamtramck" (Wimbley, par. 3).

The city council today however consists of members with divergent ethnic backgrounds. Of the six elected officials in the city council, four are Muslim. The Muslim council members however have distinct ethnic backgrounds, as Anam Miah and Abu Musa have Bangladeshi roots, Fadel Al-Marsoumi's parents came to Hamtramck from Iraq in 1990, and Saad Almasmari came from Yemen to the United States as late as 2009. The latter said that he participated in local elections "to signal to his family back in Yemen that he had truly arrived", to show them that "he has everything in America" (qtd. in "Muslim in America" par. 27). Almasmari's remarks show Hamtramck's Muslim council members can have "diverse political motivations and interests",

which makes it “difficult for them to come together as a block” (Kowalski qtd. in “Muslim in America” par. 28).

Hamtramck’s ethnic diversity does not only seem to be well reflected in the composition of its city council, but can also be deemed to be a motivation for local advocacy groups and community spaces that focus on particular ethnic immigrant populations. Hamtramck, despite its size, is home to a couple of advocacy groups which look after the interests of particular ethnic immigrant groups. OneHamtramck is believed to be the city’s most prominent platform for providing social change through community activism. OneHamtramck is an independent non-governmental progressive organization which aims to bring communities together in the diverse city of Hamtramck by organizing and sponsoring public events and supporting culture of social significance (“About Us”). Its public events have been addressing social and economic issues including racism, xenophobia, discrimination, human rights, worker rights, and the effects of the economy on the community since 2007. The creation of a large mural in Hamtramck’s south end which depicts the Yemeni American community in 2013 and development of a similar mural celebrating its Bangladeshi community in 2018 are among OneHamtramck’s most visible exemplifications of cultural activism. Bangladeshi donors paid for about sixty percent of the mural, while the Michigan Economic Development Corporation made a large matching grant as well (Kominek, par. 3). OneHamtramck moreover claims to provide social justice for the marginalized and neglected communities of color, which frequently are victims of injustice (“What We Do”).

Another notable local group that focuses on the advancement of Hamtramck’s immigrant residents is Women of Banglatown. This organization sprouted from a photo project on Hamtramck’s Bengali community in 2014, after which photographer Ali Lapetina observed that Bangladeshi men had considerably more and qualitatively better recreational outlets than Bangladeshi women (Mondry, par. 1). By offering weekly art and wellness classes, the all girls community space of Women of Banglatown aims to promote greater understanding of the Bangladeshi community in general and provide opportunities for discovering the creative and social potential of immigrant and first generation American girls and women (“About”).

Finally, the office of the Bangladeshi American Public Affairs Committee (BAPAC) is also located in Hamtramck. This bipartisan organization promotes the values and principles of the United States Constitution among the Bangladeshi Americans, and provides Bangladeshi Americans with an institution to legally organize as a group to exercise their political rights (“Home”). BAPAC also works to ensure the social and economic concerns and needs of the Bangladeshi community. Hamtramck therefore seems to be rich in civil advocacy groups that work for the social, political and economic empowerment of the city’s minorities. Recent accounts reporting higher voter turnout in the 2016 presidential elections (“Vote Break” par. 8) and 2018 midterm primary elections (Sercombe 2018) in Hamtramck appear to confirm that the strong presence of minority politicians in local government bodies is not accidental, but convincing proof of a genuine advancement of political engagement within the city’s diverse Muslim communities.

#### CONCLUSION

The Muslim community of Hamtramck is relatively new and includes Muslims from around the globe, who were generally drawn to the city as a result of its well-kept but extremely low-cost housing stock in close proximity to the General Motors assembly plant. Not only is Hamtramck believed to be the nation’s first Muslim-majority city, its Muslim community is also incredibly ethnically diverse. The city’s neighborhoods are yet marked by specific ethnic presences and Muslims with different ethnicities tend to live fairly segregated lives. Next to that, these neighborhoods perform rather disparately on socioeconomic issues such as household income and education. Although Hamtramck is a decidedly impoverished city in itself, the neighborhoods marked by a strong Arab presence are substantially poorer and more undereducated than other ethnic neighborhoods. While some Muslim women are hindered from participating on the labor market because of conservative values that still prevail within the community, others were able to grasp the opportunities that arose to actively participate in Hamtramck’s social and civic domains. Muslims in Hamtramck appear to become increasingly politically engaged, with the election of the first-ever Muslim-majority city council in the United States in 2015 and progressively higher voter turnouts in recent national elections as a result.

