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Religion as a Site of Boundary Construction: Islam and the Integration of Turkish Americans in the United States

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Introduction

The United States' religious and ethnic landscape has dramatically changed since alterations to its immigration laws went into effect in 1965. Among the reasons for this change are the increasing number of Muslim immigrants and conversions to Islam in the U. S. (Eck 2001). Although no reliable figures exist regarding the size of the Muslim population in the U. S., it has been estimated that the number ranges between 7 and 8 million (Kaya, 2005). The United States has a larger Muslim population than the predominantly Muslim countries of Kuwait, Qatar, and Libya combined (Haddad and Esposito 1998). However, the U. S. has a more diverse Muslim population than any Muslim country, as Muslims of all nationalities and ethnic groups have been immigrating to the United States for decades. While this is the case, Muslim Americans are often represented as a monolithic group. Their cultural, national, social, and political differences are overlooked and their successes are frequently unrecognized. Muslim immigrants are one of the most highly educated immigrant groups in the United States, with a figure of forty-nine percent reportedly having at least a bachelor's degree (Camarota 2002). Fifty-five percent of Middle Eastern immigrants hold American citizenship (Camarota 2002). This information indicates that Islam is no longer a distant or 'foreign' tradition in America; it is part of American social, cultural, and political life regardless of any efforts to represent it otherwise (Takim 2004).

Muslim landscapes can be seen in many of American cities as over 3000 mosques exist throughout the US. Two thirds of these mosques were founded after 1980, which indicates that the vast majority of Muslim Americans are recent immigrants (Wuthnow and Hackett 2003).

However, the representation of Muslims in America suggests a marginalized image of Islam and Muslim Americans. First of all, Islam is often seen as an alien religion outside the 'norm' of predominantly Christian America. The complicated historical relationship between the Muslim world and the West has created significant negative images in the public mind in both the West and the Muslim world. On the one hand, memories of the Crusades, colonialism, and Western influences and interventions in the Muslim world have shaped public sentiment and understanding of the West among Muslims around the world. The distorted representation of Muslims and Islam by 'Orientalists' and the media have caused Muslims to be suspicious of the West and the United States (Said 1997). On the other hand, historical Muslim penetrations into Christian lands, and various terrorist attacks over the last two decades, have caused many people in the West, including the United States, to view Muslims with suspicion. This distrust between the two worlds influences not only politics, but also everyday relations between Muslim Americans and other Americans (Armour 2002; Armstrong 2002; Said 1997). Charles Kimball (2004) indicates that the overwhelming majority of Christians and Muslims view each other with great ignorance. He points out that the problem is not just a simple lack of knowledge. Much of what people think they know is incorrect or is based on misunderstandings and/or biases. A large portion of negative images are reinforced through media misrepresentation as the media focuses on the sensational words and actions of extremists (Kimball 2004). Such practices, and the misunderstandings which result from them, maintain/create boundaries between Muslim immigrants and the larger American society.

In this article, I examine the role of Islam and the institutionalization of traditional American religions in the integration of Turkish Americans within the United States. The study is based on my observations and interviews with members of the Turkish American community in the New York City metropolitan area during 2002. Thirty-eight people from different segments of the community were interviewed. Based on my interviews, observations, and what is recorded in the literature, I argue that religious boundaries often hinder the integration of an ethnic group, not because the religious beliefs and practices of that ethnic group are radically different from those of the dominant society, but because of the way differences between the group and the

larger society are politicized and represented. I also argue that the integration of Muslim immigrants, such as Turkish Americans, into the larger culture, is not totally in the hands of these immigrants as their acceptance by the larger society is a crucial factor in the integration process (Portes 1994; Alba and Nee 2003). Viewing Muslim immigrants as different, foreign, or alien, and associating them with terrorism, fundamentalism, radicalism, and backwardness, hinders integration of Muslim ethnic groups within the United States. Such generalizations make Muslim immigrants, such as Turkish Americans, feel out of space in the United States. Also, Muslim groups such as Turkish Americans tend to distance themselves from Arab Americans because they think that Arabs are somehow responsible for creating the negative images of Muslims that are common in the United States. Muslim immigrants, including Turkish Americans, also find the representation of Muslims in the media to be unfair and biased.

