Death On The Move: Burial, Repatriation, And The Politics Of Belonging Among Muslims In Germany

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Abstract
This dissertation examines what happens to migrant bodies after they die. It demonstrates that the governance of the dead is intimately linked to the construction of the nation and the enactment of sovereignty. Through a comparative study of the mortuary practices of ethno-religious minorities in Germany, it highlights the ways that death structures political membership and identity. By tracing the actors, networks, and institutions that determine the movement of dead bodies within and across international borders, it analyzes how relations between authority, territory, and populations are managed at a transnational level. The dissertation builds on extensive, multi-sited fieldwork conducted in Berlin and Istanbul in 2013-15. Drawing on interviews and participant observation with bereaved families, Muslim undertakers, government officials, religious leaders, and representatives of funeral aid societies, I show how the corpse functions as a political object by structuring claims about citizenship, belonging, and collective identity. I argue that families, religious communities, and states all have a vested interest in the fate of dead bodies. Further, I demonstrate that in contexts where the boundaries of the nation and its demos are contested, burial decisions are political decisions. Focusing primarily on Turkish and Kurdish communities, I show how decisions about where and how to be buried are linked to larger political struggles over the meaning of home and homeland. While burial in Germany offers a symbolically powerful means for migrants and their children to assert political membership and foster a sense of belonging, the widespread practice of posthumous repatriation illustrates the continued importance of transnational ties and serves as an indictment of an exclusionary socio-political order. In both situations, the corpse is central to localizing and grounding political claims for recognition and inclusion. As I show, this is a highly contentious process wherein different factions, including states and civil society organizations, struggle over where dead bodies should go and what they should signify. In highlighting the role that burial decisions play in the negotiation of social, cultural, and political boundaries, this dissertation contributes to a growing body of literature on how the long-term settlement of Muslim immigrants is transforming European societies.

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DEATH ON THE MOVE: BURIAL, REPATRIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING
AMONG MUSLIMS IN GERMANY
Osman Balkan
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DEATH ON THE MOVE: BURIAL, REPATRIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

AMONG MUSLIMS IN GERMANY

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Osman Bekir Balkan

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Handelman, Danielle Hanley, Aniruddha Jairam, Juman Kim, Sara Mourad, Thea Riofrancos, and Sid Rothstein. I am particularly indebted to Matt Handelman for his inimitable perspective and to Guzmán Castro who showed me that there is no agency in Cabo Polonio.

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ABSTRACT

DEATH ON THE MOVE: BURIAL, REPATRIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING AMONG MUSLIMS IN GERMANY

Osman Balkan
Anne Norton

This dissertation examines what happens to migrant bodies after they die. It demonstrates that the governance of the dead is intimately linked to the construction of the nation and the enactment of sovereignty. Through a comparative study of the mortuary practices of ethno-religious minorities in Germany, it highlights the ways that death structures political membership and identity. By tracing the actors, networks, and institutions that determine the movement of dead bodies within and across international borders, it analyzes how relations between authority, territory, and populations are managed at a transnational level. The dissertation builds on extensive, multi-sited fieldwork conducted in Berlin and Istanbul in 2013-15. Drawing on interviews and participant observation with bereaved families, Muslim undertakers, government officials, religious leaders, and representatives of funeral aid societies, I show how the corpse functions as a political object by structuring claims about citizenship, belonging, and collective identity. I argue that families, religious communities, and states all have a vested interest in the fate of dead bodies. Further, I demonstrate that in contexts where
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INTRODUCTION: BODIES IN MOTION AND AT REST

“So far as the economy of the metropolitan country is concerned, migrant workers are immortal: immortal because they are continually interchangeable. They are not born: they are not brought up: they do not get tired: they do not die.”

– John Berger, A Seventh Man

“…This strange experience of hospitality transgressed, through which you die abroad and not always at all as you would have wanted.”

– Jacques Derrida, Of Hospitality

“It matters not I’ve oft been told / Where the body lies when the heart grows cold / Yet grant oh grant this wish to me / Bury me not on the lone prairie.”

– “The Dying Cowboy” (Traditional)

Death is a problem for the living. The dead, being dead, don’t seem to care. But we, the living, care very much for the dead. For millennia, human beings have devised different ways to dispose of, commemorate, or in some cases, eradicate the dead and their traces in the world. Some groups bury their dead while others eat them. Several religions enjoin their followers to burn dead bodies. For other religious faiths, cremation is unthinkable. Sometimes the dead are placed in trees or on mountaintops, left exposed to wild animals and birds of prey. Others prefer to keep their dead closer to home, by burying them under their houses or placing their ashes on the living room mantelpiece.

While death is universal, post-mortem practices are not. The diversity of mortuary rituals attests to the fact that the dead matter universally, though for different reasons in different times and places. Mortuary practices are shaped by a wide range of ideas about the body, the soul, and the afterlife. They also reflect more secular concerns, such as the place of the individual in society and the value accorded to different groups and persons
by members of a given community. As Metcalf and Huntington argue in their pioneering study on mortuary ritual, “the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. Life becomes transparent against the background of death, and fundamental social and cultural issues are revealed.”¹ I agree with their assessment and this dissertation starts from the premise that death offers an important window into people’s understanding of the social order and their place within it.

I am particularly interested in how death is experienced and managed in the context of migration, a phenomenon that I would like to refer to in what follows as “death out of place.” In this dissertation I focus primarily on how Turkish migrants and their descendants in Germany deal with and make sense of death in a country that they do not necessarily view as their own. Before I say more about the specific contours of this research project however, I’d like to explain what I mean by “death out of place.” Why, in particular, is a death in migration a death out of place?

The phrase “out of place” evokes a sense of unsettledness. It can be applied to those who are displaced, though the feeling of being out of place is not necessarily tied to the act of forcible expulsion or deportation. “Out of place” is how Edward Said describes the experience of a life lived between different places in his memoir by the same name.² For Said, being out of place was not merely a geographical reality, but an existential condition. He writes how from an early age he had a difficult time reconciling his two

¹ Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 25.
halves. “Edward,” an English name that was given to him in honor of the Prince of Wales, always seemed alien to his other half, the Arabic “Said.” His loyalties and allegiances—his very sense of self—were confused and contradictory. He felt, as he put it, “out of place.”

Said’s experience is resonant with other accounts of migratory life. By its very nature, migration implies mobility—comings and goings, presences and absences, departures and arrivals. Anyone who has been a migrant will tell you that they have, at one time or another, grappled with the difficulties of being between two worlds. Migrants must reconcile the absences generated by their departures and the reactions to their presence in a new society. Between these two poles, some have found themselves in a position of double absence, both from their place of origin and in their place of arrival. Describing this predicament, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that “the immigrant is atopus, has no place, and is displaced and unclassifiable… Neither citizen nor foreigner, nor truly on the side of the Same nor really on the side of the Other, he exists within that ‘bastard’ place… on the frontier between being and social non-being. Displaced, in the sense of being inopportune, he is a source of embarrassment.”³

The migrant as inopportune and unsettled/unsettling connects to another dimension of being “out of place.” The story of Turkish migration to Germany was initially understood by German policymakers as an economic question. The Gastarbeiter (“Guest Worker”) initiative was conceived of as a temporary and cyclical program to

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³ Bourdieu 2004: xiv. Atopus is how Plato describes Socrates, which according to Hadot and Chase, refers to the ways in which the philosopher is at once “strange, extravagant, absurd, unclassifiable, disturbing.” Hadot and Chase 2004: 35. See also Schlosser 2014, particularly chapter six on Socrates’s atopia.
overcome shortages in the German labor market and to ensure the steady rotation of cheap manpower throughout Germany.\textsuperscript{4} Between 1955 – 1973 more than 2.5 million foreign workers emigrated to Germany as part of this official government program.\textsuperscript{5} But as the Swiss poet and playwright Max Frisch noted during the height of the *Gastarbeiter* period, labor migration is never simply about labor. “We called for labor” he observed, “but people came instead.”

The arrival of new migrants from Southern Europe and the Mediterranean brought different groups, cultures, ideas, and ways of life into contact with one another. The largest national group among the foreign laborers were the Turks, who constituted 23 percent of the immigrant labor force in Germany by 1973. Such encounters are at times celebrated but can also give rise to negative feelings and reactions, especially if members of the receiving society view the arrival of new groups as incongruous to the established socio-cultural order.

As the anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, what really disturbs a given cultural order is when things appear in the wrong category or when they fail to fit into predetermined or pre-established categories.\textsuperscript{6} The stability of a given culture requires that

\textsuperscript{4} Chin 2009, Rist 1978.
\textsuperscript{5} The first bilateral agreement for the recruitment of foreign laborers was signed with Italy in 1955 and served as a model for subsequent treaties with Spain and Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965) and Yugoslavia (1968). It set the legal parameters and procedures for West German businesses hiring non-German workers. Though initial recruitment was slow, the onset of rapid economic growth in the 1950s coupled with demographic bottlenecks following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which cut off a crucial source of cheap labor from the East, resulted in the acceleration of foreign migration to Germany. The number of Turkish workers grew steadily and eventually outstripped other national groups.
\textsuperscript{6} Douglas 2002 [1966].
persons and things should remain in their appointed place. Douglas thought that every culture maintains symbolic boundaries that aim to keep categories and groupings “pure,” which in turn give particular cultures or peoples their unique identity. What unsettles us, she claims, is when persons and things do not conform to their ascribed category in the cultural order. Douglas refers to this incongruity as “matter out of place.”

To cite her well-known example, dirt is not unsettling or polluting because it is intrinsically unhygienic. Dirt, she points out, “is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.” In other words, dirt also has its place. In the forest or in the garden dirt is fine. In one’s house, it is not. For certain cultures, dirt in the house is considered taboo. There, it is “matter out of place,” an example of the transgression of symbolic boundaries.

Douglas writes that every culture creates classificatory systems and structures that embody and express deep-seated ideas about the pure and the polluting and the sacred and taboo. When confronted with “matter out of place” we are inclined to try to restore what we believe is the appropriate order. In our efforts to “purify” what “defiles” we remove dirt and throw it away. We try to reorder our environment in order to reestablish a “normal” state of affairs.

Douglas’s insights about the pure and the polluting were taken up by Julia

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7 Cultures are never self-contained, bounded entities with static boundaries but are often treated as such by groups looking to defend and preserve values and ideas that they associate with a particular culture and way of life.
8 Ibid: 36.
Kristeva who observed how the “closure” of cultures, the drawing of symbolic boundaries around a particular group of people against foreigners, ‘others,’ strangers, aliens, intruders and so forth, is part of the same process of purification. While outsiders might threaten existing symbolic orders, Kristeva identifies another force that is even more disruptive of the boundaries between self and other: the corpse.

Kristeva sees the corpse as the paradigmatic form of the abject, understood as a nauseating and repulsive object from which we seek to distance ourselves. She writes, “…corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live… The corpse seen without God and outside of science is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.” For Kristeva, the abject collapses the distinctions that separate subject and object. It undoes the fundamental boundaries that mark subjectivity.

The corpse is a compelling object for several reasons. In Kristeva’s reading, it reminds us of our own mortality. By “death injecting life” she means that the corpse provides a mirror of mortality, a sign of our finitude. Because the thought of our own death is unsettling, we must constantly thrust it aside in order to live, a practice that psychologist Ernest Becker identified as the “denial of death.” The corpse, to use Kristeva’s language, shows us the undeniable reality that awaits us all. Though dead, the corpse maintains some qualities of personhood by virtue of the fact that “it” was once a living, breathing, speaking, thinking, and feeling human being. Being dead, however, it is

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10 Becker 1973. In this landmark study, Becker attempts to show how the fear of death is one of the most fundamental and important inner drives of human beings.
no longer a person. At the same time, it is not quite a thing. This curious state of being neither a person nor a thing might help explain why so much care is given to the treatment of corpses and conversely, why their mistreatment can cause great anguish.\textsuperscript{11}

Images of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by followers of General Mohamed Aidid in October 1993 aroused the same sort of horrified emotional response that the story of Achilles dragging the lifeless body of Hector over the fields of Troy did in Homer’s \textit{Iliad}. During the Second World War, Nazi occupiers left the corpses of executed resistance fighters on the streets of Paris, just as Mexican drug cartels in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century leave the bodies of their victims hanging from bridges and highway intersections today. As historian Thomas Laqueur writes with reference to the feelings generated by the mistreatment of dead bodies, “the radically different eschatologies of Bronze Age or Golden Age Greece, sixteenth-century Mexico, eighteenth-century Jamaica or England, and twentieth century France or Somalia or the United States seem to melt away.”\textsuperscript{12}

The corpse, as not quite person and not quite thing, can be thought of as a

\textsuperscript{11} Take for example the story of Diogenes the Cynic, which serves as a counterpoint to the argument developed by Thomas Laqueur in his magisterial work on the cultural meaning of the dead. As recounted by Cicero in his \textit{Tusculan Dispositions}, “[Diogenes] ordered himself to be thrown anywhere without being buried. And when his friends replied, “What! To the birds and the beasts?” “By no means,” saith he; “place my staff near me, that I may drive them away.” “How can you do that,” they answer, “for you will not perceive them?” “How am I then injured by being torn by these animals, if I have no sensation?”” Quoted in Laqueur 2015: 1. Laqueur argues that Diogenes is right in that the dead body cannot be injured but that he was ultimately “existentially wrong, wrong in a way that defies all cultural logic.” The dead body matters tremendously, according to Laqueur, “because the dead make social worlds.” \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{12} Laqueur 2015: 7. I take the examples of the American soldier, Hector, and the French resistance from Laqueur who also writes about Antigone (who I’ll discuss below), Jamaican slaves denied burial rites for rebellion or for denouncing Christianity, the Spanish conquistadors’ practice of leaving dead Aztecs in the public square for all to see, and the English poor riots against laws that sanctioned the use of criminal bodies for public dissection. On the politics of slave burial in Jamaica see also Brown 2008.
pollutant. When Kristeva writes that the corpse is abject she also has in mind the physical properties of the corpse. Processes such as putrefaction, decomposition, seepage, and leakage that take hold of the body after death are repulsive for most people. Corpses must be disposed of because they deteriorate and become impure. Burial is one common method of disposal that entails the re-ordering of matter. The corpse is put in its proper place—out of sight, but not out of mind.

The act of burial is charged with symbolic meaning. As Robert Hertz, a student of Durkheim, noted at the turn of the twentieth century, the corpse is “an object of horror and dread” not only because of the aforementioned processes of physical decomposition, but also because “when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of its life, in the faith that it has in itself.”

Like Durkheim, Hertz believed that society regenerates itself through ritual and saw in funerary rites a process by which communities move individuals from the world of the living to the world of the dead. It is through funerary rites, what Arnold van Gennep calls “rites of passage” that the dead are put in their proper place. That is, out of our world—the world of the living—and into the realm of the ancestors and the dead.

There is of course, enormous variation in the ways that such transitions are achieved, which as I mentioned above, relates to different cultural and religious beliefs about the body, the soul, and the afterlife. In migratory contexts ethnic and religious

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13 Hertz 1960 [1907]: 37, 38.
14 Hertz lays out his influential theory through a study of the mortuary practices of South Asian tribal societies, in particular, secondary burial among the Dayak of Kalimantan, Indonesia. He shows how social death is not coterminous with the biological death of the individual and that the living ease the dead into the world of the ancestors through a series of phased transitions, each with its own ritual practices.
15 Van Gennep 1961 [1908].
minorities may face legal and bureaucratic challenges concerning the permissibility and feasibility of certain funerary rites, a topic that I address at greater length in chapter four. A larger and more existential question that is at the heart of this dissertation and which poses a different set of challenges for immigrants has to do with the fate of migrant corpses. The peripatetic nature of migratory life may come to rest with death, but questions that haunt migrants in life persist as posthumous predicaments for their kin. Where does a dead body belong? For immigrants the answer is far from obvious.

Although belonging operates at manifold levels and individuals have multiple attachments to different groups and places, the corpse is less schizophrenic than the self. The dead body can only be in one place at one time. Yet the mere fact of death does not necessarily limit mobility. Bodies at rest are often set into motion. On any given day, the bodies and ashes of thousands of dead migrants are shipped around the world to be laid to rest in ancestral soils.

Françoise Lestage estimates that one in every six Mexicans who dies in the United States is repatriated to Mexico for burial, with around ten thousand repatriations annually. In the European context, Nathal Dessing suggests that 99% of Turkish and Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands prefer burial in their country of origin, while Katy Gardner, in her research on the transnational death rituals of British Sylhetis, claims that

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16 To think through the link between death and mobility, consider how descriptions of death in everyday language are often saturated with metaphors of motion: “the final journey,” “passing away,” “going to a better place,” “crossing to the other side,” etc.
18 Lestage 2013. See also Félix 2011 on the repatriation of Mexican dead from the United States to Mexico, a phenomenon that he terms “posthumous transnationalism.”
60-70% of Sylheti dead are sent to Bangladesh for burial.\textsuperscript{19} In Germany, a number of Turkish funeral funds offer logistical and financial support for the funerals of their members, who overwhelmingly choose to have their bodies repatriated to Turkey for burial.\textsuperscript{20} Others are buried locally in cemeteries in the countries where they lived and died, some of which have been established to accommodate ethno-religious minorities.

This dissertation examines what happens to migrant bodies after they die. It explores how experiences with death in migratory settings shape affective and material ties to religious and political communities. It builds on extensive, multi-sited fieldwork conducted in Berlin and Istanbul in 2013-15. Drawing on interviews and participant observation with bereaved families, death workers, government officials, religious leaders, medical practitioners, and representatives of funeral funds, I show that the corpse functions as a political object by structuring claims about citizenship, belonging, and collective identity. I argue that families, religious communities, and states all have a vested interest in the fate of dead bodies. Further, I demonstrate that in contexts where the boundaries of the nation and its demos are contested, burial decisions are political decisions.

Focusing primarily on Turkish and Kurdish communities, I show how decisions about where and how to be buried are linked to larger political struggles over the meaning of home and homeland. While burial in Germany offers a symbolically powerful means for migrants and their children to assert political membership and foster a sense of

\textsuperscript{19} Dessing 2001, Gardner 2002.
\textsuperscript{20} See chapter two. See also Zirh 2012.
belonging, the widespread practice of posthumous repatriation illustrates the continued importance of transnational ties and serves as an indictment of an exclusionary socio-political order. In both situations, the corpse is central to localizing and grounding political claims for recognition and inclusion. As I show, this is a highly contentious process wherein different factions, including states, families, and civil society organizations, struggle over where dead bodies should go and what they should signify.

Previous studies have examined the political significance of funerals and the ways that the dead confer historical depth to imagined communities, but often from a perspective that privileges official state rituals and narratives. This dissertation considers the role of the state alongside a range of private actors and institutions that are central to the provision of funerary services and the governance of the dead. By attending to the multiple ways that Muslim minorities manage and memorialize death in the diaspora, it offers insight into quotidian forms of commemorative activity and sheds light on the everyday practices through which the nation is constructed and contested. In highlighting the role that burial practices play in the negotiation of social, cultural, and political boundaries, it also contributes to a growing body of literature on how the long-term settlement of Muslim immigrants is transforming European societies.

My approach to the study of death out of place is ethnographic. An ethnographic approach requires immersion in a particular community and is motivated by the desire to understand the meanings that the individuals and groups under study attribute to their

social and political reality. During the course of my research, my primary field site was Berlin, a city with a substantial Turkish population. I spent most of my time in Kreuzberg and Neukölln, neighborhoods with a high concentration of Turks, Arabs, and other non-ethnic Germans. Kreuzberg is often referred to as “Little Istanbul,” though its long-term residents are facing increasing pressure with higher rents owing to the neighborhood’s transformation into an epicenter of Berlin’s nightlife.

As a Turkish-American whose childhood was spent between the United States and Turkey, I found myself in the position of an insider / outsider in Germany. I did not grow up among a diaspora community in the United States, as we were the only Turkish family in a small village in upstate New York. Yet frequent travel to Turkey and several years spent in Turkish schools gave me an intimate familiarity with Turkish culture, language, and history. In Turkey I was viewed as an American and in the United States people emphasized my Turkishness. To this day, people frequently ask me where I am from and praise my English language skills. From an early age, I had a good idea about what it felt like and meant to be a part of a society where others view you as an outsider.

The Turkish people that I met in Germany were curious to learn about my experience in the United States. For the most part, they had not encountered Turks who grew up in countries other than Turkey or in other parts of Western Europe. I was frequently asked, “what do Americans think about Turkish people” or “what is Turkish life like in the United States?” My interlocutors were disappointed to hear that Americans didn’t really think much about Turks and didn’t know very much about Turkey since the number of Turkish people living in this country is relatively small and diffuse.
Turks in Germany are used to being at the center of heated debates around the place of immigrants in German society, a situation that is not entirely applicable to Turks qua Turks in the United States. The people I spoke to had certain preconceptions about Americans and the United States, a country that they related to in unexpected ways. Often when people heard that I had lived in New York they told me, “you have Harlem, we have Kreuzberg. We are like the blacks in America.” This sort of self-racialization has been documented elsewhere, as a strategy by which minority groups in Germany try to make sense of their structurally vulnerable position.\textsuperscript{22}

The questions that I was asked about my own experiences lent themselves naturally to conversations about the experiences of my interlocutors. I heard many stories about family histories of migration and settlement, about annual vacations and trips to Turkey, about people’s hopes for their children and their future, and about the challenges they faced in their day-to-day lives. The notion of integration came up frequently and was often a point of contention for my interlocutors. Social scientists often talk about integration in structural terms and focus on metrics such as immigrants’ socio-economic status, access to citizenship, level of education, employment, political participation, linguistic abilities, neighborhood effects, and even whether or not they have non-immigrant friends.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Yurdakul and Bodemann 2006.
\textsuperscript{23} There is an enormous body of literature on these different topics. Bleich 2008 provides a useful overview of the different styles of scholarship on immigrant integration in Western Europe and the United States, while Givens 2007 offers a comprehensive review of comparative research in political science on immigrant integration in Western Europe. My focus here is not so much on “how” states “integrate” immigrant populations or whether or not some states are more “successful” in “incorporating” ethnic and
For my interlocutors, integration was an existential question. As one Turkish man in his mid-forties told me during an impromptu conversation in a coffee shop in Neukölln, “there’s this thing they call integration here. You’ve probably heard about it. They’re trying to integrate us. Like we’re from outer space. This is all linked to the notion of tolerance. What does tolerance mean? It’s something you do because you have to do it. Not because you want to do it. I find integration to be a really ugly concept.” Such conversations recall a question posed by W.E.B. DuBois more than a century ago: “How does it feel to be a problem?” For Turks in Germany, the answer was quite personal.

As an insider / outsider, I was able to both relate to and reflect about what I saw around me. My position allowed me to establish strong relationships with the people and the communities that I wanted to study. In one instance, which I chronicle below, my affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania created an unexpected atmosphere of distrust. For the most part however, people were as eager to talk and to learn about me as I was about them. Ethnographic studies are never one-directional. Our informants always study us back and let us into their lives in calculated ways. Winning trust is critical and there isn’t a single correct way to encourage people to tell their stories. As a researcher, I tried to be respectful, honest, and transparent about my intentions with everyone that I met. My Turkish background and the network of contacts that I developed among Berlin’s diverse Turkish and Kurdish communities helped open certain doors that might otherwise have remained closed.

racial minorities, but rather, how integration is understood and experienced by those who are targets of integration policies.
The anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin has argued against a colonial conception of research in which the world is treated as a laboratory where students of anthropology can pick and choose sites for fieldwork as they please. She writes that “only certain spaces and themes make themselves available for study by certain people.”24 Her insight is no less applicable to political scientists, especially those who attempt to reduce complex social phenomena into a series of numbers and datasets in an effort to measure the world and explain disparate outcomes through large-scale, cross-national comparisons.

