

IDENTITY AND SPACE: THE CASE OF TURKISH AMERICANS*

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ABSTRACT. Until recently, Muslim Americans have often been overlooked in studies on immigration, ethnicity, and race. Their loyalty to America and their integration into the larger culture have frequently been questioned by the media, and academia's interest has mostly been limited to establishing links between Muslims, fundamentalism, and terrorism. Muslim American experiences—their social, political, and cultural institutions and spaces in the United States—have drawn little attention from geographers. But stereotypes play an important role in intergroup relations and public-policy making. Thus, it is important to understand Muslim ethnic-group experiences of immigration and their place-making activities in the United States. Based on research in the greater New York metropolitan area, this study explores one facet of the Muslim experience in the United States by investigating Turkish American identity-construction spaces and their role in the preservation and reformation of Turkish American identity; that is, how these spaces emphasize and shape particular identities and discourage others. *Keywords: identity, immigration, New York City, Turkish Americans.*

Over the past two decades, geographers have shown growing interest in identity politics and the role of place in the formation of identities (Crow 1996; Berry and Henderson 2002). Geographers have produced theoretically well informed work on identity and space, going beyond the boundaries of the discipline and challenging classic notions of space and its role in the formation of identities, production of culture, and shaping of social relations. One specific argument is that space not only is a container in which events occur but also shapes what happens and how it happens (Keith and Pile 1993; Massey 1993; Pile and Thrift 1995). It is an active component of identities because it is both the medium and the message of domination and subordination (Massey 1993).

Geographers have also conducted research on ethnicity and identity among immigrant communities. They have examined boundary-maintenance activities and community-survival strategies applied by first-time immigrants for preserving identities and finding employment and housing, such as in the cases of Ethiopian immigrants in Washington, D.C. (Chacko 2003), Russian immigrants in Sacramento (Hardwick 2002), and Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans (Airriess 2002).

Regardless of the mounting research by geographers on immigration, ethnicity, and race in the United States, Muslim American experiences and their social, political, and cultural institutions and spaces in the United States rarely gained significant attention from geographers until the events of 9/11. Given the important role that stereotypes play in intergroup relations and public-policy making such as immigration and the fact that Muslims represent the third largest and fastest-growing

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