Religion as a Site of Boundary Construction and Representation of Muslim Americans

Religion is a key institution in marking boundaries of difference. Religious boundaries like other social boundaries are not fixed but dynamic and changing. For instance, according to Alba (2005), identification of the United States as a Caucasian/Protestant country is more of a historical issue than a present one, as Judaism and Catholicism have become mainstream American religions. Therefore, the growing emphasis on the Judeo-Christian heritage of America is not a surprise, because Jewish and Catholic immigrants have moved from "othered" immigrant positions to mainstream Americans. While these religions have been redefined in some ways, there is also a significant degree of acceptance of them by the larger society in areas such as Hanukah (the Jewish equivalent of Christmas) and Passover. Intermarriages between Jews and Christians have risen from 10 to 50 percent in the last four or five decades (Alba 2005). However, the status of Islam is rather problematic. Islam is still seen as an alien and non-American religion, although the number of Muslim immigrants in the United States has grown radically since American immigration laws were changed in 1965. A large number of converts among African Americans has also contributed greatly to this growth (Curtis 2006). Muslims have become more visible in American society, but they still hold a disadvantaged position in the United States. The institutionalized majority religion, Protestant Christianity, does not accept Islam as easily as it does other versions of Christianity or even Judaism.

This does not mean that I ignore the difficulties and discriminations Catholics and Jews faced when they first came to the United States. The point that I am trying to make is that there is inequality in the way the othering process takes place. Although Jews and Catholics do not share some religious beliefs and practices with Protestants, they are still considered to be a part of the same religious tradition. The same cannot be said about Islam, and therefore, Muslims are religiously more othered. As Edward Said (1997) documents this fact very well, Islam represents the "absolute other" and the "fundamentally different" (Mamdani 2002). Therefore, the way religion is institutionalized in the United States makes it difficult for Muslims to achieve parity because Christianity maintains a significant role in defining "who Americans are"(Moore 2002; Alba 2005). Temel Durmus, a first generation Turkish American engineering student states: "I think the role of religion in terms of getting accepted in the United States is very important. Americans may feel closer to a French person than they do to a Turk because of their religious similarities." Durmus is not the only person who thinks that Christianity is an important part of American (and Western) identity and that Islam is considered to be outside of this tradition.

Although the United States is often represented as having a better integration system for immigrants than many European countries, a deep cultural and institutional embedding of Christianity hinders parity for Islam and Muslims. Therefore, the dominance of mainstream religions culturally and institutionally through holidays and rituals leaves little room for other religions such as Islam to be expressed in the public space. Everyday places and platforms such as shopping centers, public squares, and television programs are dominated by Christianity. This is particularly true during holidays and celebrations. Regardless of how secular the American political systems may be perceived, the system actually privileges one religion, Christianity (and often times Judaism), over another, Islam (Alba 2005). Aysel Turkoglu is a well educated conservative Turkish immigrant mother with two children. She complains about the difficulties she faces in America in teaching her children her own values. She states: "it is very hard to teach your children Turkish culture, religion, and values in [an] American context. They spend much more time with their friends at school than with you. Almost all of my children's friends are American." While many immigrants from different origins feel similar things when they raise their children in their new cultural setting, Ayse Turkoglu believes that it is harder for Muslims to teach their children Muslim and Turkish cultural values while living in the United States where negative images of Islam and the culture of Muslim countries are widely circulated in the media.

There is also the belief that the social organization of space in the United States does not allow Muslim immigrants to freely express their faith, as Muslim worship practices and religious needs require accommodations not normally available in the United States. For instance, Muslims are required to pray five times a day. They typically have problems finding places to fulfill their religious obligations because of the limited number of mosques and Islamic centers in urban America. Therefore, for many Muslims, practicing their religion is a difficult problem when they find themselves in places such as airports, places of employment, and schools at prayer time. Although a few public facilities such as Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, Georgia have opened interfaith chapels to serve all religions including Islam, the overall American social space is not organized in a way that can accommodate the religious needs of most Muslims.