Navaro-Yashin argues that “anthropology is only fruitful insofar as the anthropologist is able to establish a relationality with the people whom she or he is studying. This is not possible just anywhere, for any one person or with any other person. The world does not wait for us out there to be the object of our science.”25 This is not to say that only people of Turkish descent are qualified to study other Turks. It is to recognize, however, how the knowledge of unwritten cultural codes, mores, habits, histories, struggles, aspirations, and beliefs helps inform one’s approach and abilities as a researcher and observer of social, cultural, and political phenomena. My own background and experience, or what is sometimes called “positionality,” certainly impacted my ability to navigate Berlin’s Turkish communities and spaces.

This does not mean that I did not make mistakes or face any obstacles. One important limitation was my ability to access certain gendered spaces. While several of

24 Navaro-Yashin 2012: xii.
25 Ibid.
my interview partners were female, many of the venues where I sat chatting with people for hours at a time were predominantly frequented by men. Furthermore, all of the Muslim undertakers whose work I analyze in chapter two were men, a trend that has been observed in the death care industry elsewhere.\textsuperscript{26} Other ethnographic studies have focused specifically on the gendered experiences of Turkish women and Turkish men in Berlin.\textsuperscript{27} While I was granted some leeway and credibility as someone who others identified as a Turkish Muslim male, I also recognize how this positionality limited my access to other spaces.

One way that I incorporate my ethnography is through vignettes that precede each chapter and set the stage for the discussion that follows. These vignettes, the first of which is in the introductory chapter itself, draw from my own experiences in the field and connect to the broader themes and research questions that animate this study. The rest of this introduction offers an overview of the chapters to come. Before I proceed however, I would like to say more about the political dimensions of death and the different ways that states and other organizations are involved in the management of the dead. Death helps structure political life and determining the fate of dead bodies is an important political task that sheds light on the ways in which the dead help demarcate the boundaries of political communities and how the exercise of power is tied to the governance of the (dead) body.

\textsuperscript{26} While the number of women in the funeral industry in Germany and other parts of Europe and North America has increased in recent years, the division of labor tends to be highly gendered and women often hold administrative roles, whereas men are tasked with the handling, transportation, and preparation of the corpse for burial. See Parsons 1999 and Bremborg 2006. For exceptions see Pringle and Alley 1995 and Doughty 2014.

\textsuperscript{27} See Hinze 2013 on the experiences of second-generation Turkish women in Kreuzberg and Neukölln and Ewing 2008 on the construction and stigmatization of Turkish-Muslim masculinity in Berlin.
The governance of the dead is intimately linked to the construction of political communities and the enactment of sovereign power. Recall the story of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, written in the 5th Century BC. The play opens in the aftermath of a civil war fought by two brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, each vying for the throne of Thebes. Both brothers are killed on the battlefield. While Eteocles receives a proper funeral befitting his role in defending the city, his brother does not. The extant ruler of Thebes, King Creon, ordains that Polynices is to be left unburied, carrion for scavengers, as punishment for his treasonous rebellion.

Antigone, sister of Eteocles and Polynices, defies Creon’s orders and sets about burying Polynices out of a sense of moral responsibility and familial fidelity. For this transgression, Creon sentences her to death by being buried alive, and sends her to a vaulted cave which becomes her living tomb. Antigone ultimately commits suicide, an act that sets into motion a chain of deaths including the suicides of her fiancé Haemon, son of Creon, as well as his mother, Creon’s wife Eurydice.

The play has been interpreted in a number of different ways. Various commentators have focused on Antigone’s civil disobedience as a democratic act of defiance in the face of excessive sovereign power or alternatively as an elite objection to Athenian democratic ideals. While my intention is not to weigh in on these debates, the story of Antigone and King Creon’s ordinance against Polynices’s burial is important.

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since it clearly illustrates how sovereign power is invested in the management of the dead. Eteocles, the patriot, is granted honorific burial rites while Polynices is left to the buzzards. The defilement of his corpse is understood as a just punishment for his crime. It is left in public sight as a warning to those who would dare to disobey the state, much in the way that gruesome public executions have been used by state authorities to remind citizens of the sovereign power over life and death.29

States have a vested interest in the fate of dead bodies and not just because of public health or hygiene. The ways in which sovereign power comes to bear on the dead is most evident in exceptional cases like Polynices or Remirro de Orco. The capacity to dictate who may live and who must die is viewed by Achille Mbembe as the ultimate expression of sovereignty, a phenomenon that he explores at length on his widely cited essay on necropolitics.30 But necropolitics is not simply about which lives will flourish and which lives will languish as the result of political decisions. It also entails paying attention to the ways that states and other actors manage and memorialize the dead qua dead.

As Finn Stepputat reminds us, all states establish a range of institutions, laws, and practices to oversee the transitions from life to death, including what happens to dead

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29 The execution of Damiens in the opening of Discipline and Punish is a case and point. See Foucault 1995 [1977]. In one of the more colorful passages of The Prince, Machiavelli describes how Cesare Borgia handles his deputy, Remirro de Orco, after the latter successfully “pacifies” the province of Romagna, eliminating a number of unruly lords: “And because he knew that past rigors had generated some hatred for Remirro, to purge the spirits of that people and to gain them entirely to himself, he wished to show them that if any cruelty had been committed, this had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister. And having seized this opportunity, he had him placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied.” Machiavelli 1998: 30.

30 Mbembe 2003.
bodies. While states often delegate certain responsibilities concerning the dead to private, social, and religious entities, they usually claim ultimate authority over the definition and governance of the dead within their jurisdiction through a combination of legislation and institutionalized procedures. As such, the death of a person is an occasion for the performance of sovereignty. Moreover, the management of the dead is central to the constitution, consolidation, and territorialization of national and political communities across the world.

As far as the management of exceptional dead is concerned, we’ve seen in our own day how the U.S. government erased any trace of Osama Bin Laden’s body by (allegedly) burying him at sea while simultaneously prohibiting the circulation of images of dead American soldiers being returned in flag draped coffins from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. In France the bodies of terrorists are routinely buried in unmarked graves under the cover of darkness. The exceptional dead, particularly those who are viewed as enemies of the state, are at times the subjects of public spectacle. At other times, they are hidden from sight. This is in part due to the idea that certain dead are polluting not only in a material sense but also symbolically. Because their bodies threaten the sanctity of the symbolic order, much effort goes into preventing their burial in particular places.

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31 Stepputat 2014.
32 Ibid.
33 See Kastoryano 2015 on the burial of terrorists and jihadis in France.
34 I will say more about Bin Laden, French terrorists and symbolic pollution as it relates to the burial of the exceptional dead in the conclusion, but to cite a recent burial controversy in the United States that involves the quotidian dead, consider the reactions to a proposal to build a Muslim cemetery in Dudley, Massachusetts, a small town near the Connecticut border. Having purchased 55 acres of farmland in
In some cases the dead remain anonymous. Another example of the ways that states manage the dead in order to consolidate the boundaries of political communities can be seen in the rituals surrounding unknown soldiers. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a memorial invented by the Italians, the French, and the British during the last years of World War I. While state memorials to the dead have a very long history (Thucydides writes about the Athenian practice of the empty tomb or Cenotaph), the monuments built to unknown soldiers are considered by some scholars as decisively modern phenomenon that is emblematic of nationalism.

Consider the opening lines of the second chapter of Benedict Anderson’s influential *Imagined Communities*:

“No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedence in earlier times… Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings. (This is why so many different nations have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be but Germans, Americans, Argentinians…?)”

Anderson goes on to point out the difficulty of imagining a “Tomb of the Unknown Marxist” or a “Cenotaph for Fallen Liberals” and argues that nationalism, unlike Dudley, the Islamic Society of Greater Worcester sought to turn the area into a Muslim cemetery but was met with considerable opposition by the town’s residents. During a town hall meeting in which the proposal was being discussed, some residents spoke about the potential threat of contamination of their well water, while others questioned the need for a separate burial ground for Muslims. “Why not go bury your dead at a Christian cemetery,” asked one resident. “Why do you need your own cemetery if you’re willing to violate jihadi law [sic].” Other residents wondered, “how soon before they propose a mosque too?” and asked whether they would have to “listen to crazy music like the call to prayer.” When the president of the Islamic Society told the crowd that existing cemeteries in Connecticut were too far and that his group sought a cemetery in the state where they lived, another local remarked that “you say the ride to Enfield [Connecticut] is too long. Well the ride from Afghanistan for a dead soldier is about 14 hours.” Quoted in Boeri 2016. See chapter three for more on controversies over the construction of visible symbols of Islam in the public sphere.

35 Wittman 2011.
Marxism or Liberalism, is very much concerned with death and immortality, which lends it a strong affinity with religious imaginings. This affinity, which for Anderson is by no means coincidental, is what inspires him to begin his study of the cultural roots of nationalism with death, which he characterizes as “the last of a whole gamut of fatalities.”

Soldier dead have long played an important role in the consolidation of political communities and ideals. In his funeral oration, Pericles spoke of the bravery of fallen Athenian soldiers while extolling the virtues of the Athenian people and their democracy. Many years later, at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln expounded upon the sacrifices made by Union soldiers and declared that their deaths would enable the rebirth of the American nation. Soldier dead are often appropriated by politicians who insist that their deaths are never in vain and speak of the ways that their sacrifices enable the perpetuation and regeneration of the nation and its political community. States claim “their” dead and moreover, go to great lengths to ensure that they are recovered and brought “home” to their “appropriate” resting place.

The remains of national leaders and cultural icons are also at times, sites of

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38 See Stow 2007 for a compelling analysis of the two speeches.  
39 The United States government spends approximately $100 million annually to recover, identify, and repatriate military remains from former theaters of war. The first systematic effort to recover and repatriate American soldier dead took place during the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection of 1898. In the aftermath of WWI, 45,888 soldiers were repatriated at a cost of 18 million dollars. During World War II, 171,000 soldiers or 61% of those killed in combat were repatriated at a cost of 95.5 million dollars. Since the Korean War, the U.S. military has instituted a policy of “Concurrent Return” which stipulates that all fallen soldiers are repatriated to the U.S. as fast as possible. See Sledge 2005. In contrast, the British employed a policy of “non-repatriation,” choosing instead to bury their dead soldiers where they fell. The existence of British military cemeteries across the world was coherent with its imperial outlook and lent credence to the notion that there was “a little part of England everywhere.” See Dendooven 2014 on British repatriation policies.
political contestation. Susan Gal chronicles the return of Béla Bartók’s body from New York to Hungary in the summer of 1988 and shows how the composer’s funeral was an occasion for political elites to defend and claim credibility for a morally and organizationally weak regime by symbolically aligning the state with the figure of Bartók. Long buried corpses can acquire new public meaning in times of political turbulence and change.

In her masterful study of post-socialist Eastern Europe, Katherine Verdery investigates the flurry of activity surrounding the corpses of revolutionary leaders, artists, and the ordinary dead following the collapse of communist governments in the region. She demonstrates how the repatriation and reburial of such public figures was central to the process of reordering worlds of meaning in post-socialist societies. The dead bodies of previously slandered “traitors” (who became newly discovered “heroes”) were a loci for struggles to endow politics and authority with a “sacred” dimension; contests over the morality of a post-socialist order; divergent politicizations of time and space; and reconfigurations of identities (especially national ones) and social relations.

The bodies of the dead have been a concerted site of political activity in other times and places. In France, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Napoleon Bonaparte are among many political figures that were reburied to mark political change. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the corpses of the old order became targets of a peculiar form of political violence.

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41 Verdery 2000.
When the National Convention voted for the destruction of the royal mausoleums of Saint-Denis in 1793, the skeletons of 25 kings, 17 queens, and 71 princes were exhumed, thrown into two great ditches, and covered with lime to destroy them.42 Their lead burial vaults were removed by workers with pick axes, melted down, and turned into bullets. The same year, the body of Cardinal Richelieu was taken out of its tomb and decapitated with much fanfare. Such examples lend material evidence to what Walter Benjamin may have had in mind when he claimed in his Theses on History that “the only writer of history with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this: that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy if he is victorious.”43

Since the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) by the U.S. Congress in 1990, numerous museums and other cultural institutions have been required to return the human remains and grave goods to indigenous peoples who can prove their relationship to such items.44 Policymakers saw the return of such artifacts as a corrective to past abuses and the law was meant to restore sacred objects that had been pillaged from Native Americans to their rightful owners. One of the central motivations underlying this process was the notion that the dead and

42 This story is recounted in Ragon 1983.
43 Benjamin 1969: 255.
44 See Clifford 2013 and Platt 2011 on debates around returns and repatriations. One of the most famous cases of Native American repatriation involves the body of Jim Thorpe, an Olympic gold medalist and member of the Sac and Fox Nation. His third wife sold his corpse to the town of Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania (later re-named Jim Thorpe in his honor), which built a mausoleum to house his remains. Family members sued the town in 2010 to have the remains of Jim Thorpe transferred to the Sac and Fox reservation in Oklahoma but the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit declared that the borough of Jim Thorpe, PA is not a “museum” as defined by NAGRPA and therefore was not compelled to return his remains.
their belongings should be returned to their proper place. Demands by Native American communities for repatriation were often expressed as a desire to “bring” such objects “home.”

Of course migrants are different than soldiers, statesmen, cultural icons, and indigenous bodies and artifacts. What connects all of these disparate figures is that the political activity surrounding their corpses is intimately tied to place-making processes. The boundaries of political, national, religious, and ethnic communities are asserted and established through the governance and management of the dead. To “bring a body home” is at once a physical and symbolic act that involves not only the transportation of material remains but the articulation of individual and collective identities. It reflects a widely held idea that the dead have their proper place and that efforts to deny them their proper resting place are unjust.

Yet it is important to point out that places are also made meaningful by virtue of the dead that inhabit them. The act of burial is a place-making practice par excellence. Vico argues that the ancestors of the patrician families of Europe laid claims to their lands by signaling towards the graves of their forefathers: “Thus by the graves of their buried dead the giants showed dominion over their lands, and Roman law called for burial of the dead in a proper pace to make it religious. With truth they could pronounce these heroic phrases: we are sons of this earth, we are born from these oaks.”

As Robert

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45 Ibid.
46 Quoted in Harrison 2003: 35. A more contemporary example involves S.M. Otieno, a Kenyan lawyer who became an object of litigation as his widow and his clansmen fought in the courts over the location of his grave and the identification of his real home, a decision that pitted customary law against common law in Kenya. See Cohen 1992.
Pogue Harrison notes, for Vico, it was through such gestures that claims of ownership over the land were legitimated.\textsuperscript{47}

While the graves of the dead can serve as proof of proprietary rights over land, they also help structure symbolic claims of ownership and belonging. One of the core arguments I develop in this dissertation is that individuals assert membership in particular groups, be it at the level of the family, clan, religious community, or nation, through the act of burial. The graves of immigrants, in particular, might represent endpoints for migrants, but as Engseng Ho reminds us, they are also “beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in a land.”\textsuperscript{48}

As I mentioned above, individuals, families, civil society organizations, and states all have a vested interest in the fate of dead bodies and work in different ways to ensure that they end up in the ‘right’ place. In this dissertation, I trace the actors, networks, and institutions that determine the movement of dead bodies within and across international borders. In doing so, I also analyze the processes through which relations between authority, territory, and populations are managed at a transnational level.

The term “transnationalism” captures the different types of ties and connections that exist across national borders, be they economic, cultural, political, or familial. It has been deployed by scholars of immigration to express the ways in which contemporary migrants are simultaneously embedded in, identify with and participate in multiple

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ho 2006: 1.
communities that are not just, nor even primarily rooted in a single national collectivity.\textsuperscript{49}

Nina Glick-Schiller and her collaborators have suggested that the existence of transnational ties points to the emergence of a “new type of migrant experience” and concomitantly, a new type of immigrant.\textsuperscript{50} These ‘new’ immigrants no longer break their ties with their countries of origin or simply stay put and assimilate to the host society. While the novelty of transnational migration might be overstated given the fact that many migrant groups have historically maintained ties with their countries of origin in various domains of life, the time-space compression brought on by improvements in transportation and communications technologies have certainly made cross-border voyage and communication much cheaper, easier, and readily available to greater numbers of people in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries.\textsuperscript{51}

The study of transnational migration involves not just the connections forged by immigrants between home and host societies but also concerns the ways in which states become involved in managing their diasporas abroad. There are nearly 4 million Turks in Germany, making it one of the largest concentrations of Turks outside of Turkey. The Turkish government has been actively involved in forging ties with its diaspora in Germany for several decades, in no small part because of the economic remittances sent to Turkey and because many Turks in Germany are eligible to vote in Turkish elections.\textsuperscript{52}

The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (\textit{Diyanet}) was central to the

\textsuperscript{49} Ehrkamp 2006.
\textsuperscript{50} Glick-Shiller et al. 1995.
\textsuperscript{51} Foner 2000, Vertovec 2004.
\textsuperscript{52} See Argun 2003 for an account of transnational linkages between Turkey and Germany and Senay 2013 for an analysis of the Turkish state’s activities in Australia, what she refers to as “long distance Kemalism.” Mandell 2008 offers a rich ethnography of Turkish transnational life in Berlin.
institutionalization of Turkish Islam in Germany and maintains control over hundreds of mosques in the country. Various Turkish political factions have come into conflict in Germany, including Kurds, Alevi, Kemalists, Islamists, Yezidis, and Gülenists. As the ethnographic vignette in the next section illustrates, domestic disagreements between different Turkish sub-communities in Germany play themselves out in unexpected ways.

**The man in Pennsylvania**

The transnational dimensions and consequences of my research became evident after a mundane visit to the Şehitlik mosque in Berlin. I had been to the mosque several times before, to attend and observe funerals and Friday prayers. The mosque, which is one of the few in Berlin with a dome and minarets, is a welcoming place and a busy hub of activity. It is centrally located and attracts hundreds of people of all ages during its religious services. It also hosts cultural events such as concerts and art exhibitions as well as public outreach programs. Within the courtyard is a bookstore that has both religious and non-religious literature in Turkish and German and also sells clothes, trinkets, and accessories. The mosque also has a canteen that serves tea, coffee, and on Fridays, excellent grilled sucuk sandwiches.

On this particular day the mosque was quiet. It was late in the afternoon and a group of men were sitting and chatting at a white plastic table in the courtyard when I arrived. One of them was the imam of the mosque. He had been in Berlin for about six

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53 See chapter one.
54 Sucuk is a spicy beef sausage common in Turkey.
months, having been sent over by the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey. The Turkish state subsidizes and oversees hundreds of mosques and pays the salaries of Turkish imams in Germany and in other European countries. It not only provides financial support but also appoints imams trained in theological schools in Turkey to serve for four or five year stints.

One of my informants, an undertaker who I’ll introduce in chapter three, also came to Germany as a Turkish-state appointed imam, but left his post after falling out with his superiors. The policy of sending religious leaders from Turkey to Germany has been criticized for giving undue influence to the Turkish state for matters concerning Islam in Germany. In recent years the German government has established institutions to train Islamic religious leaders in Germany, such as the Centre for Islamic Theology at Münster University, founded in 2011. Still, the vast majority of imams that find employment in DITIB affiliated mosques in Europe are sent from Turkey.

I walked over to the table and introduced myself to the group and asked if I could join them. “I’m here doing research for my dissertation,” I told them. “I’d like to learn more about Islam in Germany and in particular, about the burial practices of Muslims here.” The imam gestured for me to take a seat next to him and asked me where I was from. I explained that my parents were Turkish immigrants living in the United States and that I had been born and raised in the U.S. with intermittent years spent in Turkey.

“Are you a journalist?” he asked me. “No,” I said, “I’m a Ph.D. student, here to conduct research. My university is in the United States.” I reached into my bag and

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55 Tezcan 2008.
pulled out a business card, something I had printed up before embarking on my fieldwork thinking that it would lend me some credibility when I made interview requests. Later I found out that “Ph.D. student” was a common cover used by members of several intelligence agencies when visiting mosques and Islamic associations in Germany. Consequently people were weary when approached by outsiders who wanted to ask them questions.

The imam, a man in his late fifties, donning a thin mustache and a white skullcap took my business card and examined it. It was a simple white card, with the university’s crest, name, as well as my name and departmental affiliation. “What is this university?” he asked me. Without thinking I answered, “It’s the University of Pennsylvania.” There was silence. I looked around the table. The other men looked at me quizzically but said nothing. “Hmmm,” said the imam skeptically. “Yes,” I repeated, “it’s the University of Pennsylvania. That’s where I’m doing my Ph.D. I’m in the political science department.” I waited for the imam’s response, wondering what was so puzzling about the situation. I had assumed that even if Penn wasn’t as well known outside of the U.S. as some universities, that my credentials would not be so carefully scrutinized.

“Pennsylvania” said the imam, drawing out the word. “Penn-sil-vey-nee-ah.” Then it hit me. Pennsylvania is the home of the reclusive cleric Fetullah Gülen, who has been living there in self imposed exile for the last 15 years. He has a compound somewhere in the Poconos, not far from Philadelphia. Gülen is the spiritual leader of the
Hizmet ("service") movement and has focused much of his energies towards establishing math and science based schools in Turkey, Central Asia, Africa, Indonesia, and the U.S.\textsuperscript{56}

Gülen has been active in Turkish politics and was a longtime ally of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan until the two parted ways. For years, Erdoğan referred to Gülen not by name, but as "the man in Pennsylvania." In Turkish public discourse, the word "Pennsylvania" often serves as a metonym for the Hizmet movement. Gülenist cadres have been accused of infiltrating key branches of the Turkish state, including the military, police, and judiciary. It is widely believed that Gülen himself is operating a "parallel state structure" within the Turkish state.

During the time of my fieldwork, the war between Gülen and Erdoğan was in a cold phase.\textsuperscript{57} Yet Gülen was widely known and reviled by supporters of the AKP, both at home and abroad. I hadn’t considered that my association with the University of Pennsylvania would have the potential to mark me as a Gülenist, but as I sat there at the table in the courtyard of the Şehitlik mosque, I understood why the imam had received me with such skepticism. I laughed nervously and tried to explain that my university was

\textsuperscript{56} Some of these, like the charter schools he founded in Texas, have come under indictment for money laundering. See Saul 2011. For more on the history of the Hizmet movement see Tittensor 2014.

\textsuperscript{57} On July 15, 2016, a faction of the Turkish armed forces attempted a coup d’etat, seizing the Bosphorous Bridges in Istanbul, scrambling jets across Ankara, and bombing the Turkish Parliament and police headquarters. More than 300 people were killed and 2,100 were injured. Erdoğan and his supporters have blamed Fetullah Gülen as the mastermind behind the coup and in the weeks following the coup attempt have undertaken a massive purge of the state apparatus. As of August 2016, more than 45,000 civil servants from the Ministries of Interior, Health, Culture and Tourism, National Education, Development, Economy, Forest and Water Management, Transport, Science Industry and Technology, Family and Social Policy, and Environment and Urban planning have been dismissed alongside thousands of military personnel. The Deans of more than 1,600 universities have been asked to resign. It is the largest witch-hunt in modern Turkish history and unprecedented in its scope. The morning after the attempted coup Erdoğan took to the airwaves and announced: "I have a message for Pennsylvania: You have engaged in enough treason against this nation. If you dare, come back to your country." Quoted in Arango and Yeginsu 2016. The AKP has pressed the U.S. government to extradite Gülen to face trial in Turkey, but he still remains in Pennsylvania.
a long-standing educational institution, which was well regarded in many academic circles.