## CHAPTER THREE — SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The previous chapters have dealt with two of the most visible Muslim communities in the United States separately. In order to create a complete and thorough analysis of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities' socioeconomic status and the degree to which they participate politically, a comparative component which examines the similarities and differences between the cities' Muslim communities is imperative. An evaluation of socioeconomic and political features that connect the Muslim communities of both cities might reveal larger shared experiences of being Muslim in southeast Michigan and the United States more generally, but it are the differences that can really tell something about the specific socioeconomic and political needs, desires and accomplishments of each city's Muslim community. This comparative structure will allow me to see what the relation between the socioeconomic and political similarities and differences between the two Muslim communities is, and how this relation ties into existing narratives of shared experiences and internal diversities within Muslim communities in general.

### 3.1 SIMILARITIES

Although these communities reside in rather disparate cities, Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities do seem to share several historical, socioeconomic and political aspects. As the previous chapters demonstrated, both cities are known for their long histories with immigrants who were pulled to southeast Michigan by the promising economic opportunities provided by Detroit's automobile industry (Abraham and Shryock 18). Each city experienced an initial influx of immigrants in the early twentieth century, but both Dearborn and Hamtramck remained predominantly white for a large part of the twentieth century. Every time war or conflict ensued in these immigrants' native countries in the second half of the twentieth century, waves of immigrants would be allowed entrance into the United States and settled in the Detroit area, as they were "seeking relatives and job referrals among previously established compatriots" from Lebanon, Yemen, Bangladesh and the like (Babson 225).

Later waves of immigrants who came to live in Dearborn or Hamtramck due to war and persecution incorporated many higher educated individuals, as these immigrants were merely

forced to leave their native country and did not specifically come for economic opportunities in the same way as earlier Muslim immigrants from the Middle East or South Asia did. When Detroit's automobile industry started to decline and many Muslim immigrants lost their jobs, both Dearborn and Hamtramck's ethnically diverse Muslim communities were quick to find other sources of income by establishing ethnic grocery stores, restaurants and other small businesses (Stiffler in Cwiek, par. 31; "Hamtramck Michigan" par. 3). Their entrepreneurial activity led to a high visibility of the Muslim contingent in both cities.

What both cities have in common though is that *the* Muslim contingent does not really exist, but the communities consist of multiple rather heterogenous branches. Both cities' Muslim communities are rich in ethnic diversity and therefore internal division often prevails (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 23). Dearborn and Hamtramck are also fairly segregated cities, as particular ethnic groups of Muslims tend to live in particular neighborhoods and do not really intermingle much (Radzilowski in Bailey, par. 28). As a consequence, socioeconomic characteristics specific to each neighborhood can easily be identified in both Dearborn and Hamtramck.

Data collected by the United States Census Bureau shows that in both Dearborn and Hamtramck, those who live in neighborhoods marked by a large Muslim presence are more likely to be undereducated and have a substantially lower median household income compared to neighborhoods with fewer Muslim residents. Moreover, the same census data shows that the economic gap between largely Muslim neighborhoods and other neighborhoods moreover seems to be widening in both cities. On a more positive note though, Muslims, and especially Muslim women appear to become better educated in both cities. Second and third-generation Muslims in the Detroit area have seen how their parents, who were first-generation immigrants, worked long and arduous days in the Ford or Dodge auto plants to provide their children with the opportunity to study and gain some upward mobility (Hamdan 44).

These second and third-generation Muslims appear to be "very aware of the fact that education is key to affording themselves a better life" and as conscious of their parents' expectations as they are, Dearborn and Hamtramck Muslims are now slowly catching up to city averages (Hamdan 44). Education, as a tool for socioeconomic and political advancement of

ethnic and religious minorities, progressively seems to be taken more seriously in both Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities.

Other similarities between both cities that allow for some optimism are that the median home value increased and the unemployment rate simultaneously dropped significantly between 2013 and 2017. Official census figures show that Dearborn and Hamtramck's labor forces are yet largely active in the manufacturing and production sector, while relatively few work in the fields of engineering or science, which are the sectors that generally require highly educated employees but also pay substantially higher salaries. Should education levels within Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim community continue to rise then Muslims, and especially Muslim women, are likely to find employment within higher-paying fields of work to an increasing extent (Jackman, par. 6).