Getting permission to build a mosque is another problem that Muslims face in the United States. They must deal with the reluctance of government authorities to issue permits to build mosques, as some communities do not want to see Islamic landscapes in their neighborhoods (Alba 2005). For instance, several years ago the Turkish American community in New York bought land on Long Island to build a mosque. After struggling with bureaucracy, they finally received permission to start construction. However, a few months after the construction began, people in the neighborhood filed complaints, stopping the construction of the Islamic structure in 2002. When I interviewed community members who were involved in the mosque construction during 2002, many indicated that they believed that if it were a construction site for a church, nobody would have tried to stop it.

Some scholars (such as Coleman 1987; Portes 1995; Wuthnow and Hackett, 2003) have pointed out the importance of social capital and networks in the integration of ethnic and religious groups. Network ties and associated norms such as trust can assist groups to promote internal social cohesion with subgroups and to link these groups to the larger society. Social networks can manifest in socioeconomic status, political participation, trust (a norm that encourages cooperation and reflects a feeling of efficacy, interpersonal network ties), and religion (Wuthnow and Hackett 2003; Coleman 1987; Portes 1995; Maggard 2004). Similarly, Turkish Americans have established a number of organizations that function to promote internal social cohesion within the Turkish American community and to link their community to the larger American society. Turkish American umbrella organizations such as the Federation of Turkish

American Associations (FTAA), and the Assembly of Turkish American Associations along with their member associations, help to establish internal social cohesion within the Turkish American community and link their community to the larger American society. Although these organizations are secular in their agendas, they also count religious organizations amongst their members. These religious organizations, with their religious centers and schools, play an important role in providing internal social cohesion within the Turkish American community. For instance; The Fatih Mosque in Brooklyn, with its summer camps and weekend schools, provides the community with religious and cultural education. The Amity School in Brooklyn and the Pioneer Academy of Science in Clifton, New Jersey organize graduation ceremonies to which parents as well as members of the larger Turkish American community are invited to attend. These schools, through activities such as graduation ceremonies and holiday festivals, function to increase solidarity within the Turkish American community. Turkish American mosques and schools also organize interfaith-intercultural activities with other schools and religious organizations in the New York City metropolitan area. Therefore, they not only help to provide internal social cohesion but also present and link the Turkish American community to other communities and the larger American society (Kaya 2005).

Moreover, religion can create important boundaries when the institutional system pressures for assimilation. Religion as a personal matter is quite different from other cultural practices and elements. For instance, one can speak more than one language but cannot normally practice two religions at the same time. Also, while the teaching of a language is generally allowed in schools, the teaching of religion does not receive the same degree of freedom (Alba 2005). Necmi Dursun, a conservative Turkish immigrant, feels pressured to assimilate. He states "people were surprised that I did not have a girlfriend. I was feeling a lot of social pressure. All these circumstances put me in a position where I had to reevaluate my faith. I became more sincere in my faith and became more aware of what I believed." As in the case of Necmi Dursun, pressure from the larger society to assimilate may result in a stronger boundary. Gender relations are closely related with belief systems, and Islam is generally quite strict about the segregation of sexes. Therefore, differing religious views and beliefs about gender relations can easily result in religious boundaries.

The events of September 11, 2001, mark an important date in American history in terms of loss of life, wealth, and a national sense of security. Americans of all religions and

nationalities, including Muslim Americans, were totally shocked by the events. Many Muslim immigrants stated: "Please God, don't let it be a Muslim" as they feared what might happen to their communities via retribution. Following the events of September 11, people from ethnic and religious groups such as Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in the United States were targeted with blame and attacked (Peek 2003). Muslim immigrants who were found to have been committing minor infractions of U.S. immigration laws were deported. Muslim organizations and businesses have since been under strict scrutiny and many Muslim philanthropic organizations have been closed. Muslim Americans with Muslim sounding names and Muslim appearances have been targeted and subjected to onerous security checks at airports, and transportation stations (Bozorgmehr and Bakalian Forthcoming).