“It’s a university that is in the city of Philadelphia, in the state of Pennsylvania,” I told him. “It has been around for more than two hundred years. It was there long before Gülen moved to Pennsylvania and it has nothing to do with him or his movement.” Unfortunately, the die had been cast, and the imam was unconvinced. He agreed to talk with me but our conversation was short lived. He offered canned responses to my questions and after about five or ten minutes, he told me that he was busy and that he didn’t have any more time to talk. “I’m going to keep your card, if you don’t mind” he told me, as I stood up to leave. “Good luck with your research, and with all of your work in Penn-sil-vey-nee-ah!”

I left the mosque feeling quite shaken, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry. The absurdity of the situation baffled me and I wondered how I could so easily be marked as guilty by association. A few days later I recounted my experience to one of my interlocutors in Berlin, a man who happened to work as the social media coordinator for a Gülenist newspaper in Germany. I was with another friend, an anthropology student of Turkish descent who had introduced me to the social media coordinator. I told my story in jest, thinking that it made for a funny anecdote and a good laugh. If the experience at mosque was a farce, then what happened next could only be described as tragedy.

The social media coordinator passed my story along to his boss, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper. The editor found the story so compelling that he decided to run
an op-ed about it. The story appeared on the website of the *Deutsche Türkisches Journal*, under the title “The Role of the Diyanet in the Political System of Turkey.” The opening paragraphs read as follows:

A large Diyanet mosque in Berlin. The candidate Ali Yılmaz of the University of Pennsylvania visited the mosque to ask the Imam for an interview about his research topic. He conducts research on how German Turks behave in the case of a deceased relative. If the death occurs here in Germany, are they buried here or transferred to the old country, to Turkey? If the funeral takes place in the old country, how is it organized and financed? These and other issues are of interest to the young scientist from the USA who sought help from the Diyanet imam, whose responsibilities include the pastoral care of the bereaved in the event of a death in the community.

Before the candidate presents his questions, he briefly introduces his university, himself, and his research topic. When the imam hears “Pennsylvania” he freezes. He does not address the questions of the young scientist and behaves aloof and unfriendly. As Ali realizes that he won’t be getting any answers to his questions, he gives the imam a business card and says goodbye, and asks if he can contact him in the future for help. The imam replies to the guest with a cold and harsh, “I wish you good work in Pennsylvania.”

The article goes on to criticize the role of the Diyanet as an institution that has a monopoly over how Islam is interpreted and practiced in Turkey. It laments the link between Gülen and the U.S. state of Pennsylvania and argues that the Diyanet is actively fostering a hostile and polarized climate among German-Turks. The Diyanet is vilified as an institution that is overly politicized when it’s activities should in fact be relegated to the realm of religious belief.

I became aware of this article, which all but outed me by name, once I had returned to the U.S. It had been published on September 11, 2014. On September 28th I received a livid email from the imam from the Şehitlik mosque, who was highly critical

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58 The article is available online: <http://dtj-online.de/tuerkei-politisches-system-diyanet-laizismus-sunnitentum-atatuerk-36808>
of the manner in which the events were portrayed. He asked me why I had fabricated the story and made him out as a bad guy. He ended his email with the following sentence, all in capital letters: “YOU SAID YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE COMMUNITY IN PENNSYLVANIA!” It was a valuable lesson for me and laid bare the political stakes of my research. A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, but for certain groups a University named Pennsylvania stinks in ways that are not always predictable.

**Summary of chapters**

This dissertation examines how individuals, families, civil society organizations, death care workers, and states manage and make sense of “death out of place.” My primary focus is on Turkish and Kurdish communities in Berlin. A death in migration constitutes a death out of place in situations where individuals have multiple and sometimes conflicting allegiances and loyalties to different places and communities. The question of what is to be done with the body takes on added urgency when the corpse can only be in one place. Life in the diaspora is often organized around the “myth of return,” the idea of a glorious homecoming following years of displacement. For many migrants however, the long anticipated return to their purported homeland is only achieved posthumously, if at all.

The anxieties produced by the experience of dying abroad are a recurrent theme in Turkish-German literature and cinema. Almost all of Fatih Akin’s films feature some form of death, repatriation, and burial. A scene in *Im Juli* (In July) depicts a young
Turkish man, Isa, driving the corpse of his dead uncle from Berlin to Turkey in the trunk of his car. The scene echoes the main plot of the Güney Dal’s 1979 novel E-5 (German title: Europastraße 5), in which the Turkish protagonist stuffs the dead body of his father into an oversized television box and drives it from Berlin to Turkey.

In both stories the men are apprehended by Turkish border guards, though for Isa, the outcome is comical. As he sits nervously facing the police interrogators, expecting a heavy prison sentence, Isa is shocked to hear what comes out of the police chief’s mouth. “So you came all this way to bring your dead uncle to Turkey? Bravo, Isa, bravo!” says the chief as the officers around him start clapping. Isa is celebrated and sent on his way to bury his uncle. He is praised for returning the body to its proper place.

Most repatriations are not realized haphazardly in the trunks of automobiles. In chapter one I examine an important institution that provides logistical and financial support for the transportation of Turkish corpses across borders: funeral funds. These funds, which first emerged in the 1990s are similar to the burial assistance funds founded by mutual-aid societies and fraternal organizations in 19th century England and the United States. They differ in one important respect however. While earlier funds focused their efforts on the provision of a ‘decent’ burial locally and were motivated by the desire to avoid the stigma of a pauper’s funeral, the funds that are analyzed here are transnational in their scope. Through an investigation of their contracts and informational material as well as interviews with fund administrators, I show how these funds provide moral and material incentives for the repatriation and burial of Turkish bodies in Turkish soil.
In chapter two I turn to another actor that is central to the provision of funerary services for Turkish and Kurdish communities in Germany: Muslim undertakers. The creation of an Islamic funeral industry is a novel consequence of migration. There is no private market for funerals in Turkey and burials are performed by functionaries of the Turkish government, (mostly) free of charge to citizens as part of the Turkish welfare state. Here I explore the intercultural negotiations around the death and burial of Muslims in Germany.

I focus in particular, on the mediating role that Muslim undertakers play between immigrant families and the German state. I argue that undertakers’ ability to navigate the regulatory structures of the bureaucracy and the cultural expectations of their customers is a principal source of their professional authority and occupational identity. As intermediaries, undertakers guide families through the cultural, religious, political, and legal landscapes structuring the transitions from life to death. In reconciling competing sets of administrative and cultural norms, they preside not only over end-of-life decisions and their theological implications, but also over pedagogical moments of socio-cultural integration in contemporary Germany.

While chapters one and two cohere around the legal and institutional aspects of death out of place, or what might be understood as the ‘material’ conditions of death and burial, the second half of this dissertation examines the symbolic dimensions of death and dying in Germany. Scholars of transnationalism have emphasized how the multiple and permanent ties sustained between ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries are often accompanied by the social and symbolic construction of places and spaces of belonging. In the context of
transnational migration, such processes are produced through the sending and utilization of remittances (both in the form of capital and goods), and also in the performance of certain rituals and ceremonies.  

In chapters three and four, I examine processes of place-making and identity construction through the ceremonies and rituals accompanying the act of burial. Chapter Four investigates representations of religious, ethnic, and national identities on the tombstones of immigrant graves. The Greek word for “sign,” sema, is also the word for “grave.” According to Robert Pogue Harrison, the grave marker was not viewed as an ordinary sign among others for the Greeks, but as “a sign that signified the source of signification itself, since it “stood for” what it “stood in” – the ground of burial as such.”

In this chapter I highlight the central role that burial grounds play in the construction of diasporic memory and collective identity through a comparative study of over 150 tombstones across a number of Islamic cemeteries in Germany. I argue that expressions of posthumous nationalism reflect efforts to confer fixity on identities that are more fluid in life. Displays of belonging through epitaphs, images, and grave design offer a symbolically powerful way for immigrants to demonstrate membership in various communities. By examining the range of semiotic strategies in the iconization of the dead, this chapter also shows how identity formation extends beyond the limits of biological life.

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59 Olwig 2007
60 Harrison 2003: 20.
In chapter four, I shift from symbolic representations of posthumous identities to the meanings attributed to burial practices by members of Turkish and Kurdish communities in Berlin. Drawing on interviews with bereaved individuals I analyze the different reasons why families in the diaspora choose to inter locally or repatriate their dead to Turkey for burial. This chapter demonstrates how burial decisions are linked to broader political questions over the meaning of home and homeland. Here, I argue that family and kinship ties, ideas about the significance of land and soil, and feelings of social exclusion play a greater role in determining burial outcomes than laws circumscribing burial practices.

In the conclusion I summarize the findings of the dissertation and link the struggles around the burial of the quotidian dead to those of the exceptional and infamous. I highlight the ways in which sovereign power targets the bodies of the dead by examining corpse-politics in the aftermath of the failed coup in Turkey, the killing of Osama bin Laden, and the Charlie Hebdo attacks. I suggest that conflicts over the proper handling of corpses are likely to intensify with Europe’s ongoing refugee “crisis” and the long-term settlement of its migrant populations.

Determining the method and location of burial of immigrants is connected to broader identitarian concerns over the boundaries of national and political communities and the place of immigrants within them. As Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) member and Integration Minister for the state of Baden-Württemberg Bilkay Öney argued during deliberations over Islamic burial in Germany, “Integration must cover the whole span of life—from the birth to the death of a person.” In the light of changing
demographic patterns and an aging Muslim population, questions about the burial practices of German Muslims are only likely to multiply.
CHAPTER ONE: “EVERY SOUL SHALL TASTE DEATH”:

THE NECROPOLITICAL WORK OF TURKISH FUNERAL FUNDS

How do immigrant families manage the problem of death out of place? This chapter explores the institution of the funeral fund, a solution developed by a number of voluntary associations in Germany. These funds first emerged in the early 1990s in response to the growing demand for funerary services among the Turkish diaspora and provide logistical and financial support to their members in the event of death. In many respects, they are similar to the funeral benefit societies established by fraternal organizations in places like England and the United States in the 19th century, which offered monetary aid to help cover the burial expenses of their members. These financial subsidies were meant to alleviate the stigma associated with a pauper’s funeral by enabling the poor and working classes to have a ‘dignified’ burial.

Unlike their historical predecessors, the funeral funds analyzed here are not simply motivated by the desire to facilitate a proper or decent burial for their members in their country of residence. The funds are transnational in their outlook and most (but not all) provide material incentives to transport their members’ corpses to their country of origin for burial. Although the funds emphasize their charitable function and employ notions of mutual aid and religious duty in describing their work, their services have important political implications. By encouraging repatriation, they affirm the symbolic
connection between the (dead) body and the nation and help naturalize the idea that the
dead belong in a particular place.

Drawing on membership contracts and informational and promotional literature
produced by the funds themselves, as well as interviews with fund administrators and
members, this chapter shows how existing incentive structures largely promote
repatriation over local burial. My primary focus is on the two largest funeral funds,
whose combined membership is estimated at around 375,000 people across Western
Europe. These funds are managed by two long-standing and well established Turkish
Islamic associations, Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği (The Turkish-Islamic Union for
Religious Affairs, hereafter DITIB) and Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş (Islamic
Community National Vision, hereafter IGMG). Both organizations are highly active in a
number of areas and offer a broad range of social, cultural, religious, and educational
services to their constituents.

IGMG and DITIB offer a rewarding contrast not only because they are often
portrayed as rivals in the field of Islamic associations in Germany\(^\text{61}\), but also because
their funeral funds reflect two distinct approaches to the question of death out of place.
As an organization that is linked to the Turkish state, DITIB is ethno-nationalist in its
outlook. It caters exclusively to Turkish citizens and is more explicitly oriented towards
Turkey. Its funeral fund works to ensure that Turkish corpses end up in Turkish soil. By
contrast, IGMG is more flexible when it comes to local burial in Germany. It describes
itself as an Islamic organization that is open to Muslims of all backgrounds and

nationalities. While members of its funeral fund may also choose repatriation over local burial, IGMG offers greater financial support for those who wish to bury in Germany and does not limit its membership to the Turkish community.

In what follows, I offer a brief synopsis of the funerary services provided by these organizations and compare them to other burial aid societies, both contemporary and historic. Immigrants, ethnic minorities, and precarious communities in many different national settings have created organizations that extend funerary benefits and insurance against sickness and death for their members, including payments to survivors. What is distinct about diaspora burial societies in migratory contexts is their transnational character.

I then turn to the operations of DITIB and IGMG’s funeral funds, paying particular attention to both the legal and contractual terms of membership and the ideational motivations underpinning their services. In analyzing the institutionalization of transnational funerals among the Turkish diaspora I aim to highlight some of the structural parameters that shape and constrain individual actions and end-of-life decisions. While subsequent chapters address the bureaucracy and memorialization of death and analyze the complex constellation of reasons that motivate individual burial decisions and outcomes, this chapter shows how institutionalized incentive structures and economic calculations also help influence where and how dead migrants are buried.
Burial societies and risk management

In an essay penned in 1811, the English writer Charles Lamb describes an advertisement for a burial society that he encountered while walking around the Fleet Market in London:

“A favorable opportunity now offers to any person of either sex” it reads, “who would wish to be buried in a genteel manner.” Individuals who pay a “one shilling” entrance fee and “two-pence per week” are entitled to receive, upon their death, “a strong elm coffin, covered with superfine black, and furnished with two rows, all round, close drove, best japanned nails, and adorned with ornamental drops, a handsome plate of inscription, Angel above, and Flower beneath, and four pair of handsome handles, with wrought gripes; the coffin to be well pitched, lined, and ruffled with fine crape; a handsome crape shroud, cap and pillow. For use, a handsome velvet pall, three gentlemen’s cloaks, three crape hat-bands, three hoods and scarfs, and six pair of gloves; two porters equipped to attend the funeral, a man to attend the same with band and gloves; also the burial-fees paid, if not exceeding one guinea.”

Lamb observes that the poor and working classes in England make substantial sacrifices to avoid the “reproach of a parish funeral.” “Many a savory morsel” he writes “has the living body been deprived of so that the lifeless one might be served up in a richer state to the worms.” The widespread appeal of burial societies is understood as a reaction to the horror and shame of a pauper funeral. “Nothing” claims Lamb, “tends to keep up in the imagination of the poorer sort of people, a generous horror of the work-house more than the manner in which pauper funerals are conducted in this metropolis.”\textsuperscript{62} This point is echoed by historian E.P. Thompson, who in his classic study of English working class observes that “working people attached an exceptional valuation to the ceremony of the

\textsuperscript{62} Lamb 2007 [1882]: 139-140.
funeral. A pauper funeral was the ultimate social disgrace. And ceremony bulked large in folklore, and preoccupied dying men.”

A dignified funeral was meant to ameliorate some of the indignities that a person suffered during their lifetime and burial societies (also known as “friendly societies” or “box clubs”) assured their members that their remains would be treated with respect and care. They were very popular in England and membership in various friendly societies grew from at least 600,000 in 1793 to as many as 4 million by 1874. According to one estimate, at least 9,000 friendly societies were active in Great Britain at their peak in the late 19th century. For many members, affiliation with a fraternal order or mutual aid society helped strengthen older and more stable forms of mutual aid and solidarity based on blood ties, geography and religion. At their core, such associations offered social and economic support to individuals and groups and helped offset some of the negative effects of poverty in the absence of public welfare programs.

Associational life was an important feature of 19th century American society as well. As Alexis de Tocqueville noted in 1830, “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly unite together. Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations to which all belong but also a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very specialized, large and small. Americans group together to hold fêtes, found seminaries, build inns, construct churches, distribute books, dispatch missionaries to the antipodes. They establish hospitals, prisons, schools

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63 Thompson 1964: 419.
64 Beito 2000.
65 Ibid: 8.
by the same method… Where you see in France the government and in England a noble lord at the head of a great new initiative, in the United States you can count on finding an association.”

For Tocqueville, voluntary associations were not simply an integral feature of American life but central to its democratic ethos. Such associations become popular among a cross-section of the American populace and many immigrant groups, including German, Irish, and Italian communities, formed mutual aid societies that offered funerary benefits to their members. Groups such as The Ancient Order of Hibernians, The Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen, The Odd Fellows, and the Deutscher Orden Harugari operated nationally and provided cash payments to surviving family members to help cover burial costs. These payments were used not only towards the provision of a “dignified” funeral but also helped support families that lost employed wage earners.

According to one comprehensive study of mutual aid societies in the United States, the disbursement of financial payments was fairly informal and many organizations were not concerned about consistency in spending. Applications were usually considered on a case-by-case basis and cash payments were classified as “charity” and “relief” rather than “benefits.” Yet, as informal as such organizations might have been about spending, many had strict rules concerning sanctions and penalties for misconduct.

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66 Tocqueville 2003 [1835]: 596.
67 It should be noted that such associations were often exclusionary and divided along racial and ethnic lines. African Americans were banned from joining white orders like the Freemasons and established their own fraternal orders, which according to Skocpol et al. (2008) were integral to the struggle for equal rights and made important contributions to the modern Civil Rights movement.
68 Beito 2000.
To cite one example, The Boston Marine Society imposed penalties ranging from monetary fines to expulsion for offenses such as failure to attend members’ funerals, blasphemy, gambling, and drunkenness. Behavioral restrictions were structured by a set of moral codes. By joining a mutual aid society new members adopted, at least implicitly, the organization’s values. Societies dedicated themselves to advancing mutualism, self-control, thrift, and good moral character. In regulating conduct and shaping social expectations, these organizations sought to instill a sense of civic responsibility and camaraderie among members.

Mutual aid societies in England and the United States emerged in a context where governmental welfare programs were highly limited or non-existent. They provided economic and social support to vulnerable populations during moments of financial shock and emotional crisis. While the growth of life insurance and the creation of social security benefits led to the decline of burial societies in these two countries in the course of the 20th century, voluntary associations that provide funeral assistance are still common in many parts of the developing world. Burial societies are currently active in many African countries. In Ethiopia they are called iddirs and in addition to funeral aid, engage in a range of developmental activities offering their members informal microfinance.

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69 On the rise of life insurance see Zelizer 1979. For a discussion of the problems posed by life insurance and the commodification of life and death see chapter two.
An OECD study of burial societies in Ethiopia and Tanzania found that between eighty to ninety five percent of households are members of at least one *iddir*. These institutions have formalized rules that set guidelines for membership dues, financial contributions and payout schedules. To join an *iddir*, individuals and families pay a one-time membership fee. To avoid moral hazards immediately after joining, most burial societies require new members to wait a certain time (usually at least 3 months) before they can receive benefits.

Upon the death of a member, beneficiaries will receive a constitutionally agreed cash payment and also payments in kind. Burial societies provide food, tents, chairs, and assist families in preparations for funerals. The authors of the OECD report argue that these institutions are remarkably inclusive and, contrary to more informal arrangements of mutual aid, serve a cross-section of the populace, including the chronic poor as well as relatively well-off members of the community.

African burial societies are typically geared toward the provision of funerary services in the towns and cities where their members reside. In migratory contexts, these institutions have assumed a transnational character. While some funeral funds offer support for families who wish to bury their dead locally, many are focused on repatriation.

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70 Dercon et al. 2004.

71 See for example the “Diaspora Funeral Cash Plan” a Zimbabwean organization that describes itself as “a need driven funeral cash plan targeted at the diaspora communities.” Its website notes that “The cost of a funeral and/or body repatriation to home country runs in several thousand dollars on average. Funeral Cash Plan is so important because it will save your bereaved family the burden and embarrassment of begging for help during your funeral. The cash plan guarantees you an honourable and dignified sending off as your loved ones can celebrate your life without worrying about money.” <https://diasporafuneralcashplan.com/> Accessed July 27, 2016.
and provide logistical and financial support for the international shipment of corpses. In the United States, Mexican communities have relied on different means to fund *traslados*, literally “transfers” of dead bodies from the U.S. to Mexico. Hometown Associations (HTAs), private businesses, and the Mexican state are all involved in the institutionalization of transnational migrant burials.

HTAs rely on both formal and informal channels to assist members in repatriating bodies to Mexico. Upon the death of an HTA member, the association will informally pool money and donate it to the family of the deceased. HTAs and families will sometimes put collection boxes with photographs of the dead in businesses in Mexican neighborhoods to raise funds from the wider Mexican community. The associations help interface with Mexican consulates in the U.S. and government officials in Mexico, who provide financial subsidies for repatriation to needy families. According to anthropologist Sarah Lynn Lopez, assisting migrant families during death allows the Mexican state to make a symbolic demonstration of its commitment to the diaspora in an area that is fairly straightforward and involves predictable one-off payments.  

Lopez reads the practice of *traslado* as an act of self and community identification and sees it as a means through which Mexican migrants attempt to resolve the symbolically and socially ambiguous status produced through continual migration. “Through burial practices,” she writes, “migrants confirm their allegiance to and

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Lopez 2015. The New York Times notes that the Mexican state spent approximately $4 million towards the subsidization of transnational funerary expenses. 10,622 corpses were repatriated from the U.S. to Mexico in 2006, 7 percent more than in 2005 and 11 percent more than in 2004. See Porter 2007. For more on the bureaucratic hurdles faced by Mexican families in the U.S. who wish to repatriate their dead, particularly those whose legal status is tenuous, see Marco Williams’ excellent documentary, *The Undocumented*. 

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identification with their hometown in Mexico… Migrants’ allegiance to their pueblo is further confirmed when they elect to be buried in it.” In my own fieldwork, I found that Turkish and Kurdish communities in Berlin also expressed allegiance and identity with their hometown through the act of repatriation and burial, though the link between burial and a sense of belonging was not always so straightforward (see chapter four).

Migrant communities in other national contexts rely on a combination of governmental, non-governmental, and private organizations to help finance and organize the repatriation and burial of their dead. Guinean NGOs in Portugal, like the Associação dos Naturais do Pelundo give financial and logistical support to ship their deceased members to Guinea-Bissau for burial. Due to the high costs involved, some families opt to organize a symbolic shipment of the deceased’s personal belongings in lieu of the body itself.

In some cases, these programs are administered by national banks. Moroccan citizens outside of Morocco are eligible for funeral assistance programs through the Banque Populaire du Maroc and the Banque Commerciale du Maroc. For an annual fee that ranges between $20 - $70, these banks will guarantee the transportation of the corpses of their accountholders to Morocco. Such programs cover both individuals and families. In France, Kabyle organizations known as tajmaâts (assemblies) collect funds

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74 Savaria and Mapril 2015.
75 Dessing 2001.
to finance among other things, the repatriation of their members’ corpses to their natal villages for burial.\textsuperscript{76}

Algerians living abroad are encouraged to enroll in a program through the Algerian National Insurance Company (SAA) known as "Assurance rapatriement de corps" (insurance for the repatriation of bodies/corpses). The company arranges for the transfer of corpses to Algeria for burial and provides a round trip air ticket for a close relative to accompany the body. It also facilitates all administrative formalities related to death, post-mortem treatment, ritual washing, and entombment. The annual fee for members is €25 and discounts are available for group subscriptions.

In a statement announcing the existence of this insurance program, the Algerian consulate of London offers some insight into why it was created in the first place: “Considering the costs charged by some insurance companies abroad or the very high fees that the next of kin have to pay to ensure the repatriation of the body of their loved ones” it declares, “the Insurance for body repatriation proposed by the SAA is of great benefit and has our full support as it addresses an old and recurrent plea from members of the national community abroad.” Citing certain advantages, such as the absence of an age limit for enrollment and no ceiling on the amount covered, the announcement urges Algerians to enroll: “The consulate of Algeria strongly encourages the citizens to contract this insurance policy.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} These associations function much like HTAs in the U.S. context and raise money for other projects, including infrastructural improvements in the home village. See Silverstein 2004, especially 115 -120.
In its attempt to persuade Algerian citizens to subscribe to its funeral insurance program, the Consulate relies on a cost-benefit argument. It notes the difficulties and exorbitant costs associated with repatriation and suggests that the insurance program offers a financially sound solution to a long-standing problem. It assumes that members of the diaspora will be repatriated to Algeria for burial, thereby normalizing the practice. As we shall see below, Turkish funeral funds in Germany also take for granted the fact that their members will be buried in Turkey. The arguments they employ however, have less to do with the economics of burial than with a purported nostalgia for the homeland.