Politically, both Dearborn and Hamtramck's high levels of ethnic and religious diversity are reflected in the composition of their city councils. First-generation immigrants, whether new or generation-old, tend to decline opportunities for political participation in both Dearborn and Hamtramck's local politics as they maintain a political focus on their native land (Khaldi in Harb, par. 15). Many of the Arab, South Asian and Southeastern European Muslim immigrants who settled in southeast Michigan during the first immigrant wave in the 1970s did not run for elections because they considered politics to be dirty business, and Muslims tended to mobilize only when they were directly affected by repressive policies in both Dearborn and Hamtramck (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 36) What is perhaps most important is that Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities' reasons for political participation have "very, very little to do with any theological need to promote Islam or *shariah-ize* their local community" and they are "not trying to accomplish anything different from any other ethnic group" (Dalmia in "A Closer Look").

### 3.2 DIFFERENCES

Despite the similarities between the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck, each city has a distinctly unique Muslim presence. Dearborn has a long history of Middle Eastern immigrants who are largely ethnic Arabs but have a multitude of different national identities such as Lebanese, Yemeni, Syrian or Iraqi. Moreover, Dearborn used to be an almost entirely white

Anglo American domain under mayor Hubbard's rule for most of the twentieth century (Loewen 159). Hamtramck on the other hand has a relatively short history of Muslim presence and is a city in which migrants, ethnic and religious minorities have always been "a large part of its fabric" (Matheny, par. 5). Only when its Polish Catholics started moving up to wealthier and more spacious Detroit suburbs and were replaced by working-class immigrants from Bangladesh and Yemen in the 1980s, the city acquired its current blue-collar, Muslim veneer.

While the Muslim community of Dearborn is well-established and its Arab populace is deemed to be "highly institutionalized and politically organized" (Wills 186), census data shows that Hamtramck's Muslim community includes a comparatively high percentage of more recently arrived and foreign-born immigrants. As Ramakrishnan and Espenshade assert, immigrants tend to have greater contact with and stronger commitment to the political system the longer they live in the United States (877), which means that the disparity in political organization between Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities can be largely attributed to the fact that Hamtramck Muslims simply had a shorter time frame to politically mobilize themselves in.

Economically speaking, both cities are on a different level as well. The median household income in Dearborn increased by 7.7% between 2013 and 2017 and is now almost on par with the Michigan average. Despite the economic underdevelopment of Dearborn's eastern, predominantly Arab neighborhoods, the city seems to become increasingly more middle-class (Dalmia in "Muslim in America" par. 13). Contrastingly, the median household income in Hamtramck decreased by five percent during the same time. This indicates that Hamtramck's households, of which a majority is believed to be Muslim, began earning less despite the creation of additional jobs, and are now performing far below the Michigan average.

This is underlined by census data which shows that the percentage of people who live at or below the poverty line is extremely high in Hamtramck, especially when compared to other cities in metropolitan Detroit. Hamtramck's status as a low-income city might also be the reason for its housing situation. With low property taxes and housing prices only half as high as Dearborn's, Hamtramck continues to attract high numbers of working-class immigrants (Dalmia in "A Closer Look"). Moreover, Hamtramck's percentage of vacant housing units declined in a

faster tempo than Dearborn's, which might signify that Hamtramck is gaining popularity as a residential destination.

On a political level, Dearborn and Hamtramck differ considerably as well. The Muslim community in Dearborn has been in the United States much longer and have consequently seen the hostility towards them emerge, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Dalmia in "A Closer Look"). Dearborn's Muslim community therefore participates politically mostly for protective reasons, as they are extremely self-conscious of their Muslim identity, an identity which is actually imposed on them by external actors (Dalmia in "A Closer Look"). The Muslim community of Dearborn is highly conscious of the national spotlights shining on them, and because everybody sees them as Muslims they have to protect themselves as Muslims (Dalmia in "A Closer Look").

This sense of awareness and urgency to mobilize as a group seem to be reflected by the fact that Dearborn is home to large and nationally revered civil rights and advocacy groups such as ACCESS and ISPU, both prominent organizations which aim to promote Muslims' socioeconomic interests and enhance political participation not only locally, but on a national scale as well. As Dalmia argues, the political participation of Dearborn's Muslim community is a "complicated coping dance" based on the securement of economic interests, civil and religious rights and simultaneously the, often reluctant, obligation to cooperate with federal anti-terrorism efforts (in "Muslim in America" par. 13).