Events have shown that religion is an important site of boundary construction and religious views have social power, as these views can inspire, punish, coerce, unite and divide communities. Muslim Americans found themselves in a defensive position, as the media representation of Muslims and statements from various individuals and groups contributed to the already negative image of Muslims in the United States. Muslim Americans have been under constant pressure to prove that they are loyal Americans and many indicated that they felt they needed to redefine themselves as "good citizens." The number of hate crimes against Muslims (including those against Turkish Americans) who displayed obvious visual differences such as wearing a headscarf (*hijab*) have dramatically increased since 9/11 (Taylor and Hawley 2003).

Muslim Americans have developed strategies to minimize the backlash effects as they feel the need to distance themselves from radical groups such as Al Qaeda and express their own interpretation of Islam. Groups such as Turkish Americans have not only distanced themselves from radical organizations but also ethnic groups such as Arabs. The Turkish immigrants who participated in my study constantly made the point that they were not Arabs, did not want to be associated with Arabs, and that their "imagined community" of Turks had nothing to do with the events of September 11. Moreover, their emphasis on their Americanness/Westerness became very apparent. Thirty-five of thirty-eight people I interviewed claimed that they believed themselves to be more Western than Middle Eastern.

Other strategies to escape harassment included changing appearance and names. For instance; male students with beards would shave in order to look less Arab or Muslim. Female students wearing headscarves (the *hijab)* changed their manner of dress. Some even quit wearing

the *hijab* entirely. These female students stated that it was very difficult for them when they were asked to remove their *hijab* by their families and friends, as they indicated that the *hijab* as an essential part of their Muslim identity was very important for them (Peek 2003). Ayten, a second generation Turkish American from Brooklyn, is one of the Turkish immigrants who did not stop wearing a *hijab*. After 911, her parents did not send her to school for a few days. Her parents feared that someone might try to hurt their daughter because of her obvious Muslim appearance. The family was divided about whether Ayten should wear her *hijab* or not. Finally, her father told her that the decision was hers and she decided to go to school wearing her headscarf (*hijab*). She indicated that she was very scared as she felt everyone was looking at her and examining her. Even one of her teachers harassed her verbally by asking if she was a terrorist. However, she was very happy when the school administration intervened and assured her and her teacher that they would not tolerate any discriminatory acts.

Similarly, Sibel, a second generation Turkish American, feels that she has been discriminated against in job applications because of her name. She states: "I am planning to change my legal name, because I believe that I get discriminated against in job applications. They ask where I am from and I say America, but they ask where my real country is. I was born in the U.S. and I do not have an accent. But it is my name that gets in the way." Another interviewee, Cindy, has already changed her name because she indicated that she did not want to deal with explaining her national origin to everyone.

Ayten, a second generation Turkish American who wears a Muslim headscarf provides another example of discrimination against Muslim Turkish Americans. She indicates "I feel more disadvantageous. Few days ago, I called for a job at a local library and asked if they had a position. They said yes. But when I went up and asked for a job application, and the lady looked at me, said that "no, we don't." I definitely thought that it was my religion because they cannot find someone for the position in half an hour. My differences are very visible because of my covering. I have not experienced any difficulties because I am Turkish but I have felt that I have been discriminated against because I am Muslim."