“Out of a longing for their homeland”

DITIB is the name given to the European branches of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, hereafter Diyanet). The Diyanet is an important and long-standing political institution in Turkey, having been established shortly after the founding of the Turkish Republic. Its basic duties are outlined in Article 136 of the Constitution: “to execute the affairs concerning the beliefs, worship and ethics of Islam, to enlighten the public about their religion, and to administer sacred worshipping places.” The same Article also indicates that the Diyanet is to exercise its duties “in accordance with the principles of secularism (laiklik), removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity.” In practice, the Diyanet is the institutional hub for all matters related to Islam in Turkish political life. It oversees everything from the training of imams and the staffing of mosques to the writing of religious textbooks for use in public schools.
The expansion of the Diyanet’s activities outside of Turkey’s borders began in the 1970s with the sending of religious personnel to countries with large Turkish populations. The organization’s 1971 mission statement urges it to “instill love of fatherland, flag and religion” abroad, and to “prevent opposition forces from exploiting the religious needs of Turkish migrants and mobilizing them against the interests of the Turkish republic.”

The Diyanet opened its first overseas post in Berlin in 1982 and established a national office in Cologne in 1984 under the name of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB). According to Şenay, this move represented a key development in terms of the Diyanet’s extra-territorial institutional structure, and pointed to efforts by the Turkish state to monitor and regulate the religious activities of its nationals abroad.

The impetus for Diyanet’s European expansion came after the 1980 military coup in Turkey when it emerged that anti-Kemalist Turkish Islamist groups were operating with greater freedom in Europe. A retired Turkish diplomat who served as an envoy in Germany for more than twenty years told me that “after September 12th [the date of the coup] the soldiers compelled the establishment of DITIB to represent the interests of Turkish Islam in Germany.”

According to Jonathan Laurence, DITIB offers the “quintessential model of exported Embassy Islam,” a practice in which homeland governments of Muslim majority countries advocate for and intervene on behalf of their citizens in Europe with the goal of maintaining guardianship over religious practices.

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78 Qtd in Laurence 2011: 60
79 See Şenay 2013, particularly chapter four.
80 Author interview 9.20.13 Berlin
abroad.\textsuperscript{81} With 896 member associations, DITIB is the largest Islamic umbrella organization in Germany.\textsuperscript{82} It oversees a broad range of activities including the organization of religious events like \textit{hajj} pilgrimages and Eid celebrations, as well as conferences, interfaith dialogues, soccer matches, and the commemoration of Turkish national holidays. It also engages in a variety of educational programs, including religious instruction and Qur’an courses as well as language and professional education.

DITIB’s funeral fund is the largest in Europe with approximately 300,000 members. In describing the motivations behind the creation of the fund, DITIB refers to the history of Turkish migration and settlement in Germany and characterizes the migratory experience as something that is saturated with nostalgia and yearning. According to its mission statement, the funeral fund was established in 1992 to “\textit{provide a lasting, practical and secure solution to the serious problem faced by our people who, having spent a lifetime in gurbet and out of a longing for their homeland, desire to have their bodies repatriated to our country for burial}.”\textsuperscript{83} It goes on to say that “in very short time, this fund has provided for the mutual support and solidarity desired among our citizens and has been the object of great interest and respect.”\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{81} Laurence 2011: 60
\textsuperscript{82} Rosenow-Williams 2012.
\textsuperscript{83} Emphasis added. The word \textit{gurbet} does not have a direct equivalent in English, though the closest translation might be “exile.” In its common usage in Turkish, \textit{gurbet} means to live abroad, away from one’s homeland, but has strong connotations of alienation, estrangement, longing and homesickness. To live in \textit{gurbet} is an undesirable condition and Turks living outside of Turkey are sometimes referred to as “\textit{gurbetçi}” (one who lives in \textit{gurbet}). The notion of \textit{gurbet} has its mirror image in the word “\textit{silayla gitmek},” which means returning to one’s homeland after a long absence (“\textit{silaya gitmek}”). It is not uncommon to see Turkish restaurants and cafes around Germany with the name \textit{gurbet} and in Essen there is even a funeral company called “\textit{Gurbet Bestattungen}.”
\textsuperscript{84} See <http://www.ditib.de/default1.php?id=6&sid=14&lang=en>. Similar language is utilized in the informational literature about the Diyanet’s funeral funds in other Western European contexts. For
Notions of solidarity and reciprocity are hallmarks of fraternal organizations and mutual aid societies. In this regard, DITIB’s funeral fund is no different. It offers a practical service to its members, who are linked to one another as compatriots (“our people”) and are distinguished from others through their shared origins (“our country”). What is telling about the fund’s self-depiction is that it relies on a strong dichotomy that naturalizes the distinction between homeland and host society. Fund members are exclusively depicted as unsettled immigrants who do not feel at home in Germany. After having spent a lifetime in a country that is characterized as foreign or strange, members are faced with the “serious problem” of dying in a place that is not their own. Although at first blush the fund appears to merely reflect its members’ demands and desires by providing repatriation services, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that it actively shapes burial outcomes through its incentive structures.85

Eligibility for membership in DITIB’s funeral fund is determined by an individual’s citizenship status. Only Turkish citizens with permanent residency status in Germany and “European Union citizens with Turkish roots” living in Germany are permitted to participate in the fund. Tourists, refugees, or individuals with temporary

example, its Netherlands branch explains that “the funeral fund was established out of a desire to ensure that our citizens who die in the Netherlands are buried in their longed for Turkey.” Its website also makes reference to the difficulties faced by the first generation of Turkish migrants, noting that “In the event of a death in the early years [of settlement], the transportation of corpses to Turkey created a lot of problems and took several days since it was difficult to raise money to cover the costs. In the face of such problems it was inevitable that the funeral fund would be established and the number of members has grown like an avalanche up to the present day.” <http://cenaze.vakif.nl/cenaze/?page_id=2>. The teleological language employed here suggests that the establishment of the funeral fund was a matter of destiny, not choice. 85 This is not to say that some fund members do feel unsettled in Germany, but there are other reasons why individuals choose to be buried in one country or another, as I chronicle in chapter four.
residency permits are not eligible for membership. Importantly, this requirement bars non-Turkish Muslims, including converts, from joining the organization’s funeral fund. Entrance fees vary by age (see Table 1), and membership covers the individual applicant, his or her legal spouse and their unmarried children under the age of 18. In order to maintain eligibility for the services provided by the fund, members must pay an annual fee as determined by the fund. This amount varies from year to year based on the expenses accrued by the organization in any given fiscal year. According to one fund member whom I interviewed, the annual fee has averaged around 50 euros in recent years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 50</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 60</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 – 65</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 – 70</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 +</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: DITIB Funeral Fund Entrance Fees by Age (in Euros)*

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86 The membership contract is available online here: <http://www.cenazefonu.de/v16/?page_id=1797>. All translations from Turkish are my own.
In the event of a member’s death, surviving family members must notify the funeral fund, which assigns a funeral company to attend to the practical and bureaucratic details related to burial or repatriation. Families are not free to choose the company that will provide funerary services. If they hire a company other than the one assigned by the fund, they are ineligible for any sort of financial benefit or payment. In its early years, DITIB’s funeral fund worked with select Turkish firms in large German cities but more recently, it has established its own in-house private funeral company which handles all of the business generated by the fund.

The Zentrum für Soziale Unterstützung GmbH (Center for Social Support) is the name of DITIB’s corporate wing. In addition to a funeral company, it also includes a bookstore, an insurance company, and a travel agency which organizes trips to Mecca for the hajj. While the funeral fund has the status of a not-for-profit voluntary association, Eingetragener Verein, or e.V., DITIB’s commercial activities are housed within ZSU GmbH, which is registered as a limited liability company. There is room for some confusion due to the fact that both the not-for-profit and for-profit wings of the organization bear the same name.

In practice, the fund serves as a means to generate non-taxable capital. Members of the funeral fund pay annual contributions, which are then funneled back into the organization’s coffers through its in-house funeral company which maintains a monopoly over the provision of funerary services to fund members. The lack of open competition in

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87 See <http://www.zsu-gmbh.eu/> Additional side organizations include D&B Trade GmbH, a producer and supplier of halal meat, which advertises itself as “the halal brand for European Turks,” and DITIB Net Sigorta, an insurance company providing health, dental, travel, auto, and home insurance. See <http://www.nethelal.de/> and <http://www.ditib24.de/>
the marketplace for Islamic funerals was a major sticking point for some of the smaller firms that I studied in Berlin. An undertaker who I’ll return to in the next chapter, Selim, who has been in the funeral business for eighteen years, put it this way:

Bring together all the Muslim funeral companies and they would all tell you DITIB's funeral company is our biggest problem. After that, it's their funeral fund. If their company wasn’t in the Şehitlik mosque [a centrally located mosque in Berlin], lots of private companies like me would see an increase of 30% in our business. That's our greatest disadvantage. Every time we go to the Şehitlik, we give them free advertising. We can't take the bodies anywhere else. And I put myself in the place of the customers. If I had a funeral, where would I go? I'd go to the Şehitlik. I'd have it washed there, I'd have the prayers held there. Because there isn't another mosque where we can have the namaz /prayer/. Most mosques don't have a place where we can wash the body. There's one or two in Wedding [an immigrant heavy neighborhood in Berlin] I think with a courtyard, with a garden. But you can't do it there. As a company, this makes us weaker.

After notifying the fund of a member’s death, family members must provide the funeral company with a copy of the fund member’s passport, Turkish national ID card, marriage license, death certificate, and birth certificates and ID cards of any children under the age of 18. With these documents in hand the funeral company is able to attend to the bureaucratic procedures accompanying local interment or international shipment (see chapter three for a detailed overview of these operations).

If the family requests it, the funeral company will also arrange for the ritual washing (ghusl) and shrouding (kefen) of the corpse and for a funeral prayer to be held at a nearby mosque. Though the fulfillment of these Islamic funerary rituals (washing, shrouding, prayer) is not required by the fund, its brochure encourages family members to actively take part in them: “The preparation of the corpse should not be left to the
corpse washer. Friends and family members ought to aid the person tasked with preparing the corpse for burial.”

This sort of moralistic tone is pervasive throughout the fund’s informational literature. In some instances, it is framed in religious terms, such as on the opening page of the fund’s brochure, which quotes the following line from the Hadith: “Those who are prudent/intelligent will prepare for what comes after death.” In other cases, the fund employs a mixture of religious language and the language of risk management.

“You still haven’t become a member of DITIB’s Funeral Fund?” asks one of the fund’s advertisements, which bears the image of a winding road through an empty green field. The road branches off into three paths, one which leads to a point outside of the frame, another which leads to a distant mosque, and a third, which ends at a small cemetery shaded by a single tree whose leaves are changing color. Citing a well-known Qur’anic verse, “Every soul shall taste death,” the advertisement implores potential customers to enroll. “If you haven’t become a member, then hurry up. Because death does not announce when it will arrive.” Seeking to offer some comfort in the face of existential dread, the advertisement closes with the promise that: “We are by our citizens’ side during their most painful days” (Figure 1).

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88 Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2008.
This blend of moralistic and religious language coupled with a call for individuals to mitigate risk and contingency by preparing in advance for their death echoes the
discourses surrounding life insurance. The organization insists however, that it is not a provider of life insurance. According to its membership contract, “The fund does not have the status of an insurance company. Its services are based on the principle of mutual aid and provided within the framework of social support.” While the death benefits offered by the fund effectively function like an insurance payment, its eschewal of the category of life insurance suggests that it might be motivated by the desire to avoid the financial evaluation of human lives.

More importantly perhaps, the distinction offers a legal buffer in situations where there is some confusion over the terms of payment. Unlike a life insurance program, individuals whose membership is revoked by the fund or who withdraw voluntarily are not eligible to receive any of the money they have paid into the fund in previous years. As mentioned above, fund members also have less freedom of choice in determining funeral service providers and the ways in which their benefit packages will be distributed.

In some cases, the funeral fund does provide a lump sum payment to members in the event of death. For example, if a fund member dies in Turkey, the family is entitled to a €500 payment. Likewise, if a fund member dies and is buried in Saudi Arabia while on a hajj pilgrimage, the family will receive a €500 payment. If the death occurs outside of Turkey or Germany, fund members are entitled to a one-time €1,500 payment. According to its own limited statistics however, most of DITIB’s funeral fund members die in Germany, though the vast majority are not buried there.
One of the major reasons why local interment is not widespread among fund members has to do with incentive structures that financially penalize families who wish to bury in Germany. Those who choose to repatriate to Turkey are eligible for a number of benefits. First, the fund provides a free round-trip companion ticket for a family member to accompany the body to its final destination in Turkey.

Second, the fund covers all transportation costs incurred by international shipment, including the costs of the hermetically sealed zinc coffin that is required for the transportation of a corpse across international borders. The body is flown to one of 13 major airports in Turkey, where it is collected by an employee of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in an ambulance provided free of charge. It is then taken either to a municipal morgue or straight to the cemetery where it is to be buried. The Turkish Diyanet also offers free ground transportation to family members in Turkey who wish to attend the funeral services.

When I asked an Istanbul-based Diyanet representative who worked in its funeral division why his office was tasked with the burial of Turkish corpses originating in Europe he replied that “It is more natural that we do it because we are a religious organization. We do this because our religion demands it. We don’t do it for money. It isn’t a commercial enterprise, it is a duty.” While he acknowledged that his organization did charge for certain services, he was insistent that it was not a profit-

89 The bodies are initially flown to one of the following airports: Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Diyarbakir, Elazig, Erzurum, Malatya, Istanbul, Izmir, Kayseri, Konya, Samsun or Trabzon.

90 Author interview. Istanbul.
making enterprise. Like the Muslim undertakers whose work I analyze in the next chapter, the Diyanet representative was critical of a profit-based model of funerary provision and disparaged individuals and companies whose involvement in this enterprise was financially motivated. He saw no contradiction in using public resources and state employees to bury members of the Turkish diaspora. “They are our citizens,” he told me, “and this is their homeland.”

Members of DITIB’s fund who choose burial in Germany receive fewer benefits compared to those who repatriate. Upon the death of a member, the funeral company will obtain the necessary permits for burial in Germany and will also arrange for the washing and shrouding of the corpse. It will also provide a basic casket and will transport the corpse from the morgue to the cemetery where it is to be buried. Importantly, the fund will not cover what is undoubtedly one of the most expensive elements of inhumation in Germany: the cost of the cemetery plot. According to its membership contract, “All costs associated with the cemetery plot and burial in Germany shall be borne by the member.” In addition to the burial plot, these include a variety of fees charged by the municipal cemetery administration for the use of its facilities and services. The price of a burial plot, which is leased for 10, 15, or 20 year periods, ranges from 865 euros to over three thousand euros (see chapters four and five for more on cemetery laws and regulations).

A comprehensive search through the fund’s website, membership contracts, and promotional literature yields no information on why the costs associated with burial in Germany are excluded from its benefit package. Repeated efforts to contact fund administrators in Cologne were unsuccessful and each one of my written and oral
requests for an interview was denied. When I spoke to an undertaker who worked for DITIB’s in-house company, he avoided my questions about the fund’s contractual obligations and told me that he was not authorized to speak on behalf of the organization or its activities. Consequently, the official reasoning behind this policy remains nebulous.

One point, however, seems fairly straightforward. DITIB’s funeral fund provides economic incentives for fund members to be buried outside of Germany. While economic considerations are just one possible determinant of burial outcomes, the limited financial support for local burial undoubtedly plays some part in family decisions about where to bury a fund member. As mentioned above, affective connections to the Turkish homeland and the migratory experience of living in a condition of estranged exile are presented as primary factors motivating the establishment of the fund in the first place.

But by privileging repatriation over local interment, the fund itself is an important actor in the production of nostalgia and longing for the country of origin. By incentivizing the return of the dead to their natal country, it also helps naturalize the idea that the body of a Turkish migrant belongs in Turkish, rather than German soil. And for the most part, it is quite effective. Out of the 3,185 fund members who died between January 1 and November 24, 2013, only 123 (3.86%) were buried in Germany. The remaining 3,062 (96.13%) were repatriated to Turkey for burial (See Table 2).91

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91 These figures were compiled from DITIB’s website in 2014. The organization used to post a list of the names of its members who died in the previous year which also contained information about where they were buried. It no longer posts this information publically and declined to provide any figures about burial locations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Buried in Turkey</th>
<th>Buried in Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2033</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stillborn</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3062</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>96.13 %</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: DITIB Funeral Fund Members’ Burial Locations in 2013

A similar pattern was observed in 2011 by Zirh who notes that of the 2,866 funerals funded by DITIB that year, 2,718 (95%) of the dead were buried in Turkey. While it has been extraordinarily difficult to gather statistical information about the burial locations of DITIB funeral fund members in Germany, its affiliates in other parts of Western Europe have occasionally provided such information to their members in annual letters soliciting membership dues. Although my access to such data is rather limited, an examination of the available figures shows that the vast majority of fund members in other countries are also shipped to Turkey for burial.

To cite one example, the French branch of the Diyanet’s funeral fund, based in Strasbourg, noted in a letter to fund members that 84 of its members died in 2014. Of these 84 individuals, 6 were buried in France while 78 were buried in Turkey.

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following year, the fund announced that 111 of its members had died. As in the previous year, a large number—106 to be precise—were shipped to Turkey for burial, while only 5 were buried locally in France. These numbers highlight the fact that the vast majority of fund members in France, 93% in 2014 and 95% in 2015, choose repatriation over local interment.  

DITIB’s funeral fund incentivizes repatriation over local burial, thereby promoting and normalizing the practice. In doing so, it helps naturalize the idea that Turkish corpses belong in Turkish soil and helps reproduce a diasporic mindset in which Turks in Germany are forever foreigners whose homeland remains elsewhere. DITIB is not the only organization that encourages repatriation. Several other funeral funds attached to organizations that reflect ethnic, sectarian, and political divisions among the Turkish diaspora and cater to specific groups such as Kurds and Alevi also support the practice. One notable exception is the funeral fund administered by IGMG, whose contours are analyzed in the next section.

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92 Comparable figures for the Diyanet’s funeral funds in other countries (Austria, Denmark, England, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland) were not available. Some of the funds offer information about the number of members who died in a given calendar but do not indicate where they are buried. This information is also highly scattered and incomplete. Browsing through the different websites of each national iteration of the funeral fund one finds that for example, 83 fund members died in Switzerland in 2014, while 9 fund members passed away in Sweden and were buried at a cost of 240,317 SEK ($38,450.72). See <http://www.isvecdiyanetvakfi.org/inc.php?m=5&id=717> for Sweden and <http://diyanet.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2014_Cenaze_Listesi.pdf> for Switzerland.

93 To my knowledge there are at least 10 funeral funds administered by different voluntary associations in Germany. These include the Almany Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu (AABF; The German Alevi Federal Association) which mostly serves the Alevi community and has its own in-house funeral company; Avrupa Türk Birliği (ATB; The European Turkish Association), a pan-Turkish ethnic association; Avrupa Türk-Islam Birliği (ATIB; The European Turkish-Islam Association), a Sunni, Islamist organization; İslam Kültür Merkezleri Birliği (IKMB) also known as VIKZ (Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren) or the Association of Islamic Cultural Centers, another Sunni Islamist organization with conservative leanings, Müslümanlar Sosyal Birliği (MSB; Muslim Social Association), a Sunni organization; and Merkad and Mezopotamya, two private funeral funds which serve Turkish Muslims and Kurds respectively. Although I
“We make sure that the bodies get to Turkey”

IGMG is the second largest Islamic umbrella organization in Germany. It is comprised of 518 member organizations known as “mosque communities” across Europe, 304 of which are located in Germany. The organization claims 127,000 members worldwide and has branches in twelve European countries as well as the United States and Australia. It emerged in the 1970s as a diasporic association of members of the Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party), an Islamist political party in Turkey under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan (1926 – 2011). Erbakan’s Islamist parties have had many lives in Turkey owing to their periodic closure and re-emergence under a different name. Although its political fortunes in Turkey have wavered, IGMG has gained a strong foothold as a network of Muslims in Europe.

In its early years, IGMG’s energies were focused on influencing domestic politics in Turkey from abroad. More recently, it has re-oriented itself towards political advocacy in Europe. In Germany, it has pressed for the recognition of Islamic practices and the

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94 <https://www.igmg.org/tr/hakkimizda/2/> The remaining member organizations are located in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

95 The party entered the Turkish political arena in 1970 as the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party), which was shut down by order of the Constitutional Court for violating secular principles a year later. It was re-founded as the Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party) in 1972 and won nearly 12 percent of the popular vote in the 1973 elections. The MSP was closed down after the 1980 military coup. In subsequent years it appeared as the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, founded in 1983 and banned in 1998); Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, founded in 1998 and banned in 2001); and Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party, founded in 2001, still operative today). The reformist wing of Saadet went on to found the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, or AKP), which has ruled Turkey since 2002. See Tugal 2009 and Balkan et al. 2015 for a history of Islamist politics in Turkey.
right to religious education for German Muslims. The organization has had a turbulent relationship with the German state, whose intelligence agency (Bundesverfassungsschutz), included the IGMG on a list of Islamist groups seen as posing a “threat to German democracy.” IGMG is monitored by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz or BfV) which has characterized the organization as an obstacle to the integration of Muslims in Germany. According to a 2010 federal report, “IGMG’s strengthening of a separate religious and cultural identity and its efforts to prevent assimilation to the German society may promote the emergence and diffusion of Islamist milieus in Germany.”

However, the organization insists that its activities are fully legal under the German Constitution and maintains its right to exercise and support the religious and cultural identity of its members. It sees itself as a religious community that “represents the interest of its members in social, cultural, and political arenas” and “concerns itself with all issues affecting Muslims and works towards the improvement of their living conditions and the protection of their fundamental rights.” Like DITIB, it offers a broad range of social, educational, and cultural services, including Quran courses, sports activities, language classes, youth and women’s groups, religious education, hajj pilgrimages, and a funeral fund, which has approximately 75,000 members across Europe.

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96 Abadan-Unat 2011. The IGMG has pursued this goal through the German legal system by introducing court cases concerning the right to ritual slaughter, the right for Muslim teachers to wear religious attire in public schools, and the need for Muslim services in social and medical institutions.
97 Yurdakul and Yükleyen 2009.
98 Quoted in Rosenow-Williams 2012: 250.
99 See <www.igmg.de>
In 2013 I interviewed İrfan Taşkırıran, the president of IGMG’s Berlin branch at his office in Kreuzberg. IGMG’s Berlin headquarters are located on the upper floors of a non-descript building that is accessed through a courtyard set back some distance from the street. On the first floor of the building is a DITIB affiliated prayer room. Emerging from a graffiti filled elevator, I saw flyers advertising hajj trips and posters of well-known mosques in Turkey. Ottoman motifs, including the tughras of various sultans decorated the walls.

I asked Taşkırıran about the decision to label his organization a threat to German democracy and its ongoing surveillance by the BfV. He was critical of the German state’s attitude and told me “to this day, no member of Millî Görüş has taken part in any activity that is at odds with the German constitution. On the contrary, our organization has made very important economic, political, and cultural contributions to German society.” He spoke about the existence of double standards, about hate crimes directed at non-ethnic Germans and of the need to change existing attitudes towards Muslims and Islam in Germany. “Our doors are open. We aren’t underground, we aren’t hiding from anyone, we are at the center of society. As long as German attitudes remain unchanged, right wing and Islamophobic groups will only grow stronger.”