Hamtramck's Muslim community, on the contrary, is significantly newer and its members are therefore often primarily occupied with politics in their native lands (Khaldi in Harb, par. 15). Civil rights and advocacy groups in Hamtramck are relatively small and seem to be focused more on local environments and the provision of community-based programs. Muslims in Hamtramck have been able to make themselves heard, but only in "carefully prescribed ways" (Weiner 1052). More recently though, Muslims from Hamtramck have started to advance politically and actively voiced their political discontentment in local, state and national elections. Moreover, Hamtramck's voter turnout percentages appear to surpass Dearborn's, and women in Hamtramck are now greatly involved in local governance.

### 3.3 CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

The similarities and differences between the socioeconomic status and political participation of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities give rise to a number of issues. First and foremost, the essence of both Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim community cannot be encapsulated in universal and overarching conceptions. Clear stratifications into categories of ethnicity, race, gender, class and religion need to be made in order to come to a well-balanced interpretation of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities that takes the intersectional character of social, economic and political aspects into account. A general phenomenon laid bare by census data however shows that those who live in Dearborn and Hamtramck's predominantly Arab or South Asian neighborhoods, of which a considerable number is Muslim, are more likely to be undereducated, have low-income blue-collar jobs and have low household incomes.

Despite the fact that these characteristics are shared by a substantial part of the Muslim population of Dearborn and Hamtramck, the Muslim communities of these cities can simply not be classified as unified communities, but are primarily typified by ethnic, racial, religious, political and socioeconomic divisions. However, as Muslims in the United States are now becoming increasingly affected by anti-Islamic acts and expressions such as the Muslim travel ban (Anderson, par. 2) and the outlawing of Muslim religious arbitration (Uddin 6), it seems as if Muslims in Dearborn, and especially Hamtramck, have become aware that they cannot rest on their laurels anymore and need to mobilize politically in order to counteract threatening anti-Islamic undertakings from outside forces.

Emgage, a Washington, D.C. based non-partisan political advocacy group which seeks to educate, engage and empower Muslim Americans, recently found that between the midterm elections of 2014 and 2018, Muslim voter turnout in Michigan increased by nineteen percentage points ("Muslim Voter Turnout"). Muslim voter turnout in Wayne County, in which Dearborn and Hamtramck are located, jumped from thirty-nine percent in 2014 to forty-nine percent in 2018 ("Muslim Voter Turnout"). Discontent with and the saliency to terminate the development of growing Islamophobic sentiment therefore appears to have fostered political participation among Muslim Americans in Dearborn and Hamtramck, especially in years after the election of President Donald Trump. The election of Ilhan Omar, a Somali American politician from

Minnesota, and Rashida Tlaib, a child of Palestinian immigrants who was born and raised in Detroit as the first two Muslim women to serve in the United States House of Representatives in 2018 can likewise be seen as a symbolic affirmation of the political progress Muslims are making these days nationally. Similarly, the election of Abdullah Hammoud, who grew up in Hemlock, one of Dearborn's most impoverished and underdeveloped neighborhoods, to the Michigan State House of Representatives in 2016 marked the dawn of a Dearborn Muslim presence on state level politics.

The first Muslim from Hamtramck to reach state or national government ranks is however yet to be designated. It seems to be only a matter of time, however, for Hamtramck Muslims to start contributing to state and national politics. Not only is Islam the fastest-growing religion in the world (Lipka and Hackett, par. 1), Muslims are also estimated to become the second-largest religious group in the United States by 2040 (Mohamed, par. 3). If the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck continue to grow and their voter turnout percentages keep climbing like they did in the past five years, then Muslims from Dearborn and Hamtramck might actually play more important roles in future political landscapes of a United States which has been subjected to profound demographic changes.

## CONCLUSION

The previous chapters discussed the similarities and differences between the socioeconomic status and political engagement of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities. While the Muslim community of Dearborn is generally understood to be well-established, primarily Arab, middle-class and highly politically institutionalized, this thesis showed that Dearborn is also a highly segregated city in which its Arab and Muslim-dominated neighborhoods have the lowest household income and are the least educated in the city.

The Muslim community of Hamtramck on the other hand is newer, extremely ethnically diverse and well-represented in local politics. This thesis however demonstrated that Hamtramck is among the poorest cities in the state of Michigan, its neighborhoods are fairly segregated, and its predominantly Arab neighborhoods are substantially more destitute and undereducated than the city's other ethnic neighborhoods, as is the case in Dearborn.