The reception of Muslims by the larger society is a very important element in the integration process. If there is a lack of acceptance of a religion or culture by the larger society, integration becomes very problematic regardless of the efforts of the groups who want to integrate. In the Western mind, including the American mind, Islam does not have a positive

image. The media representation of Islam as an alien or foreign religion makes it difficult for Muslims to become part of America. Images of Muslims as "terrorists", "fundamentalists", and "violent", and the representation of Islam as a "wicked" and "backward" religion cause Muslims to feel out of space, alienated and frustrated (Lockman 2004; Moore 2002; Said 1978; Shaheen 1997). They feel that their faith is not justly represented or fairly treated. Muslim Turkish Americans do not accept the views that associate Islam with the acts of some radicals, criminals and fundamentalists. They feel that the acts of some radicals, criminals and fundamentalists belonging to other faiths such as Christianity and Judaism are not represented in the same way. Ayten, a 17-year old second generation Turkish American complains about this. She states: "when someone who is a Christian does something bad, it is always him, not his identity, not his religion. It is only him accused of his actions not his community or family. Because he does something bad, other Christians do not get blamed. When a Muslim does something bad, it is always religion [Islam] that goes on trial." Similarly, Burhan, a well educated 28-year old first generation Turkish American, does not think that America is open enough to accept him for who he is. He believes that "being Muslim is a big disadvantage in the US because Islam is seen a violent and terrorist religion."

Various groups have "posited and projected Islam as inherently violent and incompatible with Western values and norms" (Takim 2004, p.344). However, Muslim Turkish immigrants indicate that being Muslim does not conflict with being American. This is a positive element in the integration process, because it indicates a certain level of optimism regarding the co-existence of "Muslimness" and "Americanness." For example, Nizam Dursun, a first generation Turkish American who describes himself as a modern conservative Muslim, indicates that "I don't like the impression that Islam is against modernity. I think those who try to limit the freedom of religion and cultural expression are the ones who are not modern. I have no doubt about the new generation's commitment to religious life and the adoption of modern values such as freedom of speech, representative government and commitment to science."

Muslim Turkish American immigrants believe that misunderstandings about Muslims in the United States are very much a result of public ignorance and unfair media representation. They believe that most people's perceptions about Muslims are shaped by media representation, which is usually sensational and very unbalanced. Islam is viewed and presented as a threat by a network of individuals, institutions and policy makers. Therefore, the portrayal of Islam as

wicked and backward religion and representation of the Middle East to the Middle East conflict can be seen as a form of *Orientalism* (Kalin 2001; Shaheen 1997, 2001). The common portrayal of Muslims as irrational, uncivilized, threatening, and the uniquely fundamentalist "other" is quite problematic because it presents Muslims as a threat rather than a cultural or religious group. Muslims that contradict these stereotypes are presented as exceptions, not the norm. Muslim populations and societies, rich with religious, cultural and political diversity, are homogenized to embody certain specific, negative characteristics (Muscati 2003). In this process Islam as a whole is demonized and made to appear incompatible with the more 'progressive' Western values and civilization. By presenting the world in such white-and-black terms, rhetoric about Muslims shouts down dialogue and moderation in favor of conflict and hostility. Religious and political leaders, as well as best selling authors, create a strong negative image of Muslims. *Macleans* Magazine refers in a headline to the development of nuclear weapons by Pakistan as an "Islamic Bomb" (Muscati, 2003, 256). Statements of Christian religious leaders such as Franklin Graham ("The God of Islam is not the same God and Islam is a very evil and wicked religion"), Jerry Farwell ("Muhammad was a terrorist"), Reverend Benny Hinn ("this is not a war between Arabs and Jews. It is between God and the devil") and of political figures such as George Bush, ("axis of evil, fighting the evil ones, ridding the world of evil") are categorical as they divide the world in terms of absolute good and evil (Muscati 2003). In these statements and opinions, terrorists, fundamentalists and radicals are presented as ambassadors of Islam, and Islam is presented as a wicked, evil religion that promotes terrorism. Such thinking implies that the hostility between elements within the West and within the Muslim world is caused by a conflict between good and evil (Muscati 2003). However, what is important is that these portrayals and opinions influence millions of people and form policies such as immigration. Such portrayals make Muslim immigrants target for hostilities, discrimination and mistreatment.