We also discussed IGMG’s funeral fund, which was established in 2002. In its founding documents, the fund makes use of the language of migration and mobility. “The

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100 Author interview. 6.11.13 Berlin
101 The fund was initially established under the name Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş Cenaze Fonu (IGMG Funeral Fund) on 10 November 2002. It was renamed UKBA Cenaze Yardımlaşma Derneği (UKBA Funeral Assistance Association) or Bestattungskostenunterstützungsgemeinschaft e.V. (BKUG) on 14 December 2013. See <http://igmgukba.org/>
fund was established” it states, “with the recognition that every mortal being will one day migrate from this world where they are a guest.” Though it relies on a different temporal and spatial framework, the trope of migration “from this world” resonates with worldly migratory processes, which members of IGMG’s funeral fund are acutely aware of. The symbolic connection between death and mobility is instantiated through the idea that human beings are “guests” in the world (just as Turkish migrants were characterized as “guests” and “guest workers” in their countries of residence), and while the departure of the soul is unencumbered by national borders (the entire earth is taken as the realm of the spirit), the body presents a different set of challenges.

“It’s a form of mutual aid and social solidarity,” Taşkıran told me. “In the event of death, our members don’t have to worry about anything. During their most painful days we are by their side. We take care of all the bureaucratic procedures and administrative tasks. The families don’t feel any distress. We make sure that the bodies get to Turkey. It’s a really important service.” I asked him whether most fund members were repatriated to Turkey for burial and he replied that “Generally, for the most part our people want to be buried in their homeland (memleket).” For Taşkıran, the idea that Germany could serve as the homeland was ruled out and burial outcomes were understood as a function of individual choices and preferences. He did not comment on the ways in which the funeral fund itself might help normalize and/or incentivize the practice of repatriation.

In its advertisements the fund emphasizes mutual solidarity and support among members and presents the procedures surrounding death, repatriation, and burial as a
streamlined and efficient process. In one flyer, the letters of the organization’s French acronym (CIMG) are comprised of hundreds of individual bodies. “On our most painful day, we are 300,000 people” it proclaims in large, bold letters. Underneath the bodies is a simple and forceful message: “Everyone is at the age of death.” The conclusion that might be drawn here is that since no one knows when death will strike, individuals should mitigate risk and ensure that their affairs are in order by signing up for the organization’s funeral fund. Underneath this statement is a visual representation of the services provided by the fund (which I detail below). What is notable here is the assumption that the dead will be repatriated (See Figure 2).

The images show a four-stage process with each step leading towards the final outcome of burial. The first step, “official procedures” is symbolized by a document bearing an official looking seal. The second step, “religious duties” shows an imam standing in front of a coffin. An airplane in flight is used to visualize the third step, “transport,” which leads to the final step, “delivery,” symbolized by three people, one of whom is an imam, standing in front of a Muslim grave bearing a crescent moon. What is arguably a complex undertaking is visually represented as a simple process, where the repatriation of the body is taken as a given.

102 A more literal English translation would be, “everyone is of an age where they will potentially die.” The message implies that there is no given age of death and that anyone can die at any moment.
Figure 2: IGMG Funeral Fund Advertisement

The practical services provided by IGMG’s funeral fund are nearly identical to DITIB’s fund, although there are some important differences regarding membership,
coverage, and the rules governing payments to members. First and foremost, eligibility is not determined by nationality. Individuals and their families need not be Turkish citizens or ethnic Turks with European citizenship to enroll. The fund is open to all nationalities. However, it does carry a religious requirement. Only Muslims are eligible for membership (§2.1).\footnote{103}

Emrullah Yayla, one of IGMG’s funeral fund administrators told me “as an organization, the services that IGMG provides are not just intended for Turks but for all Muslims. Whatever their religion, language, race, or nationality, our doors are open to all Muslims. This is in line with the teachings of our Prophet.”\footnote{104} IGMG does not exclude along ethno-national lines and subsequently has a broader range of constitutions, though the bulk of its membership is comprised of European Turks.

Applicants must be permanent residents of Germany, Switzerland or an EU member state—no tourists, refugees, or temporary migrants are accepted (§2.2). Presenting itself as “a group that organizes mutual aid and solidarity among its members” and citing the “demand on the part of its members for these types of services” IGMG describes the goal of its funeral fund as “assisting members and their families in covering the costs associated with their funerals and burials” (§1). The organization makes clear that the funeral fund “is not an insurance company.” This semantic difference carries important legal implications, as unlike life insurance policies, members who pay annual premiums are not eligible for any sort of refund if they choose to withdraw from the fund.

\footnote{103}{The numbers referred to are clauses listed in IGMG’s funeral fund contract, available (in Turkish) here: <http://igmgukba.org/sartname/> All translations are my own.}
\footnote{104}{Personal correspondence 6.24.16}
Entrance fees are calculated by age (see Table 3) and membership covers the individual, his/her spouse (§7.a), children under the age of 18 (§7.b), unmarried daughters of any age with no income of their own (§7.c), unmarried children under the age of 27 who are formally enrolled in a university or technical school with no income of their own (§7.d), and mentally disabled children of any age with no income (§7.e). Children who receive social assistance or welfare payments such as unemployment benefits from the German state are ineligible for coverage.

While extending coverage to students and denying it to individuals on welfare might be seen as a way of incentivizing entry into the labor market or encouraging individuals to further their education, Yayla explained that these clauses were added out of the recognition that “youths and students are consumers who typically don’t have a lot of income.” As such, the organization views it as a means of subsidizing its poorer and younger members. What is less clear is why IGMG would extend coverage to unmarried women and the mentally disabled. While the latter category of individuals offers a more compelling case for support and assistance, particularly if their condition is severe enough to hinder their ability to function independently, the decision to extend coverage to unmarried women reflects a paternalistic attitude and a conservative understanding of gender relations wherein women without husbands are deemed vulnerable and in need of care.
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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Table 3: IGMG Funeral Fund Membership Entrance Fees in 2016 (in Euros)

The fund reserves the right to refuse coverage for individuals with pre-existing medical conditions and terminal illnesses (§11.3). The fund’s board of directors has the power to terminate existing memberships if a fund member has “seriously violated the guiding principles of Islam” (§11.5a) or is more than three months late in paying their annual dues (§11.5b). Individuals whose membership is terminated lose access to all services provided by the fund and are not eligible for any sort of refund on the payments they have made to the fund (§11.6). The fund’s contract does not give any examples of what would constitute a “serious violation” of Islamic tenets and the board of directors has the right to review membership terminations on a case-by-case basis. Though less explicit about norms of moral conduct, IGMG’s fund, like its predecessors in the 19th century, seeks to shape its members’ behavior through the threat of expulsion.
Upon death, the member’s family must notify the fund (§8), which assigns a private funeral company to carry out the following services: the completion of all official bureaucratic procedures (§8.1a), the fulfillment of Islamic religious rites including the washing and shrouding of the corpse (§8.1b), the entombment of the corpse in a coffin that meets European standards (§8.1c), the provision of one round-trip companion ticket for the person who will be accompanying the corpse (§8.1d).

“Before the fund was established,” Yayla explained, “these procedures were all done by outside firms whom we didn’t really know or have a relationship with. Not only was it expensive for the families, but it often took a very long time which caused people stress. Thank God, if one of our members dies today, we can get them to their country on the same day, except on holidays and weekends.” If the body is to be shipped to Turkey or one of the Balkan countries, the fund covers all of the costs incurred in transporting the body to its final burial location. (§8.2) If the body is shipped to a country other than Turkey or one of the Balkan countries, the fund is only responsible for the costs incurred in transporting the body to the airport (§8.2).

Unlike DITIB’s funeral fund, IGMG offers financial support to fund members who wish to be buried in Europe. If a member is buried in any EU country or Switzerland, the fund will pay up to €3,000 towards funeral expenses (§8.3). If a fund member dies outside of Europe and wishes to be buried in an EU country or Switzerland, the fund offers €3,000 towards burial and transportation costs (§8.5). In a situation where

105 Personal correspondence. 6.9.16. According to many of the undertakers that I interviewed, repatriating a body within twenty-four hours was extremely difficult, if not impossible. See chapter two.
106 For countries that are not on the Euro, the fund offers equivalent payments in local currencies. In Switzerland, 3,750CHF, in Sweden 26,000 SEK, in Norway, 25,000 NOK, and in England, £2,600.
the fund member dies outside of Europe and wishes to be buried in the country where they died, the fund offers €750 towards funeral and burial expenses. As such, it does not incentivize repatriation but instead provides logistical and economic support towards the burial of its members in Europe.

When I asked Yayla why his organization would subsidize the costs of European burials he acknowledged that what was initially imagined as a temporary form of migration had gradually resulted in permanent settlement. “No matter how foreign we may still be, we are here [in Europe] to stay. Recognizing this, our organization provides up to €3,000 to help cover burial costs in Europe. Because the cost of a burial here including the price of the cemetery plot is around €3,000, we decided to provide this amount to our members.”

Yayla also spoke to the fund’s decision to cover the costs of transporting fund members back to Europe for burial. “When those who die in their own country [ülkesinde] want to be buried here [in Europe] we arrange and pay for their transportation. In fact, we’ll even arrange for the delivery of the body all the way to the person’s house if they die while traveling in or to their homeland [memleket].”

Yayla and Taşkıran both see the IGMG as a European organization that is designed to serve Muslims in Europe. They acknowledge the fact that their constituents are permanent residents of European countries and direct the bulk of their efforts towards political advocacy in Europe, not Turkey. Both representatives also note that there is a growing need to ease restrictions on Islamic burials in Europe and that the establishment
of Islamic cemeteries is a long-term project that the IGMG is very invested in. Yet, even though they recognize their permanent status in Europe, both Yayla and Taşıkran maintain an analytical distinction between Europe and the homeland [memleket]. While European countries can serve as places of long-term residence, they are not necessarily considered home.

**Conclusion**

Yayla sums up the contradictory position faced by migrants and their children in Germany. They are both “foreign” and “here to stay.” This contradiction is overcome in part through burial practices, which offer an opportunity to assert membership and belonging in national, political, and religious communities. As I have shown in this chapter, different migrant associations have come up with similar institutional solutions to the problem of death out of place. DITIB and IGMG provide comparable services to their constituents and while both assume that repatriation is the normal and desired outcome, IGMG offers its members greater financial and logistical support if they decide to bury locally.

The funds established by DITIB and IGMG reflect the formalization of transnational funerals. Like the fraternal organizations of an earlier era, they are premised on notions of social solidarity and mutual aid among members. While the funeral benefits offered by 19th century associations were largely designed to help benefactors avoid the stigma of a pauper’s funeral, the financial and organizational aid provided by 21st century funeral funds is predicated on a different sort of problem, namely, how to ensure a
‘proper’ transnational funeral in a migratory context. In this chapter, I have focused primarily on the institutional efforts toward this end, which as we have seen, incentivize the return of the body to its natal soil, either by restricting burial subsidies, encouraging repatriation, or both.

In the next chapter I turn to another set of actors who are central to the provision of funerals in a migratory context: Muslim undertakers. Although the creation of a private market for Islamic funerals is a relatively recent phenomenon in Germany, Muslim undertakers play a critical intermediary role between immigrant families and the state. Their authority and expertise lies in their ability to anticipate the cultural expectations of their customers while navigating the intricacies of the bureaucracy of death. These undertakers are intimately familiar with both Islamic funerary rites and German burial law. Their work can become politically charged in the context of migration when death is linked to broader questions about assimilation and integration.
CHAPTER TWO: “THE PAPERWORK NEVER ENDS!”:

MUSLIM UNDERTAKERS AND THE BUREAUCRACY OF DEATH

Field Notes: August 5, 2014

The imam and I are smoking cigarettes in the waiting room of the funeral home when Mehmet arrives. Cradled in his arms is a small, white coffin. “It’s time to go,” he says softly, and leads us outside where a black Mercedes hearse sits idling. The coffin, contains the body of a two-week old baby and looks particularly diminutive in the back of the cavernous hearse, a vehicle that is normally used to transport two adult-sized bodies. We set out for Schöneberg, a lower middle-class neighborhood in West Berlin. Mehmet is at the wheel and I sit between him and the imam who does most of the talking during the drive.

The baby will be interred in a section reserved for children at the Neuer Zwölf-Apostel-Kirchhof, a Christian cemetery that has been used for Islamic burials in recent years. As we park the hearse, a thin, balding man with a handlebar mustache approaches us with an envelope. He is clad entirely in black. Black shirt, black pants, and a black tie. Mehmet reaches into the glove compartment to pull out a folder containing burial permits and other paperwork and examines the contents of the envelope that the cemetery worker has given him. Stepping out of the hearse, I see a group of women at a distance. This must be the family. Mehmet retrieves the coffin from the back of the hearse and we walk towards the crowd.

There are around sixty people huddled together, men and women of various ages. Half the crowd is dressed in black, and most are dressed informally in t-shirts and jeans. The women have loosely covered their hair with floral patterned headscarves and wear long skirts or pants. The younger men don black baseball caps emblazoned with New York Yankees logos, matching black track pants and high-top sneakers. Some are heavily tattooed. As we come closer, people begin to weep. Mehmet hands the coffin to a middle-aged man, the father of the deceased, and we start our ascent up a small hill lined with poplar trees towards the children’s section of the cemetery. I walk in the front with Mehmet, the imam, and the German cemetery worker. The rest of the group follows close behind with the father and the tiny coffin at the helm.

At the top of the hill Mehmet pauses and takes the coffin from the father. We are fifteen feet from the gravesite. The imam asks us to line up for the funeral prayer. I join in with the men, who have formed three rows. The women line up behind us. “Allahu Ekber” (God is Great), chants the imam as he begins the prayer. We are facing east, towards Mecca. Once the prayer is finished we all walk over to the grave.
The children's section is markedly different than the rest of the cemetery. The first thing one notices is a large wooden pirate ship rising above the small graves. It is covered with ribbons. There are no tombstones. The plots are practically on top of one another and marked with small wooden or marble plaques bearing the names of the dead. The entire area is very colorful. Pinwheels in rainbow hues spin silently over small statuettes of rabbits and ladybugs. Stuffed animals lay scattered around the grounds.

Mehmet brings the coffin to the grave and the imam beckons the crowd to come closer if they wish to take a final look. The cemetery worker is preparing the ropes that will be used to lower the coffin into the earth. Unlike the thick, sturdy, canvas ropes and pulleys that I’ve seen at other burials, these are thin, almost dainty, and made out of white ribbon. As the worker lowers the coffin, several men and women take handfuls of dirt from a wheelbarrow and throw it in the grave.

The imam recites Ya Sin, a lengthy Sura from the Qur’an that chronicles the divine source of the Word, warns unbelievers about the punishments that they will face in the afterlife and ends with the claim that the faithful will be resurrected. The prayer is recited in a song-like manner and takes nearly fifteen minutes. At one point, the imam’s cell phone goes off in his pocket. Unfazed, he pulls it out, turns it off and continues. Once the prayer has ended, four or five men from the group begin filling the grave with shovels while the rest of us watch. Within a few minutes a small mound of earth has risen above the grave. One of the men takes a pitcher of water and pours it over the dirt, signaling the end of the funeral ceremony.

The imam comes to my side and begins conversing with family members. He tells them that participating in a funeral ceremony is sünnet [a good deed modeled on the behavior of the Prophet], and that although the child’s parents are currently suffering, they will have an easier time getting into Heaven because their baby is now an angel that will block the gates of Hell for her parents.

A man who looks no older than fifty approaches me. I find out later that he is the grandfather of the deceased. His sunken, bloodshot eyes reveal his sorrow. “When will the headstone be put in?” he asks. “Is everything in order?” “What else needs to be done?” I realize that he’s mistaken me for an undertaker. “I’m.. I’m not sure…” I mutter and turn towards Mehmet who is within earshot, observing our conversation. He seems amused about the misunderstanding. He walks over and puts his hand on the man’s shoulders. “Don’t worry,” he says. “We’ve taken care of everything. There’s nothing more to be done. May God bless her soul.”
In confronting death in migratory settings, immigrant communities encounter bureaucratic systems, methods of disposal, and memorial practices that are potentially incongruous with previous experiences and expectations. The work of undertaking takes on political salience in multicultural societies where different ethnic and religious groups have divergent views on death and dying, end-of-life care, and the proper treatment of corpses. In situations where there is some uncertainty about funerary traditions and burial laws, undertakers can play a crucial role in guiding families through the cultural, religious, political, and legal landscapes that structure the transitions from life to death.

In the previous chapter we saw how different civil society groups and associations, some of which are connected to states, make claims on dead bodies and provide moral and material incentives for repatriating dead bodies to their natal soils. In this chapter I examine another set of actors that are central to the provision of funerary services in the diaspora: Muslim undertakers and the nascent Islamic funeral industry in Berlin. As private actors who negotiate issues of citizenship and sovereignty in relation to the dead, Muslim undertakers serve as political and cultural mediators between immigrant families and the German state.

This chapter argues that Muslim undertakers’ ability to navigate the regulatory structures of the German bureaucracy and the cultural expectations of their customers is a defining feature of their occupational identity and a principal source of their professional authority. All states establish a range of institutions, laws, and practices to oversee the transitions from life to death, including what happens to dead bodies. In burying the dead
and tending to the living, the Muslim undertakers of Berlin must reconcile competing (and sometimes conflicting) sets of administrative and cultural norms surrounding death and burial. In doing so, they preside not only over end-of-life decisions and their theological implications, but also over pedagogical moments in processes of political and cultural integration in contemporary Germany.

Most sociological and anthropological studies of funeral industries in Western countries focus on the contradictions posed by the marketization of death and the social stigmatization of death care workers, thereby overlooking the political ramifications of the work of undertaking. By problematizing the commercial dimensions of the funeral trade, these works help advance our understanding of the moral limits of markets. By prioritizing the economic aspects of the funeral market and the strategies by which members of the funeral industry legitimate their business practices however, these studies are less attentive to the ways in which death itself serves as a salient moment of political education and the role that undertakers play in this process.

As I will show, Muslim undertakers are intermediaries between civil society and the state in a double sense. One the one hand, they help socialize immigrant citizens to the norms and values underlying the “rational-legal” political order and the modes of conduct that are expected therein. The bureaucracy of death functions not only as a site that is particularly emblematic of such an order but reflects a broader socio-cultural structure with concomitant attitudes, mannerisms, and sensibilities. In other words, it reflects a particular way of being properly German or properly integrated. On the other hand, Muslim undertakers offer lessons about Muslim citizens to the German state by
countering stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in Germany. Through their daily encounters and conversations with agents of the German bureaucracy, they seek to dispel myths and negative perceptions about Islam.

These two features of undertaking in a migratory context attest to the idea that undertakers do much more than bury the dead. As cultural and political mediators, the Muslim undertakers of Berlin draw authority from their access and knowledge about state resources and practices. As individuals with privileged knowledge about the political order, they help expand the purview of the state over Muslim migrants, a population that has an ambivalent and at times, conflictual relationship to the German state. The work of undertaking then, offers an unexpected and largely underexplored instance of how non-state actors and informal processes are constitutive of the state as it exists and is experienced in everyday life.

**The dismal trade**

From the Paleolithic era to the present day, human societies have developed a range of actors and institutions to deal with the dead and dispose of human remains. In ancient Rome, *libitinarii* managed the Temple of the funeral goddess Venus Libitina, where slaves called *pollinctores* washed corpses while their assistants, the *designators*, sold funeral supplies, kept records of the dead, arranged funeral processions and other ceremonial aspects of the funeral. Herodotus chronicles the physical hardships faced by individuals tasked with the burial of Scythian kings, who “cut one of their ears, shave their heads, slash their arms, mutilate their foreheads and noses, and pierce their left
hands with arrows." Dedicated as they might be to their profession, it is difficult to imagine contemporary undertakers subjecting themselves to that sort of corporeal punishment in the course of their work.

The modern usage of the word “undertaker” in the English language dates back to the 17th century and originally meant one who “undertook” to make arrangements for funerals. Early undertakers in Britain and the United States combined their funeral business with other trades. Some were owners of livery stables who rented hearses, horses, and coaches to transport corpses to the cemetery. Others were furniture and cabinetmakers that built coffins on the side and gradually started supplying other materials and services for funerals and burials.

In one of the earliest and most comprehensive studies of the funeral industry in the United States, sociologists Robert Habenstein and William Lamers saw certain continuities between contemporary death workers and their ancient counterparts, asserting that undertakers have their roots “deep in the history of Western civilization.” They argued that in the United States, it was widely accepted that “the dead merit professional funeral services from a lay occupational group,” services that included everything from embalming and preparing the body for viewing, to the provision of

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107 Herodotus 2008 [440 BC]: Book IV, Chapter 71, 258.
109 Ibid. Pg. 171. Habenstein and Lamers show how the occupation of funeral directing in the United States evolved by adding to itself specific funeral tasks that were previously carried out by other occupations. In addition to furniture makers and livery stable owners, they cite tradesman undertakers who sold mourning paraphernalia, nurses and “Layers Out of the Dead” who prepared the body for burial, religious functionaries who performed obsequies, and municipal officers such as coroners and health officials who also served as official town undertakers. See Habenstein and Lamers 1955, especially 225 – 250.
“attractive” caskets that “protect the remains,” to the organization of a “dignified” and “ceremonious” funeral that “expresses the esteem of the bereaved.”

What qualifies as a necessary aspect of the funeral is, of course, culturally and historically contingent and the types of services offered by professional death workers vary substantially. Undertakers pick up corpses from homes and hospitals, inject them with chemicals and other preservative agents, and dress them up or down according to religious customs and aesthetic sensibilities. They bury them in simple shrouds, cheap pine boxes, or costlier receptacles lined with silk and satin. They burn them in industrial grade machines that reduce the body to a heap of smoldering ash. In one way or another, they make the bodies disappear.

When dealing with the dead, undertakers must also contend with the living. The troubling idea that their economic livelihood is based on the suffering of others is something that they need to overcome in order to bolster their professional credibility.

Although funeral transactions take place within a generally accepted market framework, they are potentially problematic if read as the commodification of death. The establishment of monetary equivalents for life, death, organs, body parts, and other things that might be considered sacred, inalienable, or non-fungible is a controversial process that exposes the limits of markets and market exchanges.

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10 Ibid, Pg. 4.
111 The practice of embalming, for example, while widespread in the United States, is less common elsewhere around the world. In the U.S. context, the practice dates back to the Civil War, where dead soldiers were routinely embalmed in order to maintain the integrity of the corpse during shipment for burial. See Grant 2004.
112 There is a vast literature on morality and markets and the limits of economic exchange. Some important texts include Walzer 1983, particularly pages 95 – 129, Radin 1996, and Sandel 2013.
As Vivian Zelizer has shown in her important study on the development of the life insurance industry in the United States, life insurance could not be established as a commodity to be bought and sold on the market until its meaning had been culturally reinterpreted. It was initially unpopular because it was seen as commoditizing life. Such perceptions were influenced by a value system, inspired in part by religious ideals about the sanctity of man, which condemned a strictly financial evaluation of human life. It took well over half a century for life insurance to become accepted and widely consumed, a shift that was in no small part due to efforts by life insurance companies to emphasize the beneficent and protective functions of their product.\(^\text{113}\)

As Zelizer points out, undertakers, like life insurance agents, are “businessmen of death.” Their occupational identity is significantly different than “professionals” of death like doctors and religious leaders, whose connection to death is legitimated by its service orientation. “To save and to heal,” she writes, “is holier than to sell.”\(^\text{114}\) One of the challenges facing members of the funeral industry then, is to come up with a non-economic idiom to describe their work. The language of psychology provides one possible avenue. Haberstein and Lamers offer a textbook example of what currently serves as an industry mantra in many Western countries. In the conclusion of their 700 page tome on the funeral industry they claim that the professionalism of the undertaker is based not on the possession of “technical skills” pertaining to the handling of corpses, but rather on “psychological skills in human relations necessary to the proper handling of the

\(^{113}\) Zelizer 1979.
\(^{114}\) Ibid: 136.
emotions and dispositions of the bereaved.” The notion that grief counseling is central to the work of undertaking is meant to assuage critics of the “dismal trade” who are uneasy about the marketization of death by giving credence to the idea that a proper funeral carries therapeutic benefits and helps survivors manage and transcend their grief.