In that case, how do the similarities and differences in socioeconomic status and political participation of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities contribute to shared experience and internal diversity narratives? This thesis illustrated that the relation between the similarities and differences in socioeconomic status and political participation between the two most visible Muslim communities in the United States and shared experience and internal diversity narratives can best be perceived as bilateral.

My examination of similarities and differences between Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities not only uncovered shared experiences (such as migration due to economic hardship or persecution or the collective, defensive stance against Executive Order 13769) and broader patterns (such as the systematic socioeconomic deprivation of both cities' Arab-dominated neighborhoods), but also revealed their degrees of internal diversity (Bangladeshi Muslims generally being better educated and having a higher income than Yemeni Muslims or the voter turnout imbalance between first- and third-generation Muslim immigrants). By perceiving the relation between the similarities and differences in socioeconomic status and political participation between Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities as a bilateral one, both the general public and academia should be able to comprehend the synchronous

positions of Muslim communities within the shared experience and internal diversity frameworks more accurately.

The findings of this thesis will therefore contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between ethnic and religious subgroups in cities that are exemplifications of the United States' rapidly shifting demographics. Studying the ethnic and religious compositions of cities such as Dearborn and Hamtramck, cities which can be considered to be on the front line of changing national demographics, and exploring how this composition relates to the extent of socioeconomic mobility and political engagement of ethnic and religious minority groups within local civic domains can be particularly helpful in offering more constructive criticisms of perspectives on changing demographics and minority assimilation. My comparative and analytical examination of the Muslim communities of Dearborn and Hamtramck has shown that despite shared experiences of immigration, assimilation, celebration and vilification, specific socioeconomic statuses and the degrees of political participation are often determined by distinct ethnic and religious idiosyncrasies. This particular research method can be implemented by other researchers who aim to elucidate both broader socioeconomic and political patterns and phenomena specific to particular ethnic or religious minorities.

In an ideal world in which funds and time are inexhaustible, I would have visited Dearborn and Hamtramck to meet the people who are part of the local Muslim communities. I would have tried to have lengthy and meaningful conversations with them about their sense of belonging and identity, which would enable me to experience the particularities of each of the cities' ethnically and religiously distinct neighborhoods at first hand. Unfortunately, my hefty course schedule in Nijmegen would not allow me to fly over to Detroit, which meant that I had to rely on two-dimensional facts and figures from the United States Census Bureau, academic journals and newspaper articles as my primary sources of information. I tried to get in touch with numerous actors and institutions involved in the topic of this thesis multiple times as well, but had no luck in receiving replies, let alone valuable information about specific ethnic or religious subgroups that could support my argument. Although I am aware of the difficulties regarding the acquirement of official but detailed statistics of ethnicity and religious affiliation in the United

States, it is the lack of direct empirical evidence on the socioeconomic status and degree of political engagement of Dearborn and Hamtramck's Muslim communities that I consider as this thesis' most notable limitation. Had there been more time and resources to inquire into the personal experiences of members of the Muslim communities in Dearborn and Hamtramck, it would have been incredibly interesting to see whether their experiences paralleled or deviated from the official statistics on their socioeconomic status and scholarly accounts on their political participation.

This thesis has, however, opened up many interesting possibilities for other researchers to really dig into the socioeconomic and political dynamics of ethnic and religious minorities in cities that might prove to be paragons of the nation's rapidly changing ethnic and religious demographics. Ample interesting opportunities to research local socioeconomic and political structures, their connection to minorities' ethnicity and religion and their place in the shared experience versus internal diversity narrative are for example provided by cities in Texas, where the nation's fastest growing Muslim populations are, housing costs are low and the job market is strong, or Minneapolis, which is the only American city where the majority of Muslims come from a single country, namely Somalia (Fadel n.p.). Further research could focus on different cities, other ethnic or religious minority groups and alternative criteria such as home environment, crime rates or health in order to determine the socioeconomic and political status of particular communities. It might be interesting to examine whether other ethnic minorities experience the same socioeconomic challenges as Yemenis or Bangladeshis, or other religious minorities the same difficulties as Muslims, or if Muslims in Irving, Texas have the same opportunities for political participation as Muslims in West Valley City, Utah. This kind of analytical and comparative research might be able to unveil emerging patterns and dynamics, which can in turn be used to address the potential drawbacks and benefits of the nation's shifting ethnic and religious demographics and its interconnection with minority socioeconomics and political engagement.

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