Identifying the religion of Muslim criminals but not of Christian or Jewish criminals is seen by Muslims as unfair and biased. Such identification frustrates Husniye Tatar, a Turkish immigrant who came to the United States forty years ago. She asks: "why do they have to say Muslim? Do they call Christian terrorists as Christians? Why don't they say an extremist? The media misrepresents issues. I am a very open minded person but I cannot tell these to people very openly." Likewise, Ayten, a second generation conservative Turkish immigrant complains about the representation of terrorist acts committed by Muslims. She asserts that "when someone who

is a Christian does something bad, it is always him, it is not his identity, and it is not his religion. It is only him accused of his actions not his community or family. Because he does something bad, other Christians do not get blamed. When a Muslim does something bad, it is always religion [Islam] that goes on trial." While I do not ignore the fact that many terrorists invoke religion as the foundation of their actions, many Muslims, including Muslim Americans, find this very problematic and question the relevancy of religion in describing criminal acts such as terrorism.

Equating Islam and Muslims with certain criminal or political tendencies such as terrorism or fundamentalism is very misleading and problematic because it justifies the punishment of an entire religious community or country (such as Afghanistan or Iraq). Such lines of thinking ignore the history that shaped current hostilities and tendencies. Mamdani (2002) calls this representation problem "culture talk". He (Madani, 2002, 767) states: "culture talk tends to think of individuals (from "traditional cultures") in authentic and original terms, as if their identities are shaped entirely by the supposedly unchanging culture into which they are born. In so doing, it *dehistoricizes* the construction of political identities." This reasoning and line of thinking assumes that the world is divided into modern and premodern cultures and the Muslim world is represented as part of the latter. The impression given is that the West produces its culture while the Muslim world is the prisoner of its culture. When papers on Muslims and Islam are read, one gets the feeling that Muslims have no history, no politics, and no debates. Muslim culture seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom. One gets the feeling that Muslims must be changed by outside forces as they seem incapable of changing their culture themselves and the logic behind their political acts can be gleaned from their religion (Mamdani 2002).

Moreover, Muslims are viewed as a homogeneous and monolithic threat and consequently there is a constant process of dehumanization of Muslims. On gets the impression that "Muslims think and act as a mass rather than individuals" and "fundamentalist thought can only exist within Islam" (Muscati 2003, 259). Such monolithic views regarding Muslim Americans are very problematic, because they forcibly homoginize their differences to justify some stereotypical portrayals such as radicalism, fundamentalism, and terrorism. However, American Muslims are actually quite pluralistic and divided between immigrants and native-born Americans as well as by culture, nationality and class (Nyang 1997). Muslim immigrants in the United States are quite diverse in terms of their race, ethnicity, nationality, place of origin and religious practices.

Differences among Indonesians, Turks, Iranians, African-Americans and Arabs are not easily reconcilable into any single category.

After the events of September 11, Muslim Americans have better understood the social reality of American pluralism and have been trying to influence the way the media represents them and their religion. They have begun to invite representatives from the media to their activities, have felt a greater need for active engagement with other groups, and have become more vocal, visible and extroverted in American society (Ahmad and Szpara 2003). American Muslims, including Turkish Americans, now believe that they have a responsibility to teach Americans about their faith, culture, and identity. They have also noticed that terrorism jeopardizes both their Muslim identity and American citizenship. They do not want terrorists such as Usama Bin Laden to speak for them. So they have broken their silence, as they feel that it is time to speak for themselves (Takim 2004). For instance, Turkish American organizations and institutions have organized interfaith dialogue programs, open-house programs, and conferences to get their voices heard. Vedat Cam, a retired Turkish American physician, believes that the Turkish American community has a responsibility to teach Americans about their faith, culture, and identity. He states "we have to do our part to tell them who we are. They don't have to know us; we need to let them [know] who we are. We learn everything about America but they don't even know where Turkey is." If there is one benefit from the events of September 11, 2001, it is the imperative for increased dialogue and conversation between different faith groups, particularly between Muslims and Christians. Muslims and Christians are beginning to understand the benefits of talking with one another, and the disadvantages of talking about one another (Takim 2004).