The symbolic redefinition of work is one of several rhetorical strategies identified by scholars of the funeral industry who are interested in the socialization and self-presentation of undertakers and other death-care workers. Much of this literature assumes that members of the funeral industry are socially stigmatized because of a combination of their proximity to dead bodies, societal taboos and the ‘wall of silence’ around death and dying, and the belief that undertakers profit from death and grief. As one sociologist of the death care industry puts it:

In common with many other death workers, the attribute possessed by undertakers that separates them from society or emphasizes their “undesired difference” derives from their proximity to death and their handling of the corpse. They possess an ability to handle and decontaminate the dead and, like workers in other societies who perform similar tasks, they are stigmatized. Furthermore, there is a general inability to understand their business practice. Although like other private businesses they are motivated by profit, making a living from disposing of the dead is often perceived as immoral or perverted. This interpretation of funeral directing leads to a belief that as a group, they are superficially sympathetic in their interactions with grieving relatives and profit conscious at their expense… If, in society, there is a general reluctance to confront issues of mortality, then undertakers' close proximity to death will result in public rejection or condemnation of their role.

While not all death care workers are stigmatized and the social role that undertakers play in different ethnic, religious, and racial communities varies considerably (a point that I will return to below), members of the funeral industry in many Western countries

115 Habenstein and Lamers 1955: 593.
continue to fight an uphill public relations battle to this day.\textsuperscript{117} This is in part due to questionable industry practices, but is also the result of periodic, sensationalist exposés and negative media coverage of the industry.

In the United States, it is difficult to underestimate the impact that Jessica Mitford’s \textit{The American Way of Death} has had on public and scholarly debates about funeral culture in American society and the kind of coverage that the funeral industry has received in popular media since its publication in 1963. Mitford was not the first author to write about the contradictions of the funeral industry and in particular, the vulnerability of consumers in this market.\textsuperscript{118} But her book, more than any other, helped inaugurate an on-going debate about the true costs of disposal, the need for consumer protection, and alternatives to existing industry practices. According to one cultural historian of the funeral industry in the United States, after Mitford, funeral directing “would never be the same again.”\textsuperscript{119} The book became an instant sensation, reaching the number one spot on the \textit{New York Times} best-seller list, and had an immense influence on public perceptions of death care by exposing the inner workings of the funeral industry.

\textsuperscript{117} In one of the few studies of African-American funeral directors, Suzanne Smith argues that they “have always been culturally valued for their ability to help their communities honor their dead with dignity and the requisite pageantry.” Moreover, as entrepreneurs in a largely segregated trade, African-American undertakers “were usually among the few black individuals in any town or city that were not beholden to the local white power structure.” Their financial independence, allowed them “to fight for civil rights and racial integration, a goal that would ironically threaten the relative economic security of a segregated marketplace.” Smith 2010: 8-9.

\textsuperscript{118} See for example Evelyn Waugh’s \textit{The Loved One} (1948), a fictional account of a funeral home that is supposedly based on the author’s personal experiences with Los Angeles’s infamous Forest Lawn Cemetery—burial ground of the stars. See also Ruth Harmer. \textit{The High Cost of Dying} (1963), released in the same year but largely overshadowed by Mitford’s book.

\textsuperscript{119} Laderman 2003: xxxi.
For Mitford, the vulgar materialism of the American funeral, with its ostentatious caskets, gaudy floral arrangements, and insistence on the ‘beautification’ of the corpse through embalming, represented the ultimate exploitation of the free market. She ridiculed the language of professionalism employed by undertakers and representatives of the industry to authorize and dignify the work of disposal and debunked almost every aspect of the funeral “tradition.” She was particularly ruthless towards members of the industry, whom she vilified as “merchants of a rather grubby order, preying on the grief, remorse, and guilt of survivors.”

In response, funeral industry representatives, in concert with conservative politicians, attempted to characterize her demands for simple, low-cost funerals as a communist “red plot.” California congressman James B. Utt went as far as to declare that “her tirade against morticians is simply the vehicle to carry out her anti-Christ attack.”

Try as they did however, the funeral industry faced considerable challenges in altering the national image of the undertaker.

Mitford’s critical gaze was focused on her adopted country, but the problems that she identified in the United States are applicable elsewhere and have been taken up by death scholars working in different geographical and cultural contexts. Studies of the funeral market in Germany for example, have addressed many of the same questions raised by Mitford and other scholars of Anglo-American funeral markets. These include the problem of profit, the self-representations of undertakers, the socialization of death-

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121 Quoted in Mitford 2006: 267. Congressman Utt added that “I would rather place my mortal remains alive or dead, in the hands of any American mortician than to set foot on the soil of any Communist nation.”
care workers, the professionalization of the funeral industry, and broader cultural changes in societal understandings of death and dying such as transformations in religious and secular rituals, intercultural approaches to end-of-life care, and alternative funerary traditions. One recurrent line of analysis in this literature seeks to identify the strategies by which members of the funeral industry overcome negative perceptions, bolster their professional credibility, and continue to do business.

In one of the most comprehensive studies of the German funeral market, Dominic Akyel argues that undertakers in Germany are “commonly perceived as being dishonest and largely untrustworthy.” They must actively manage their public image in order to build consumer trust. Since extensive advertising, discounts, and price competition are usually considered inappropriate in this market, undertakers rely on other strategies to attract customers and communicate their value added vis-à-vis competitors.

According to Akyel, funeral companies manipulate the perceived quality of the goods and services they provide through tactics such as status signaling and reputation

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123 Akyel 2013a: 230. Though nothing as influential as Mitford’s American Way of Death has been written for a German audience, there have been several critical books on the German funeral industry published in recent years, most notably Peter Waldbauer’s Die Bestattungs-Mafia (The Funeral Mafia). Waldbauer writes that the industry attracts “the most repulsive types and characters” including “notorious drinkers, anti-social elements, criminals and pimps, psychopaths and necrophiliacs.” See Waldbauer 2007. The industry is well aware of the need to manage its public image and regularly runs articles in its trade journals that offer strategies. See for example “Prejudices Buried: The Public Image of the Undertaker” in Bestattung Zeitschrift [Funeral Magazine], one of the important trade journals for the German funeral industry. Available online at: <http://bestattung-zeitschrift.de/index.php?id=14&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=192&cHash=9fe5233e674a8ef7742ee50e4bf7d352>

124 Industry norms around advertising are undergoing changes, as I will describe in further detail below.
building. They utilize quality markers, such as certificates and professional titles provided by business and trade associations, to signal competence and reliability. They work to enhance their reputation by focusing strongly on satisfying clients’ needs and by taking over reputable competitors.

Undertakers behave in an empathetic and compassionate manner when dealing with clientele in order to establish personal relationships with customers and to signal sincerity. Since consumers are less likely to engage in comparisons of funeral providers’ services, they often rely on the recommendations of friends and family and the perceived reputation of the firm when making a decision about a funeral purchase. Akyel concludes that the economic value of goods in the funeral market has little to do with the products’ material qualities, but rather, is a function of moral judgments that “charge companies with symbolic meanings.” In sum, economic success in the funeral industry is based upon entrepreneurs’ ability to conceal profit motivation by focusing on reputation, status, and by actively maligning and devaluing the competition.

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125 One important professional organization in this regard is the Bundesverband Deutscher Bestatter e.V. (The Federal Association of German Undertakers), established in 1948 to represent the interests of the funeral industry in Germany. Today the BDB has around 3,000 member companies, offers vocational training and certification for a variety of occupational roles including “Funeral Specialist,” “Certified Undertaker,” “Undertaker Champion,” “Certified Cremation Technician,” “Grief Counselor” and “Psychosocial Coach.” Individuals wishing to enter the funeral industry are not legally required to obtain any such certification or undergo any training whatsoever. The certificates serve as markers of distinction and professional competence. See <www.bestatter.de>. Quality seals are also issued by governmental organizations. To take one example, one of the largest and oldest funeral homes in Germany, Ahorn-Grieneisein, boasts that it is the first company in Germany to institute the “European Standard on Funeral Services” (EN 15107) issued by the European Committee for Standardization. In order to qualify, companies must meet certain requirements for funeral services that cover everything from the care of the deceased (washing, shaving, packing bodily orifices, etc.), embalming and thanatopraxy procedures, to funeral facilities (cold storage, preparation areas, and ceremony rooms). The guidelines also offer practical advice. For example, “the funeral director at all times shall behave with tact and sympathy, bearing in mind the emotional situation of the client” and “the funeral director should present an appropriate appearance and be articulate.” Full text of the guidelines are available online at: <http://www.pohrebiste.cz/stranky/archiv/dokument/40/en15017.pdf>
Other scholars point to the growth of bereavement support and grief counseling in the funeral industry to show how it has become a central aspect of German undertaking. These trends can be observed in both the training programs offered to aspiring undertakers through Germany’s vocational education system, and in industry practices and the self-presentation of undertakers themselves. Although there are no educational requirements to becoming an undertaker in Germany, the profession of undertaking is as of 2003, one of the 350 officially recognized occupations that students enrolled in vocational schools (Berufsschule) can apprentice in.
The creation of the first Federal Training Center for Undertaking in the Bavarian city of Münnerstadt in 2005 has enabled industry professionals to receive additional training in mortuary sciences. The Center offers one to three year educational programs that cover amongst other things, business administration, coffin construction, and psychological training in grief counseling. According to its website, students can enroll in courses on subjects such as “The Basics of Mourning Psychology,” “Counseling Psychology and Rhetoric” and “Children Grieve Differently.”

Grief therapy serves as another “value added” in the German funeral industry and industry professionals have in recent years, mobilized psychological tropes to criticize what they deem as an increasingly widespread “disposal mentality” among German consumers. “Disposal mentality” is the term used by industry representatives to describe situations where family members want to dispose of/with their deceased as cheaply and with as little effort as possible. Funerals can be quite expensive in Germany, ranging anywhere from 2,000 – 13,000 euros.¹²⁶

The abolition of the federal death benefit and the emergence of discount funeral chains has put downward pressure on the funeral market, leading to the rise of cheaper burial alternatives.¹²⁷ Discount funeral providers buck existing industry norms, engaging

¹²⁶ Breur and Dauman 2009.
¹²⁷ The federal death benefit (Sterbegeld) was abolished in 2004 as part of a broader package of reforms intended to promote economic growth and employment under the rubric Agenda 2010. The reforms, which also included reductions in health insurance coverage, cuts in unemployment and pension benefits, the raising of the retirement age and the relaxation of labor laws to make it easier to hire and fire workers, were pushed through by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and signaled a dramatic shift in the party’s position on social welfare spending. Previously, German citizens were granted a lump sum payment of 525 euros to help subsidize funeral costs. The abolition of the death benefit led to an increase in cremations (which can be performed at a lower cost than burial) and to a rise in the number of applications for state-subsidized “social funerals” (Sozialbestattungen). See Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur
in heavy price advertising, on-line sales, and according to their competitors, foster and propagate a “disposal mentality” among consumers. For example, the website of one such company, Der Billig Bestatter (The Discount Undertaker), based in Berlin, informs visitors that they can purchase cremation services for €699, an “offer that is only available online.” The company advertises other cremation packages, starting from €810, where cremated ashes are transported to a woodland area in Switzerland for burial. This price includes overseas transportation but family members who wish to attend the burial services must pay additional fees.

128 See <http://www.der-billigbestatter.de/feuerbestattungen.html>

129 The website offers a host of other burial and disposal options, including burial at sea (starting at €965), forest burials in a “family or friendship tree” (starting from €3,350 but the cost depends on the thickness, type, and location of the tree), and the option to turn your ashes into a “memorial diamond” (from €3,927).
Figure 4: A branch of Der Billig Bestatter in Berlin. The advertisement on the far right reads “Inexpensive: Day and Night: All from one [provider]... therefore we are cheaper!”

Members of the funeral industry have excoriated explicit appeals to low cost funerals and insist that they are not only impersonal and vulgar but more importantly, inhibit the grieving process. According to the trade magazine *Bestattung Zeitschrift* [Funeral Magazine]:

Those who advertise so blatantly for cheap burials, as if they were electric goods, cars, or food, have their own profit in mind rather than the sensitivities of the relatives. The cheaper the offer, the fewer services the customer receives. Specifically, the first conversation with survivors at discount funeral homes is often short and sweet. But it is precisely these conversations and interpersonal relations with family members that is central to the work of a good undertaker. It is important to help survivors cope with their grief and to organize a beautiful, and above all, personal funeral.130

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The magazine criticizes discount undertakers for treating a funeral like any other commodity that is bought and sold in the marketplace. It assumes that funerals are different than other commodities and that excessive advertising and price-cutting have no place in the funeral industry. By vilifying the impersonal nature of funeral transactions in discount chains, the magazine foregrounds personalized and caring customer service and claims that undertakers play a principal role in helping bereaved families cope with grief. It is a clear example of how pseudo-psychological arguments are deployed in order to lend credibility to the work of undertaking.

The journal also voices the opinion that undertakers should be open to the personal wishes of the bereaved in order to plan funerals that acknowledge and reflect the individual character of the deceased. Personalized funerals represent a break from traditional ceremonies rooted in the Church and reflect what Heidemarie Winkel, drawing on the work of historian Norbert Fischer, has described as an individuation of mourning in Germany. Contemporary funerals, she argues, are shaped by holistic reflections on death and dying and are more creative and individualized.

Winkel highlights the burgeoning diversity in burial and commemorative practices by drawing attention to the growth of alternative funeral homes. Such companies encourage greater participation by family members in the process of burial, by

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131 Winkel 2001. For Fischer, the culture of mourning in contemporary Germany involves more freedom, self-determination, and creativity. This is especially true with regards to secular funerals where individuals have greater flexibility in planning the ceremonies and rituals accompanying death. See Fischer 1997. One example of the personalization of death rites involves the establishment of niche cemeteries, such as Berlin’s lesbian burial ground in Prenzlauer Berg. See Deutsche Welle 2011. “A Burial Ground for Lesbians in Berlin.” Available online at: <http://www.dw.de/a-burial-ground-for-lesbians-in-berlin/a-17581444>.
taking part in activities such as washing the corpse, digging the grave, and lowering the coffin into the earth. These practices are meant to serve as an antidote to a culture of death denial, in which the realities of death or obscured or simply hidden from sight.

Undertakers like Fritz Roth, a leading advocate of alternative funerals in Germany, argue that through greater participation in the process of burial itself, families are better able to cope with their grief by acknowledging death as a natural part of life and as a rite of transition and passage.¹³²

Participating in the preparations for burial or disposal involves coming face to face with and potentially handling a dead body. While undertakers regularly handle the dead in the course of their work, for most people, the corpse is a reviled object because it appears impure and polluting. As Habenstein and Lamers note in the American context, undertakers prefer to avoid discussions about the “dirty” aspects of their work: “A funeral director today does not glorify his bodyhandling, and the pathological details of preparation are certainly not part of the stock of terms used in verbal intercourse with the clientele.”¹³³ In contemporary Germany, some undertakers are taking the opposite approach and encouraging direct, hands-on experiences with the dead.

In her ethnographic study of alternative funeral homes in Germany, Antje Kahl argues that these undertakers credit the dead body with a certain mystical quality and

¹³² “The Undertaker: Fritz Roth from Bergisch-Gladbach.” Deutsche Welle 2010. Available online at: http://dw.de/p/MN1l. Similar arguments are made on the other side of the Atlantic, most recently and notably by Caitlin Doughty, an author, practicing undertaker in Los Angeles, and founder of The Order of the Good Death. In describing the ethos of her funeral home, Doughty writes that “The principle behind Undertaking LA is placing the dying person and their family back in control of the dying process, the death itself, and the subsequent care of the dead body.” See <http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/>. This is a recurrent theme in her book, Smoke Gets in Your Eyes and Other Lessons from the Crematory (2014).

¹³³ Habenstein and Lamers, 1963. Pg. 243
claim that facing the dead can lead to transcendental religious or spiritual experiences. She writes that alternative funeral companies “encourage a conscious interaction with the dead body; they attribute the ability of mediating assurance, comfort and hope to the encounter with the deceased body, which contributes to overcoming the crisis that was caused by the death in a healing way.” Encounters with the dead encourage reflection on existential questions about our own mortality, the meaning of life, and the values which we live by. “The memento mori serves as an ars vivendi.”

According to Kahl, it is not death, but the deceased who is the “master teacher of life.” For alternative practitioners in the German funeral industry, encounters with the dead offer experiences that convey great truths and provide solace and hope in the face of meaninglessness, futility, and despair. She concludes that funeral companies are increasingly in the business of providing “salvation goods” – transcendental experiences traditionally offered by the church—provided in part through the dead body itself.

In my own study, I found that the Muslim undertakers of Berlin were on the whole, less committed to discourses of grief therapy, bereavement counseling, or transcendental experiences. They were also not particularly concerned with the

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134 Kahl 2013: 229.
135 Ibid.
136 One notable exception was Mehmet, whom I introduced in the ethnographic vignette that opened this chapter. Having undergone some training in the subject, Mehmet had knowledge of psychological theories of grief and mourning. During one of our conversations he told me that “all of this is in the Qur’an… The Quran says that you should take care of the dead. You should wash the body. You should carry it to the grave and bury it with your own hands. Why? Because you need to accept the fact that this person no longer exists. You’ve put them 1.5 meters under the ground. They aren’t going to come back.” In essence, he claimed that the Qur’an had already devised a system for mourning that was just catching on in Germany with the emergence of alternative funeral homes. He was critical of German practices that sought to keep the bereaved at a distance. “From a psychological perspective,” he told me, “it’s harder for non-Muslims to accept the death of a person.” Author interview 2014.08.03 Berlin.
problem of stigmatization, in so far as their professional or occupational identity was
cconcerned. Stigma was a problem, but not in the expected way. The undertakers were
stigmatized insofar as they were Muslims and/or immigrants in a country that is generally
hostile towards both. Consequently, one of the important tasks they saw themselves
performing was countering stereotypes about Islam in Germany, a point that I will
address at greater length below.

When asked about the costs associated with burial in Germany and the economic
structures of the Islamic funeral industry in Berlin, almost all of the undertakers spoke
about their relatively weak position in the funeral market vis-à-vis their German
counterparts. This was due to smaller profit margins and their command over a smaller
share of a segmented market. “The Germans would laugh at our prices,” they told me,
noting that on average an Islamic funeral costs around €2,000 – 3,000, while a “German
funeral” costs between €5 – 10,000, depending on accessories and services, such as the
coffin, flowers, musical accompaniment, etc. German companies issue an itemized bill
for every product and service provided in the course of arranging a funeral. As one of my
informants put it, “the Germans will charge you for the nails they use to seal the coffin.”

While members of the Islamic funeral industry criticized German companies for
price gouging and profiteering, they chastised other Muslim undertakers for undercutting
prices. Fierce competition within the Islamic funeral market was seen as inhibiting profit.
As we saw in the previous chapter, monopoly practices on repatriation services also
curtailed open competition in the Islamic funeral market. Bülent, an undertaker who I
will say more about below put it in the following way. “Let’s speak honestly here, we
don’t earn a lot of money. We’d like to but we can’t because there’s a lot of competition. You price a funeral at 2,500 euros then some other guy comes along and says he’ll do it for 2,300. It’s all downhill from there. The other Turkish and Arab companies don’t have a long-term perspective. They’re happy with whatever profit they can manage, even if it’s only 300 euros.”

Thus, as far as economic questions were concerned, Muslim undertakers felt squeezed between two poles. On the one hand, they were critical of the exorbitant costs of German funerals, which they saw as ostentatious. On the other hand, they felt pressured by competition within the Islamic funeral industry. In situating themselves between these two positions, undertakers sought to forestall criticism of their own business practices by drawing attention to their own structural vulnerability in the funeral market.

What I’d like to focus on in what follows however, is not the moral or cultural dilemmas posed by the marketization of death, but rather, the political consequences of its bureaucratization. In the next section I show how the bureaucracy functions as a site of power and how interactions between civil servants and the lay public are part of the everyday construction of the state and the socialization of citizens. I argue, furthermore, that the reproduction of a bureaucratic order and bureaucratized vision of the world is achieved not only through the work of bureaucracies and bureaucrats but by intermediaries whose fortunes are tied, both materially and symbolically, to the bureaucratic apparatus.
The bureaucracy of death

Intrinsic to the rise of the modern state is the development of a bureaucratic system. In Max Weber's work, the bureaucracy is a critical site for the rationalization of social life. What he describes as the “disenchantment of the world” in modernity, involves the displacement of magic and superstition by scientific and technical approaches to understanding and exercising control over nature and culture. The creation of a bureaucratic apparatus is linked to the diffusion of bureaucratic rationality based on impersonal rules, hierarchy of authority, and deference to official procedure. In their dealings with the modern bureaucracy, individuals are subjected to disciplinary practices that are subsumed under administrative procedures, such as the preparation of official documents, the filing of paperwork and so on. Consequently an important measure of “modern” subjectivity is an individual's ability to navigate the rules and regulations of the bureaucracy, a process that is at best, challenging, and potentially absurd.

Encounters with an impersonal bureaucratic apparatus are a recurring trope in fictional accounts of the experience of foreigners and immigrants in Germany. Take, for example, a scene from Renan Demirkan’s Schwarzer Tee mit drei Stück Zucker [Black Tea with Three Cubes of Sugar], a book that chronicles a young, second-generation Turkish woman’s travels to Turkey with her German boyfriend. In the text, Turkey is

137 See Weber 2004 [1919].
characterized as a world of “improvised survival” while Germany “functions by the stopwatch.”

The epitome of German officiousness is its bureaucracy, a site where interactions between civil servants and the public are curt, callous, and potentially discriminatory. In describing her attempt to complete some simple paperwork at the local registration office, the narrator recounts how the attendant clerk ignores her completely, despite the fact that she is the only person there. When she tries to get the bureaucrat’s attention, she is sharply rebuffed and told to sit back down and wait her turn. The clerk not only reprimands her, but address her in a broken, pidgin German, assuming that her linguistic capacities are too underdeveloped to understand proper German. The narrator is at once spurned and rebuked. The enactment of bureaucratic power alternates between inattention and admonition.

This scene is one of many in texts written and published in Germany by persons of “non-German origin,” a genre that has been variously (and contentiously) labeled as Gastarbeiterliteratur (guestworker literature), Gastliteratur (guest literature), Ausländerliteratur (foreigner literature), Migrantenliteratur (migrant literature), and Literatur deutschschreibender Ausländer (the literature of foreigners writing in German). According to literary critic Leslie Adelson, the “chilling absurdities and

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139 Such labels reveal the uneasiness surrounding the place of “non-German” authors in the German national cannon, an uneasiness that is in part a product of unresolved questions about the place of immigrants in German society. Literary scholars and authors have, for several decades, challenged both ethnocentric definitions of ‘national literature’ and the view that the work of authors with non-German ethnic and linguistic heritages constitutes an “addendum” or “appendage” to the national cannon. See for example Adelson 2005, Fachinger 2001, Seyhan 2000, and Şenocak 2000.
indignities of the West German bureaucracy” depicted in such works “are not merely about German ‘coldness’ or postmodern alienation” but “can and should be read as confrontations with a legacy of German racism and colonialism.”

