



**IMAGINE: What Does a Madinah on Turtle Island* Look Like?
Between Gentrification and Empowerment¹**

Case Problem Statement:

Intentionally building a community across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides in order to uplift everyone involved is a challenge when attempting to invest in communities through neighborhood development, while working against the challenge of gentrification. Structural racism and oppressions emerge and are present when working to build an intentional multi-ethnic and mixed income neighborhood in an urban setting. Some members of the Muslim community - generally comprising of Immigrant non-Black community members - express that they are only utilized for their financial resources and other members of the community - generally comprising Black community members - express that it is assumed that they cannot fend for themselves. Investing in the development of some Muslim communities have occurred in two ways: (1) making financial investments into the development of the infrastructure, and (2) assuming residence in the neighborhood being developed.

**Turtle Island is the original name referred to the landmass of North and Central America by its indigenous inhabitants*

¹ This case was authored by an alumni fellow of the American Muslim Civic Leadership program. The case study has been anonymized to ensure the confidentiality of the actors.

Background:

In a major U.S. city, a group of Muslims decided to invest in the surrounding neighborhoods of their very well-attended and established mosque and community center. Investment meant organizing the residents already living in the neighborhoods, purchasing homes to rehab, looking into the city's future plans for the area, while also encouraging Muslims from across the metro area to donate and/or move into the neighborhoods surrounding the mosque. In the one-mile radius around the mosque, there are whole blocks without a single resident and more dilapidated homes than occupied homes.

For one immigrant family, they initially decided to both monetarily invest in the rehab of a home and then physically move into the community once the rehab was completed. When it was time to move in, there were disagreements amongst the various family members regarding the feasibility for each family member to flourish in the new area. In the end, they decided to not move into the neighborhood, but instead rented the home out to a member of the well-attended mosque down the block. As a result, they have become homeowners and landlords in the neighborhood instead of actual residents.

For another Black family, they decided to physically move into the neighborhood into an already rehabbed home. After a few months of living in the area, the main breadwinner of the family was let go from their high-paying position at a reputable firm due to structural barriers because of divestment by the city, specifically the digital divide that affected their ability to have a fast internet connection. The family remained living in the home even after such a drastic pay cut and currently works at a local convenience store as they continue to apply to better-paying jobs.

In both cases highlighted, Muslims from different ethnic and racial communities and from varying socioeconomic statuses were inspired to invest in a particular community both monetarily through donations and/or rehabbing a home as well as by physically moving into the area.

Dates: 2015-Present

Main Actors:

- Diverse Muslim communities of a major metropolitan area
 - Specifically Black, South Asian, Arab, and white Muslims
 - Multiple income levels
 - Multi-generational
 - Convert and born Muslim
- Muslim families and residents
- Community donors

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What are the things that stop people from physically moving to certain neighborhoods and/or communities?
 - a) How has our perception of the “American Dream” and our pursuit of it contributed to the segregation of our Muslim communities?
 - b) What anti-Black stigmas do we hold and reproduce about urban neighborhoods?
- 2) How do we rebuild relationships with people who have expressed they are only hit up for their monetary contributions?
 - a) Who should be centered in our work: the people most materially impacted by injustice or people who may not experience material impacts? Or both?
- 3) Should organizing for the eradication of structural racism within a major city be a

priority for Muslim communities?

- a) If structural racism impacts housing prospects and housing is a human right, what is our responsibility?
- 4) What would have been a different thing to do regarding the two cases presented?