Muslim Americans have constructed an Islamic civic identity as they have taken part in peace and anti-racism movements in America and have become involved in social programs such as helping homeless and needy Americans (Takim 2004). While Muslim Americans were very interested in American foreign policy in the past, they have recently become more involved in domestic issues and they have become more interested in securing their positions as Americans. For instance, Turkish immigrants in the New York City metropolitan area began to visit politicians at different levels of government and formed interfaith dialogue programs with members of other faiths in the area. Through these programs they want to influence the way they are presented to the "outside"/.

Ahmad and Szpara (2003) document Muslim Students' complaints about the lack of knowledge and the level of ignorance about Islam and Muslims that they see in their schools. These students believe that Muslims are stereotyped and misrepresented and they feel that they are negatively affected by these misrepresentations. They indicate that they want their schools to foster a positive image of Muslims by establishing connections with the larger Muslim American community and by celebrating Muslim holidays. Studies indicate that the more personal experience an American has with a Muslim, the more tolerant and understanding s/he is (Ahmad and Szpara 2003; Kimball 2004; Kaya 2004). Americans who have had Muslim friends and relatives have more positive views towards Muslims and Muslim immigrants. Like other immigrant organizations, Muslim American student organizations have organized events that bring school administrators and students from different faiths together to foster a more positive view of Muslim immigrants. These events included Ramadan dinners, movies, panels, and conferences.

Conclusions

As the number of Muslim Americans increase, they become more visible in American social space. This troubles some groups and individuals as they find Muslims and their increasing visibility threatening. Muslim Americans are often associated with threats such as terrorism, fundamentalism, radicalism, backwardness, and violence. Such a monolithic view of Muslims ignores the diversity found among Muslims in the United States. Also, the way religion is institutionalized in the United States creates an unequal opportunity for Islam and its adherents, and creates difficulties for Muslims in achieving parity. Mainstream religions dominate much of the public space, and Muslim landmarks are not easily tolerated. Islam is frequently viewed as a non-American religion and Muslims are viewed as members of a radical, fundamentalist and terrorist religion. Statements from politicians, well-read writers, and influential religious leaders not only shape public opinion about who Muslims are, but also government policies (such as immigration) towards Muslims. Muslim immigrants, including Turkish Americans, find the representation of Muslims in the media to be unfair and very biased. The scrutiny of Muslim organizations, detentions of Muslim immigrants, and passing of laws such as the Patriot Act have caused Muslims in America to feel that they are not first class citizens in the United States. This

also affects the feelings of Muslim immigrants towards the United States as a country of equal treatment and acceptance. They believe that mainstream religions and their adherents are privileged and Muslim Americans are pushed to the margins. From job applications to life on the street, Muslim immigrants with obvious differences such as Muslim clothing and Muslim names feel othered and greatly disadvantaged. Muslim Americans frequently have difficulties voicing their experiences and problems, as regardless of their growing numbers they are still an ineffective community in the United States when attempting to counter the racist invective against them. Therefore, they often rely on sympathetic non-Muslims within the establishment to speak out on their behalf (Muscati 2003, p. 253). Therefore, since the events of September 11, 2001, Muslim Americans have become more active in attempting to reverse this process and alter this disadvantaged position. They want to influence the way they are represented in the media and the way they are treated.

In conclusion, this study shows that religious boundaries often hinder the integration of an ethnic group, not because the religious beliefs and practices of that ethnic group are radically different from those of the dominant society, but because of the way differences between the group and the larger society are politicized and represented. It also demonstrates that the successful integration of Muslim immigrants such as Turkish Americans into the larger culture is not totally in the hands of these groups, as their acceptance by the larger society is a crucial factor in the integration process. Viewing Muslim immigrants as different, foreign, or alien and associating them with terrorism, fundamentalism, radicalism, and backwardness, hinders integration of Muslim ethnic groups in the United States. Such generalizations make Muslim immigrants such as Turkish Americans feel out of space in the United States. Also, groups such as Turkish Americans distance themselves from groups such as Arabs because they think that Arabs are somehow responsible for creating negative images of Muslims in the United States.

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