The authority of the bureaucracy derives not simply from the existence of impersonal, rules, ordinances, guidelines, and procedures, but rather, in their selective and at times, seemingly arbitrary and haphazard implementation. As Michael Herzfeld reminds us, “not all bureaucratic interactions are dismal; for some lucky individuals, the system works every time.” Bureaucrats can act or appear indifferent towards their clientele and their willingness to serve certain groups like immigrants or natives can vary significantly.

The power of the bureaucrat originates in part from the amount of flexibility and leeway that she is granted in implementing the rules or holding them in abeyance. In his classic study of “street-level bureaucrats” in the United States, Michael Lipsky argues that bureaucrats “implicitly mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state” by “socialize[ing] citizens to expectations of governmental services and their place in the political community.” He adds that “the dilemmas of action maybe particularly acute” for certain groups like the poor, immigrants, or people with a different ethnic or racial background than the public employees with whom they interact: “Should I wait my turn and submit to the procedures of the agency, despite reservations? I risk

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140 Adelson sees continuities between German colonialists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries for whom an extensive colonial bureaucratic administration was a mark of German superiority over native peoples in Africa and the South Pacific, and the attitudes of present-day bureaucrats. See Adelson 1990: 385.
141 Herzfeld 1992: 3.
being unable to gain attention to my particular needs and concerns. Should I speak out forcefully and demand my rights? I risk antagonizing the workers by disrupting office procedures.”

As other authors have shown, everyday encounters with state bureaucracies are critical to the routine construction of the state, since they give “concrete shape and form to what would otherwise be an abstraction (‘the state’).”

States express their “stateness” through “social relations and the establishment of routines, rituals, and institutions that ‘work in us.’” Such routines, which often take the form of administrative procedures, require citizens to adhere to a set of predetermined rules. They also entail mastery of, or at the very least compliance with, a set of cultural codes and norms about the way that the bureaucracy functions and more generally, how political life works.

States “define and create certain kinds of subjects and identities” not only through repressive means, but through their “offices and routines, taxing, licensing, and registering procedures and papers.” These sites and practices are pedagogical in the sense that they shape citizens’ “perceptions of their own status and authority in relation to state institutions and personnel.” They also instill ideas about how states operate and demonstrate the reciprocal obligations that link citizens to the state.

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143 *ibid*: xvi.
146 Roseberry 1994: 357.
147 Soss 1999.
In pitting the bureaucrat against the immigrant however, we miss an important dimension of the disciplinary power of the bureaucracy. This is due to the fact that the range of actors invested in maintaining and reproducing a particular bureaucratic structure of governance extends beyond its principals, i.e. the bureaucrats themselves. As I will elaborate below, Muslim undertakers are at once stymied by and invested in the tortuous nature of German deathways.

From the innumerable offices that must be visited in order to obtain, notarize and process the necessary documents for local interment or international shipment, to the legal and logistical barriers that hamper their ability to carry out certain tasks within a specific timeframe, the undertakers operate within a world of red tape. Yet it is precisely their ability to navigate the intricacies of the bureaucracy that endows them with professional authority and helps to legitimate their role as intermediaries.

Moreover, knowledge of the bureaucracy serves as a key metric by which to evaluate their customers and to assess their cultural integration (or lack thereof) into German society. Although they are critical of a burial regime that is burdensome and complicated, the undertakers reproduce its authority by linking their own expertise and social status to it. In doing so, they establish themselves as cultural mediators whose work entails much more than the burial of the dead.

In instructing their customers about the rules and regulations associated with death and disposal in Germany, Muslim undertakers perform an important pedagogical function. While the German state provides the idiom through which the bureaucratic
order is constructed, the undertakers help translate and disseminate its logic, therefore educating their customers—citizens with immigrant backgrounds—about what to expect from the state and how to conduct oneself in its presence.

Readers might object to an analysis of the bureaucracy of death that takes as its primary focus not the bureaucrats themselves, but other agents who are not part of the official state cadre. What I want to highlight in the pages that follow is the mediating role played by non-state actors in processes of socio-cultural integration and assimilation. My approach is influenced by Beatrice Hibou’s recent work on neoliberal bureaucratization.¹⁴⁸

Hibou analyzes the bureaucracy not as an object or a thing, but as a set of normative and procedural arrangements, which are diffuse, dispersed, and often elusive. Bureacuratization, she writes, “is not an administrative arrangement, nor is it an institution, let alone an organizational structure.” According to Hibou, it is a “social form of power” which “unfolds across all the actors whom it targets and who, wittingly or not, carry out this process by furthering it or combating it, playing along with it or playing against it.”¹⁴⁹

The undertakers whose work I analyze, both play along with and sometimes play against the bureaucracy. They are mediators in a dual sense. They transmit a set of norms and values derived from a particular “legal-rational” framework (that of the German state), while attending to the expectations and desires of their clientele. In the process

¹⁴⁸ Hibou 2015: 11.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
they are often compelled to elucidate and explain a set of rules and regulations that contradict the assumptions and suppositions of their customers. While it is a stretch to say that they act as agents of the state in such moments, their descriptions of their interactions with customers demonstrates that they have internalized certain norms about the logic of the bureaucratic order and more generally, about how it structures political interactions in everyday life.

The work of mediation between citizens and the state works both ways. Undertakers teach lessons about the state to citizens, but also offer lessons to the state about its citizens. In the course of their day-to-day work, undertakers encounter and engage with agents of the German bureaucracy in many different official capacities. Like it or not, these men are interpellated as “Others” – Muslims, immigrants, foreigners, non-Germans – and an important dimension of their mediation involves the countering of stereotypes about such groups. Undertakers find themselves in situations where they are compelled to speak on behalf of or in the name of the groups which they are read into by others. Some take on this task willingly, but for others, the compulsion to speak feels more coercive than consensual.

I will illustrate these points through ethnographic vignettes and excerpts from interviews that I conducted during the course of my fieldwork. The undertakers show many points of convergence, in spite of their social, cultural, and political differences. Some were born and raised in Germany to immigrant parents, others immigrated to Germany as children, and some came as adults. All are men between the ages of 35 – 60. While they all provide Islamic funerals, some are more outwardly pious than others and
embody a “Muslim” identity in more explicit ways. Some of the men received religious
education, and one was trained as an imam. Still others were educated in the German
public school system. These differences play out in specific ways and in what follows; I
will provide portraits of the undertakers whose reflections on life and death in Germany
provide the empirical content of the rest of this chapter.

“This is not an Anatolian Village”

The force of the bureaucracy became evident early on in my research, though I
did not realize its centrality to the work of undertaking until much later. My first
interview was very informative in this regard. An undertaker, whom I’ll call Bülent,
invited me to come by his office one Saturday morning to talk about Islamic burial in
Germany. I learned about Bülent through contacts at Milli Görüş, whose funeral fund I
analyzed in the previous chapter.

Bülent owns and operates a funeral company that, among other things, serves
members of Milli Görüş’s funeral fund, of which he is the Berlin area representative.
Located in the culturally diverse neighborhood of Kreuzberg, the funeral home occupies
the ground floor of an otherwise unremarkable building on the busy thoroughfare of
Urbanstraße. Flanked on one side by a discount appliance store displaying second hand
washing machines and dishwashers in its windows, Bülent’s business has modest signage
in black and white letters in both German and Turkish, which read “Islam Cenaze
Servisi” [Islamic funeral service] / “Islamische Bestattungen” [Islamic burials].
Bülent is a thin, wiry man with a jet-black mustache. He is in his mid-40s and has been in the funeral business for eighteen years. Before that he worked in a shampoo factory but didn’t get along with other workers and was frequently involved in disputes with his German colleagues, a point that he tells me with pride. He emigrated from a small village near Niğde (in central Anatolia) as a child and has lived in Berlin most of his adult life.

When I enter the office he is sitting behind a large, well-ordered mahogany desk with various trinkets including a miniature airplane branded with the Pegasus logo.150 The office is sparsely decorated. Near the front door is a reception area outfitted with a black leather couch and matching coffee table covered with brochures for gravestone manufacturers, the Milli Görüş funeral fund, and hajj tourism services. Right above the

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150 Pegasus is a low-cost Turkish airline that has regular flights between Germany and Turkey. They are one of the three major airlines that transport corpses between the two countries, the other two being Turkish Airlines, and to a lesser extent, Lufthansa.
couch, painted directly on the off-white colored wall in bold, black Arabic script is the Shahadah.\textsuperscript{151}

I sit across from Büllent during the interview, which lasts nearly four hours. He is excitable and punchy throughout and provides lengthy, and at points, rambling answers to my questions. The topic of the bureaucracy, German laws of the dead, and the differences between Turkey and Germany regarding funerary services comes up early in our conversation, within the first minute in fact. Asked about the name of his business, \textit{Hicret Islamische Bestattungen}, Büllent tells me that he uses the term “\textit{Islamische Bestattungen}” to distinguish his firm from the nearly 300 non-Muslim funeral homes in Berlin.

He explains that in Germany, “private companies do what the municipality does for free in Turkey.”\textsuperscript{152} So when people talk about wanting to join the EU, if Turkey does actually join, people are going to have to start paying out of their own pockets for their funerals. They don’t consider that.” In one breath he’s linked an issue of broad geopolitical significance—Turkey’s bid to join the European Union—to the relatively mundane question of funeral welfare. The state’s role in the provision of funerary services is a theme that Büllent will return to throughout our conversation, especially as it pertains to the differences between the German and Turkish systems of disposal and laws of the dead.

“We live in a non-Muslim (\textit{Gayrimüslim}) country” he continues:

\textsuperscript{151} The Muslim declaration of faith “There is no god but God and Mohammed is his prophet.”

\textsuperscript{152} For non-Turkish speakers, the significance of the word “Hicret” may not be immediately apparent. The term refers to the Prophet Mohammed’s migration from Mecca to Medina in 622. Derived from the Arabic “Hijra” it means to flee, leave, or migrate from one place to another. When I asked Büllent about it later he told me “Hicret means migration \[göç\] and leaving this world is a type of migration.”
“They have their laws, there are many government offices that we are obliged to go to, this isn’t like some village! When someone dies, you can’t just bury them that afternoon… The government offices in Germany are open in the morning and closed in the afternoon… And the whole system works with appointments. It’s not a village. You can’t just call up the imam and say ‘let’s do this.’ In the village, the person dies, the imam washes the body, the grave is dug, there’s no official procedure, it’s easy to bury the body. Well it’s not that simple here. And that’s what we [as undertakers] have to deal with. Some people tell us, ‘Well, who cares? It’s just a corpse. It won’t create any problems.’ That’s true. The corpse doesn’t create any problems, it’s the owners that do! Our people have been living here for fifty years. They could live here for another hundred and fifty years and they wouldn’t understand the system of the country that they live in. They don’t understand the German system, nor do they want to understand it. Whatever pre-existing mentality they brought with them from Anatolia—that village mentality—it’s still there. End of story.”

For Bülent, the bureaucracy is a defining feature of German territory and space. While burial in the Turkish village is understood as a simple and swift process that requires little more than washing the corpse and digging a grave, the existence of “laws” and “official procedures” slows down the order of funerary operations in Germany. When confronted with the realities of the German bureaucracy, his customers appear blasé, indifferent, confused, or irritated.

According to Bülent, their lack of knowledge about the German system of disposal evinces a poor understanding of the legal-rational order of the society that they live in. He is critical of his customers for what he sees as their unwillingness to acknowledge or accept the structural constraints of the “German system,” which reflects the persistence of a kind of “village mentality.” In Bülent’s reading, the mentalities of Turkish immigrants in Germany are durable and portable dispositions that frame the ways that they approach and navigate German political life.
I ask Bülent about the type of procedures that are involved between death and burial. “The first thing is the death certificate,” he tells me. “The hospital needs to issue a death certificate that affirms that the person is actually dead.” It turns out, however, that obtaining a death certificate is not such a straightforward matter. “The doctor has to write it up, but they aren’t in any rush. They aren’t thinking that they should do it quickly so that the funeral company can come pick up the body. In any case, once someone is dead they’ll wait for a while. The doctor will come back after a few hours to make sure they are still dead.” I ask myself if German doctors are concerned about reanimation, but as Bülent continues, it’s clear that the problems are of a more pedestrian nature:

“Once the doctor gets around to writing up the death report, it is sent to an administrative office in the hospital. This form is delivered by hand. There are people who work in the hospital who move papers from one office to another. Now, imagine that someone dies around noon on a Friday. You can’t do anything! Remember how the doctor has to write that report? Well, that report needs to be processed by the hospital and then brought to an office where we, as funeral companies, have to go to pick it up. So I show up on Monday, between 9 am and 12 pm, which is when that office is open, and sometimes the death certificate isn’t ready. At this point the family is going insane. The person died on Friday, the administrative offices are closed on Saturday and Sunday, and come Monday the death report still isn’t there. You can’t even imagine how difficult our job is.”

Something as banal as the time of death becomes very consequential. To die on a Friday afternoon means that, at best, the formal procedures to acquire the necessary documents to proceed with burial will begin on Monday morning. There is however, no guarantee that the doctor will have written the death certificate or that the certificate will have reached its destination over the weekend. For the family of the deceased, this kind of bureaucratic purgatory can cause a great deal of anguish and frustration, much of which is directed at the undertakers.
“One guy told me once that he had thirty or forty guests who had arrived for the funeral over the weekend and when he found out that we still hadn’t obtained the death certificate he demanded that I pay for all the costs he would be incurring with his guests,” explains Bülent. “Why the hell should I pay for it? The hospital hasn’t given me the death certificate. The offices of the government agencies are closed. When have you heard of a government office in Germany being open on the weekend? This guy has been living in Germany for fifty years but he doesn’t have a clue. That’s the kind of people we live among, that’s what we have to deal with.”

Bülent adds that sometimes his customers seek to sidestep the rules by devising alternative ways to expedite the bureaucratic procedures. “Sometimes people will say, why don’t we all just split up and each go to a different office,” he tells me. “But it doesn’t matter how many of us there are. You need the correct documents. It doesn’t matter if there are a hundred of us behind one document, or if it’s just one person. We’re still operating behind that document.”

His comments speak to the quasi-anthropomorphic quality that paperwork and documentation take on under bureaucratic rationality. The paper has a life of its own, exerting and enabling agency and action. The number of human actors involved in the process matters little vis-à-vis the document itself. Hence Bülent’s point that one hundred people working with a single document could not make things go any faster. The order of operations is dictated by bureaucratic regulations. Each piece of paperwork enables the acquisition of another piece of paperwork, and multiple different documents from
different agencies and institutions are accumulated in the process of preparing a folder for each deceased individual.

The death certificate is only the first step. A year later I am sitting in the same chair, talking with an undertaker who works with Bülent, whom I’ll call Erinç. Erinç is in his mid-thirties and has been an undertaker for seven years. He has closely cropped hair and a long, thick beard. His grandfather was the first in his family to immigrate to Germany from Turkey and came in 1963 as part of the first wave of labor migrants. Erinç was born and raised in Schöneberg, an ethnically mixed, lower middle-class neighborhood in West Berlin that is most well known as the home of David Bowie and Iggy Pop in the mid 1970s.\footnote{The two lived at Hauptstraße 155 between 1976 – 1978 during which time Bowie recorded his “Berlin trilogy,” \textit{Low, Heroes} and \textit{Lodger}, while Pop completed \textit{The Idiot} and \textit{Lust for Life}. See Seabrook 2008.}

After finishing high school Erinç worked various jobs, including stocking shelves at a Turkish grocery store. He met Bülent through friends at a mosque where he and Bülent’s brother attended regularly. I spent a good deal of time with Erinç, shuttling between different offices to pick up or process paperwork, to the morgue to pick up corpses, to the cemetery to bury them, and to the airport to ship them to Turkey.

After obtaining a death certificate from the hospital, Erinç first goes to the \textit{Bürgeramt} [lit. “Citizens’ Office”] to unregister [\textit{Abmeldung}] the deceased. The \textit{Bürgeramt} is an office that, amongst other things, issues residency permits and passports and processes applications for housing benefits. Once a person has died, they must be “unregistered” from their home address. When the unregistration is complete, Erinç goes
to the *Standesamt* [Registry Office], the bureau that is responsible for recording births, marriages, and deaths, to register the death.

After having unregistered and registered the dead person, he visits the *Gesundheitsamt* [Health Office] to obtain a health report confirming that the body does not contain any infectious diseases. If the corpse is to be shipped internationally, he then goes back to the *Bürgeramt* to acquire a *leichenpass* [lit. “corpse passport”], and then to the Consulate of the country that will be receiving the shipment to process more paperwork.\(^{154}\) If the corpse is to be interred in Germany, Erinç will make arrangements with the cemetery chosen by the deceased’s family to secure a grave plot and to schedule a burial time.

I ask Erinç how quickly he is able to attend to all of these tasks, which require him to drive to various locations around the city. The sheer volume of paperwork and the number of different offices that issue it is dizzying, but there’s more to it. As Erinç explains, the working hours of each office vary considerably, which creates significant impediments:

> “In some municipalities the *Standesamt* are closed on Wednesdays and Fridays. We can’t do anything those days. And on Thursdays they are only open in the afternoon, after 2 pm. So if you have a death on a Tuesday and you want to repatriate the body, the earliest it will go is the following Monday because the *Standesamt* is closed on Wednesday. On Thursday it opens at 2 pm. By the time I’m finished there, the Consulate is closed. On Friday, the *Standesamt* is closed. And everything is closed over the

\(^{154}\) If the receiving country is Turkey, which in Erinç’s case it often was, he is required to bring a photocopy of the Turkish National Identity card of the person applying to transfer the body to Turkey (usually a family relative), a copy of the Turkish National Identity card and passport of the deceased, a notarized and translated copy of the German death certificate and, in cases of death by murder, suicide, or a workplace accident, a translated and notarized copy of the autopsy report and burial permit issued by prosecutor’s office. If the deceased obtained Turkish citizenship through marriage, a copy of their marriage and birth certificates are also required.
weekend. So it has to wait until Monday. If someone dies on a Monday, we can usually ship the body the next day without all these problems.”

The limited working hours of different government offices coupled with the unpredictability of the time of one’s death results in a situation where two temporal systems, the biological and the bureaucratic, come into conflict. The bureaucracy of death operates on an artificial schedule that has little to do with the natural or biological order of things. What is understood as a highly routinized, rational, and optimized bureaucratic process generates conditions where the ability to complete required procedures in an expeditious manner hinges on something that is, barring suicide, entirely out of one’s control.¹⁵⁵

That dying on one day of the week versus another would bring certain advantages in processing paperwork seems unfair if not slightly absurd. Such discrepancies, while acknowledged as a source of frustration, are understood as being central to the legal-rational order of the German bureaucracy. Although the undertakers are hampered by these structural constraints, they accept them as an inescapable aspect of life in Germany. Consequently, the ignorance or indignity of their customers is not attributed to their novice status—after all, why should they be expected to know anything about the laws of the dead?—but rather, as a symptom of a broader and potentially more pernicious problem: a refusal to adapt, accept, or assimilate to German norms.

¹⁵⁵ According to Islamic belief, the time of one’s death is predetermined or “appointed” and is thought to be written on one’s forehead. No one but Allah has knowledge of the precise moment that one’s death will occur. Thus, there are arguably three temporal orders in potential conflict with one another—the biological, the bureaucratic, and the religious, though for the faithful, the biological and religious might be indistinguishable, at least for one’s life on earth.
Erinç echoes Bülent’s earlier statement when he tells me “Our citizens think that when they have a funeral, they can bury it within two hours like they do in the village. They think they can repatriate a body really quickly. But this is Germany. There are bureaucratic procedures we have to take care of. But our people don’t know this. Or they know it and don’t want to admit it. And because of these situations, we are under a lot of stress. Our work isn’t easy.” Although he has no firsthand experience with rural funerary traditions, he relies on the notion of the Anatolian village as a means of articulating his own positionality.

The Anatolian village was a recurrent referent in my interviews and served as a fundamental point of contrast. Its frequent deployment suggests that that the undertakers have internalized and accepted both a specific understanding of modernity and a particular narrative about Turkish immigration to Germany. The village is read as a pre-modern place, untouched by the state and unencumbered by layers of bureaucracy. Certain things like burial can be performed more quickly and efficiently as a result. Turkish immigrants in Germany, on the other hand, are understood as displaced denizens from an agrarian world, whose mores and beliefs are shaped by their rural milieu. This narrative belies the fact that many of the first generation of Turkish labor migrants to Germany hailed from urban centers and were members of the skilled labor force. It conflates the migrant with the peasant and ascribes an intrinsic backwardness to both.

I hear a similar story from Selim. “It’s not like Turkey here,” he tells me as he lights the first of many cigarettes that he will smoke over the next two and a half hours. We are sitting in his office, located on a busy commercial strip in the neighborhood of
Neukölln. The funeral home is situated on a block that is lined with restaurants, cafes, hookah bars, bakeries, supermarkets, cell phone stores, and travel agencies.

Most of the signage is in Arabic or Turkish, reflecting the demographic composition of the neighborhood. Around a quarter of Neukölln’s 310,000 residents are immigrants, hailing from many different countries in the Middle East. Walking around the neighborhood, some might quibble with Selim’s assessment, given the conspicuous signs of ethnic identity, but Selim is not speaking about the cultural topography of his block. His comments pertain to the German way of death.

Selim is in his fifties, with greying hair and a thick broom handle mustache. He is a hafiz (someone who has memorized the entirety of the Qur’an) and a graduate of the Marmara Ilahiyat Fakultesi (The Divinity School of Marmara University), a well-regarded theological department at a public university in Istanbul. He immigrated to Germany in the mid-1990s as a DITIB employee and worked as an imam for six years in various DITIB affiliated mosques around Berlin. After falling out with DITIB administrators, he started working at an Islamic funeral company and eventually decided to open his own business. He has been in the funeral industry for eighteen years.
Selim makes the link between death and migration within the first few minutes of our interview, informing me that the transition between life and death, or between “this world and the next,” is a type of migration. “Migration to the other side is a right” he tells me. “Just as life is a right, death is a right… As a company, we do our best to prepare the deceased for their voyage to the other side.”

As I mentioned in the Introduction, death is often described using spatial metaphors in everyday speech, (“the final journey,” “crossing to the other side,” “going to a better place,” “passing away” etc.), as are the psychological processes associated with mourning and grieving (“moving on,” “moving forward”). In the context of our conversation however, the language of mobility took on a double meaning. For Selim, funerary culture in the diaspora is intimately shaped by physical movement and the weakening of ties to the country of origin. In his view, decisions about where and how to
bury a body reflect the degree to which an immigrant family has given up their
collection to their ancestral homeland and by extension their cultural identity.

When it comes to the bureaucracy, Selim’s assessments are much in line with
Erinç and Bülent’s. I ask him about the logistics of burial in Germany and he smiles.
“Don’t even ask me that!” he says, chuckling, “Don’t even go there.” “This is our biggest
challenge, and not just ours. The German firms have to deal with it too. Someone dies in
a hospital, that’s one type of problem. A traffic accident, another problem. Let’s say the
died while they were walking down the road, a different type of problem. On the bus…
these are all problems for the funeral companies. The paperwork never ends.”

Selim observes that the bureaucratization of death is a structural constraint that
impacts all funeral homes, irrespective of their ownership. Neither German nor Turkish
firms are immune from the red tape. They are all ensnared in a world in which “the
paperwork never ends.” His comments resonate with a German colloquialism known as
the “two times rule” or “zwei Mal Regel,” which refers to the idea that any visit to a
governmental agency will require a second trip since some paper or document is bound to
be missing.

Selim notes that “our people have been here for fifty years and they still think that
they can send a body on a Saturday or Sunday. There are people that die on a Sunday and
think that they can send their body that day. They think this is like some village or little
town in Turkey. But in reality, in order to ship a body outside of Germany, there are a lot
of formalities. And we haven’t been able to teach this to our citizens. They still haven’t
learned.” He goes on to chronicle the different steps between death and burial, the different offices and agencies, the documents and paperwork, and the difficulty of completing these tasks in a timely manner.

His description is almost identical to that of Eriniç and Bülent, as is his appraisal of his customers, who are upbraided for their unrealistic expectations. Selim underscores the pedagogical function of his role as an undertaker (“we haven’t been able to teach this”) but laments the fact that his lessons go unlearned. In doing so he aligns himself with the bureaucratic order as an insider with expert knowledge. His customers, on the other hand, remain outsiders and bad citizens. Their attitudes and expectations demonstrate a lack of socio-cultural integration, which in turn, marks them as subjects in need of pedagogical intervention.

For all of the undertakers quoted above, the bureaucracy is an inescapable aspect of their day-to-day lives. It is at once a source of frustration and the basis of their authority. Although they are impeded and annoyed by the endless amount of paperwork and the difficulty of coordinating across a myriad of different governmental agencies, they are committed to the logic and practice of the bureaucratic order. Their ability to navigate the intricacies of the bureaucracy of death is intrinsic to their role as mediators, or dragomen, and is a central feature of their occupational identity and expertise. Mastery, or “know-how,” of the logic of bureaucracy furnishes individuals with a type of cultural capital that can be used as a resource in the pursuit of economic or political advantages.
For the undertakers, it is clearly a part of their livelihood, though they read it in political, rather than economic terms. Bureaucratic competence serves as a mark of distinction that delineates socio-cultural integration in German society. Bülent drives this point home when he tells me later in our conversation, “I grew up among two cultures but it looks like I picked up a lot of German traits. I work with appointments. I follow the rules. I’m closer to Germans in this regard.”

The bureaucracy is a site where power is articulated, but it can also serve at times, as a locus of resistance. While it is difficult to sidestep the rules and bureaucratic procedures, families and individuals can exert pressure by physically occupying certain spaces, being obstreperous, and creating disturbances that threaten to thwart or disrupt the smooth functioning of the bureaucracy and its appendages. During my conversations with Bülent and Erinç, I was told about situations where families of the deceased had tried to take matters into their own hands when they were met with indifference by civil servants. Most of these stories involved conflicts over the corpse in which state authorities refused to release the body in a timely manner.

Erinç recounts an incident where twenty to thirty family members stormed the morgue. “The police had impounded the body and they were going to perform an autopsy,” he told me. “They were supposed to release the body on a Thursday, but during the course of the autopsy they found something and they wanted to keep it longer.” Autopsies are mandatory in cases where there is an unusual or “unnatural” death. This encompasses anything from suicide and murder to traffic accidents and heart attacks. The state health authorities exercise broad discretion when it comes to the enforcement of
autopsies and can hold a corpse for up to a week until the necessary medical examinations are performed.

“These people had already bought their plane tickets, all twenty or thirty of them,” continues Erinç. “I had warned them not to buy the plane tickets. I said, make your reservations, but don’t book the flights until everything is cleared. But since they know what’s best they booked the tickets anyway. So come Thursday, it became clear that we weren’t going to get the body. Normally we can pick them up by 3 pm, but by 2.30, it still wasn’t cleared. So I called the family to explain the situation and they said, “Well, what if we went there and talked to them?” I told them it wouldn’t make any difference. The people at the morgue are going to tell you the same thing that they told me. I hung up the phone and left the hospital and later found out that a group of them had showed up soon after. They made a big commotion, threatened the staff, yelled and hurled insults at them. They are from Gaziantep [a city in Southeastern Turkey], they are more tribal, their blood boils.”

Ultimately, the family from Gaziantep was unable to secure the release of the corpse, but their actions did have several repercussions for the undertakers, which I will elaborate on below. What is important to note for the time being is the modality through which power is articulated and challenged in the encounters between an unflinching bureaucratic apparatus and unruly citizens. While the main point of contention in this story is control over the corpse itself, central to all of the situations described by the undertakers are relationships of domination that are given concrete form not only through the force of the law, but more generally, through the manipulation and control of time.
As Javier Auyero shows in his excellent study of lines and waiting rooms for social services in Argentina, political subordination is reproduced in and through temporal processes.¹⁵⁶ For the urban poor who depend on welfare programs from the Argentinian state, the act of forced waiting is productive in the sense that it produces subjects “who know, and act accordingly, that when dealing with state bureaucracies, they have to *patiently comply with* the seemingly arbitrary, ambiguous, and always changing state requirements.”¹⁵⁷

Auyero points out that compliance is partially due to necessity—the poor have no alternative—but more importantly, compliance becomes normalized, because benefit seekers learn through repeated encounters and observations of others in their own position that there is no use in protesting publicly. In order to receive aid (be it financial support, a service, or a different good), recipients must prove that they are worthy of it by dutifully waiting.¹⁵⁸ Auyero concludes that habitual exposure to long waiting times shapes a particular set of submissive dispositions among the urban poor.

In the vignettes provided by the undertakers, Turkish migrants in Germany are chastised precisely because their life experiences have not resulted in the shaping of a particular sort of disposition, one that is consonant with the legal-rational order. One, moreover, that the undertakers themselves have internalized quite thoroughly. Another undertaker, whom I’ll call Ismail, made this point quite clearly while telling me about the funeral for the mother of a wealthy and well-known döner magnate. I’ll say more about

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¹⁵⁸ On this point, see also Soss 1999.
Ismail and his business in the next section, but for the moment, let’s consider the story of the döner producer’s mother. Ismail and I had been talking about the differences between German and Turkish attitudes towards death.

“With the Germans, it’s really quite different” he explains. “A German won’t get buried before three weeks. First the families meet, decide when and where the burial will take place, choose a cemetery, decide on the cost, write up an obituary, etc.... And the Germans are really calm. But our people are not of course [laughs]. If it were up to our people, you’d pick up the body from the hospital and take it straight to the cemetery! But there’s a law in Germany which says that you can’t bury the body for 48 hours.”

I ask him how this has played out with his customers and whether or not he has experienced any problems. “One time we had a problem,” he tells me. “I won’t say his name, but he’s a pretty famous döner producer here. His mother had passed away and he demanded that they allow her to be buried five hours ahead of time. They wouldn’t open the cemetery gates. They made him wait. He begged them, he said, ‘I’ll pay you whatever you want! Just let us bury her a few hours early!’ But they didn’t budge. They made him wait five hours and only then did they open the gates. The Germans are very disciplined about these things. And it’s a good thing I think. One should work in a disciplined way. Right?”

Islamic tradition calls for a speedy burial and the döner producer’s reaction might be read as a desire to adhere to Islamic norms and bury the body as quickly as possible. As I show in chapter four, temporal considerations were not usually foregrounded in people’s discussions about where and how to be buried, especially if repatriation was involved. The process of repatriation can take up to a week, and people didn’t seem to care as much about a speedy burial when they believed that the body was being returned to its proper place.
In both cases, with the family from Gaziantep and the döner producer, power is exercised temporally though injunctions to wait. Both groups try to resist, by going to the hospital to demand the body, by bringing the corpse to the cemetery gates, even by making threats and offering bribes. In the end, however, they are forced to wait. In recounting these stories my intention is not simply to show how a strong state governs and exercises power over weaker groups in society, but rather, to show how social actors come to interpret these interactions and assign meaning to them.

What I find compelling in the accounts of the undertakers is that they are intimately and personally involved in reproducing a bureaucratized vision of political life. They mediate encounters between citizens and the state and in doing so help not only to translate and disseminate political norms but also to enforce them. In this sense, the work of undertaking is not simply about burying bodies. In their interactions with their customers, the Muslim undertakers of Berlin preside over pedagogical moments of political and cultural integration.

As I mentioned previously, the mediating role that they play is multi-directional. Remember that these undertakers work not only with immigrants but with state officials as well. In the course of their day-to-day activities, they have personal interactions with German bureaucrats in a number of different venues (the Citizens’ Office, the Health Department, the Cemetery Administration, etc.). As such, they work hand-in-hand with various agencies and agents of the German state.
Another dimension of their mediating role involves combatting negative stereotypes about Muslims in Germany. In the next section, I will analyze some of the strategies they employ to establish their credibility as cultural representatives. By presenting themselves as responsible, professional, well-integrated, and knowledgeable individuals, the Muslim undertakers of Berlin attempt to demystify popular assumptions and misconceptions about Muslim immigrants in Germany. In some cases, they take on the role of a spokesperson and pedagogue willingly, but in others they are put in a position where they are compelled to speak on behalf of others.

“You’re a Muslim?”

The timing of my fieldwork was auspicious, though for reasons and circumstances that were quite strange. In May 2014, two weeks before I returned to Berlin for a second round of research, German police raided the offices of an Islamic funeral home and eighteen other properties across Berlin in a coordinated effort to crack down on a network of human traffickers.160 The code name given to the police operation was “Funeral.”

Although the criminal investigation is still ongoing, two Muslim undertakers as well as a city official were taken into police custody and questioned about their alleged involvement in the sale of passports of the dead to human traffickers in Syria and Palestine. For some observers, the scandal only confirmed the existence of questionable practices within the funeral trade. Because it created a general climate of suspicion

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around Muslim undertakers, it offered an opportune moment for members of the industry to reflect on the behavior of their colleagues and competitors and to offer a defense of their own professional integrity.

As I mentioned above, the literature on death workers often starts from the premise that undertakers are a stigmatized group and then goes on to show how members of the funeral industry develop techniques to curb negative perceptions and reduce personal stigmatization. In my own research, I found that stigmatization was not a major issue for the Muslim undertakers of Berlin, at least in terms of the stigma attached to their professional identity. A larger and more politically salient problem that they faced in the course of their work was the stigma related to popular perceptions of Muslims in Germany. Consequently, one of the important tasks they saw themselves performing was combatting negative ideas about Islam by countering stereotypes and prejudices through their own behavior.

“I teach a lot of classes in hospitals and police stations about the things that people should pay attention to when there is a Muslim funeral,” explains Ismail. He is a clean-shaven, smartly dressed man in his early fifties, wearing a neatly pressed suit and tie. Ismail emigrated to Germany at the age of six with his parents and was the first in his family to earn a university degree. Our interview takes place in his office, a light-filled building with its own morgue, sitting room, and garden. He has worked in the funeral business for seven years, having started as employee of the well-known German firm
Ahorn-Grieneisen. In 2011 Ismail left Grieneisen to start his own company, which he runs to this day.

We've been talking about the Islamic funeral industry in Berlin and Ismail has spent the last few minutes chiding his competitors, whom he views as unprofessional and inexperienced. Unprompted, he switches gears to tell me about his efforts at educational outreach. “Since 9/11” he continues, “people in Germany get a little uneasy when they hear the word Muslim. I try to alleviate those fears in my classes. I often invite people to come visit my business because it’s much easier to allay their concerns when they come in and see things for themselves.”

Grieneisen is one of the oldest funeral companies in Germany, having been established in 1830. On its website it boasts about having provided funerary services for such prominent individuals as Kaiser Wilhelm I, Axel Springer, and Marlene Dietrich. See <http://www.grieneisen-bestattungen.de/promibeisetzungen.php>.
In his classes, Ismail covers topics related to the handling of Muslim corpses, offers advice on how to treat dying Muslims and on steps that can be taken to establish bonds of trust with their families.¹⁶² “Germans are really afraid of Muslims,” he tells me. “And after those events in the U.S. they are even more afraid. When someone says ‘Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim’ (In the name of Allah), the Germans will look around and say, 'What's going on? Is there a bomb? [...] In the courses I teach I try to take away this fear.”

For Ismail, negative stereotypes about Muslims in Germany are pervasive and have been heightened in the post-9/11 era. The conflation of Islam with violence is a symptom of a broader problem of misrepresentation and prejudice. Although his account might be slightly embellished, it is clear that Ismail sees a need to correct unfavorable images of Muslim immigrants by educating those who have regular contact with Muslims in their line of work. One strategy that he employs is explicitly pedagogical. By visiting hospitals and speaking with staff members his goal is to educate them on Islamic death rites and rituals so that they can provide proper care. Another strategy has to do with his own appearance and self-presentation.

“Most people who visit my funeral home expect to see a bearded man, a hacı hoca [Turkish slang for an ostentatious religious figure]. When they see me they are surprised. They ask me, 'wait, are you a Muslim?’ because they were expecting someone with a big beard [laughs].” Ismail expresses a certain pleasure in this sort of

¹⁶² I will say more about culturally sensitive end-of-life care, including the perspectives of German medical practitioners in chapter four.
misrecognition. By not conforming to the expected image of a Muslim undertaker he challenges preconceptions about what a Muslim should look like. In embodying and presenting an alternative Islamic identity, Ismail hopes to dispel some of the myths that circulate in the German public sphere. As an undertaker, he does not represent any particular group or community. Yet as these examples demonstrate, Ismail willingly embraces the role of a public figure with a political mission. In challenging expectations about Muslims in Germany, he provides a type of corrective cultural mediation.

Appearances can be deceiving however, and individuals who bear certain physical signs of a purported Islamic identity can face a different set of challenges related to racial profiling and discrimination. On a sunny afternoon I accompany Erinç to the Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow, a cemetery in the neighborhood of Spandau, on the Western outskirts of Berlin. Gatow is one of the three cemeteries in the city with dedicated sections reserved for Islamic graves. We are greeted by two gravediggers and a cemetery administrator whom Erinç has known for many years. The four men have a cordial relationship and make frequent jokes with one another.

As we approach them they point to Erinç and exclaim “Taliban! Look out! The Taliban is here!” Although it is all in jest, Erinç has experienced such taunts in his private and professional life. He sees it as a challenge that he must personally overcome in order to correct misconceptions about Muslims in Germany. With his long beard, he knows that he might appear threatening to some people but attempts to counter the stereotype of the

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163 See chapter three for more on Islamic cemeteries in Berlin.
violent, fundamentalist Muslim through his personal interactions with civil servants and public officials.

“When I go to municipalities in the East, places like Pankow, Hellersdorf [neighborhoods in what was formerly East Berlin], people look at me and size me up. Dark hair, beard, Turkish, foreigner. When they see the beard they think Muslim” he explains, highlighting the link between physical appearance and presumed religiosity. “When they make that connection it's over. Maybe they imagine Osama Bin Laden, or a bomb, or the twin towers. But when I start speaking to them in German, they are really surprised... I can sense a change in their tone of voice. And maybe because of this, I'm able to give them a different example of what a Muslim or a Turk looks like.”

As mentioned above, Erinç was born and raised in Berlin. He has native fluency in German. Yet because of the way he looks, people make certain assumptions about him, concluding that he is unlikely to speak proper German. Language is an intrinsic part of social identity and questions of linguistic competence are particularly salient in debates around immigration and integration in Germany. With the reform of Germany's citizenship laws in 2000, proficiency in the German language was established as a precondition for naturalization and the acquisition of German citizenship.

This legislation reflects the popular perception that immigrants in Germany lack the requisite language skills to fully participate in German society. Given the tenor of these debates, it is not surprising that Erinç encounters some degree of disbelief when he

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164 Many of my informants warned me against traveling in East Berlin, noting that it was a haven for Neo-Nazi and xenophobes. Among the Turkish communities in Berlin, neighborhoods in the East have a very bad reputation.
is able to communicate clearly and effectively. By doing so, he is able to challenge some of the misconceptions about immigrants' linguistic capabilities.

Alongside his efforts to correct stereotypes about language, Erinç is often compelled to speak on behalf of Muslims or Turkish immigrants in Germany. Unlike Ismail, who willingly seeks venues to speak to public officials on topics related to Islam, Erinç’s interventions and mediations occur during routine visits to bureaucratic offices during the course of his work. In our interview I ask him about the funeral company that has been accused of selling passports and whether it has impacted his own business in any way. He explains that he faces heightened suspicion in the municipal offices and interprets this as part of a broader pattern of discrimination.

“If one person makes a mistake” he tells me, “we all suffer for it.” Erinç questions whether German funeral companies have had to face a similar degree of scrutiny in the aftermath of the passport scandal, and recounts how he has had to explain to numerous civil servants in the municipal offices that he has no connection to the company that is under investigation. “These are people I've known and worked with for years,” he continues, in reference to the civil servants whose offices he regularly visits to file paperwork. “Now they ask me questions like, 'Why are Turks so angry? Does Islam allow that?’ And I tell them this has nothing to do with Islam, it has to do with the person. Being hot tempered is a personality trait!”

The erasure of difference and the homogenization of diversity is one of the pernicious effects of stereotyping. Erinç’s comments draw from his own personal
experiences but reflect a broader practice of taking individual behavior as indicative of an entire group. Although as an undertaker, Erinc would not be expected to weigh in on theological issues or to provide sociological analyses of group dynamics and behavior, as someone who is read as a Muslim he frequently finds himself in a position where he is required to do so. This suggests that a certain type of cultural and political mediation is characteristic of professionals like the Muslim undertakers of Berlin, who operate between civil society and the state.

More broadly, it points to an important feature of the lived experience of Western Muslims in Europe and North America today. To a certain extent, there is a constant demand placed on Western Muslims to speak for and on behalf of Islam or the ethnic or national communities they are perceived as being a part of. Such demands not only essentialize minorities by foregrounding certain aspects of their identity, but also place an undue burden on individuals belonging to minority groups to speak on behalf of the entire community.

As Anne Norton has argued, the compulsory speech acts required of Muslims in the West attest to the “radical narrowing of the right to free speech.”165 While Erinc and Ismail's efforts to counter existing stereotypes about German Muslims can be seen as small steps in bringing about broader shifts in public perceptions, it is important not to overlook the asymmetrical dynamics of power at work in such interactions. The demand that all Muslims be prepared to speak on behalf of Islam threatens not only to trivialize

165 Norton 2014: 42.
politics, but to strengthen the divisive binaries that posit a hierarchy of citizenship amongst those who belong and those who do not in contemporary Germany.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the work of political and cultural mediation that is performed by the Muslim undertakers of Berlin. As intermediaries between immigrant communities and the German state, undertakers help families navigate the cultural, religious, political, and legal landscapes that structure the transitions from life to death. Their cultural capital and professional credibility is derived from their ability to anticipate and manage the expectations of their customers while guiding them through the German bureaucracy. Max Weber famously asserted that “bureaucratic administration is domination through knowledge.” As this article has shown, the authority of the Muslim undertaker is in part a function of his knowledge of the bureaucracy.

In mediating between civil society and the state, the Muslim undertakers of Berlin not only help instruct immigrant families in the rational-legal order of the German bureaucracy, but also engage with members of that order to counter and dispel stereotypes about Muslims and Islam in Germany. Their role as a spokesperson is at times taken up willingly, but can also be thrust upon them. Consequently, their ability to serve as cultural translators or political brokers can be seen both as a positive effort to fight prejudice and as an example of the uneven power dynamics that frame contemporary discussions about Islam in the West.

Recent scholarship has stressed the need for the provision of culturally appropriate palliative and end-of-life care in places such as hospitals and hospices, while insisting that practitioners remain mindful of the diversity of lived experiences that exist as much within cultures as across them.\textsuperscript{167} This chapter has shown that the intercultural negotiations around death and dying do not conclude with the death of an immigrant. Post-mortem procedures are governed by a different set of rules and regulations that raise culturally inflected questions about the proper treatment and handling of corpses. In migratory settings, undertakers play an important role in mediating between the expectations of their customers and the laws of the state. As such, they are not simply professionals that oversee the burial of the dead, but cultural and political mediators that preside over pedagogical moments in the transitions from life to death.

Thus far we have seen how these transitions are structured by different actors, institutions, and organizations, who are variously invested in the fate of migrant corpses and assign different meanings to the rituals and practices surrounding death. The first two chapters of this dissertation have largely focused on the material and procedural dimensions of death out of place by highlighting the inner workings of transnational funeral funds and the Islamic funeral industry.

In the next two chapters I turn to symbolic processes of meaning making attendant to another important post-mortem practice: burial. I first investigate the ways in which different groups remember and memorialize their dead by analyzing symbolic representations of personhood and identity on the tombstones of Muslim graves in

\textsuperscript{167} Gunaratnam 2013. I will return to this point in chapter four.
Germany. I then analyze the different meanings assigned to the location of burial and attempt to make sense of the various factors influencing the decision to be buried in one place over another. While the first two chapters were concerned with the practical aspects of death and burial in the context of migration, the second half of this dissertation investigates how Turkish and Kurdish communities in Germany experience, represent, and make sense of death out of place.
CHAPTER THREE: THE GRAVES OF BERLIN

Field Notes: June 18, 2014

It is a typically overcast morning in Berlin. The streets are quiet when I leave my apartment at 8:30 am. Berliners are people of the night, and no one seems to be in a rush to get out of bed, even though it’s a weekday. Passing the street sweepers who are hard at work removing the lingering traces of the previous evening’s revelry, I make my way to Hicret Bestattungen, where I’m to meet Erinç to accompany him to a funeral. This is the first one that I’m attending and I’m not quite sure what to expect.

I walk through the back streets of Neukölln, a gentrifying neighborhood that has historically been one of Berlin’s most immigrant-heavy areas. There are some signs of life, like the small Turkish bakery whose vitrine displays a variety of sweet and savory pastries. The anarchist bar next door has its shutters drawn. Walking by, taking care not to step on the ubiquitous dog shit, one can read a number of anti-fascist slogans spray painted on its walls.

Erinç is seated at his desk, rifling through a large stack of papers when I arrive. Flipping through the documents, he pulls out a few sheets and places them neatly in a three ring binder. “Good morning,” he says, glancing up for a moment. “Are you ready?” We head outside to his car, one of those tiny European “smart cars” that Americans find bemusing. Erinç puts his binder in the back seat (if you could call it that), and we set off towards Spandau, the westernmost borough of Berlin.

“This is going to be quite a scene,” he tells me when I ask him whom we will be burying later that morning. It turns out that the deceased is an elderly Polish woman whose daughter converted to Islam a few years back. Her conversion was not well received. Her father disowned her, her husband divorced her, and her sister stopped talking to her. Every family is unhappy in its own way.

“I don’t think they’ll show up for the funeral,” Erinç tells me and recounts a series of tumultuous events that have occurred over the past few days. The daughter, who had been taking care of her infirm mother for many months, convinced her to convert to Islam on her deathbed. Consequently, she will be interred in the Muslim section of the cemetery with full Islamic rites.

Upon hearing this news, her ex-husband confronted her, calling her a “terrorist,” and her sister threatened to kill herself if their mother were buried in accordance with Islamic standards. Her father, who was separated from her mother, was furious. I shuddered to think of the graveside fight that might erupt at the funeral but Erinç was right. Nobody from the family showed up.
Three men are waiting by the cemetery gate as we pull in. Two gravediggers in muddied green work overalls and an administrator wearing a white shirt and black tie. The latter speaks to us in Turkish and after learning about my research project, tells me a bit about the history of the cemetery and his role in it. He is the son of a Gastarbeiter and moved to Berlin when he was two years old. He’s been working at the cemetery for 26 years and has overseen Muslim burials since they first began in 1988. The municipal cemetery in Spandau is one of three burial grounds for Muslims in Berlin. Most Muslims who choose to be buried in the city end up here, as the other two cemeteries are almost at full capacity.

The cemetery is split into three “fields,” (Grabfelder) one for Christians, one for Muslims, and one for anonymous urn burials. According to the administrator, there is enough space for several thousand new plots. The main building on the premises is equipped with offices for administrative staff, a room to wash and prepare corpses for burial, a church-like hall with stained glass windows, and a sizeable morgue in the basement, where Erinç has gone to retrieve the corpse.

As we are talking I notice a small group of men walking towards us. They are young, between twenty and forty years old. Most have thick, bushy beards and wear long white robes. Many are Turkish. I find out later that Erinç has invited these men knowing that the family would boycott the funeral. He wanted to ensure that at least some people would be present.

A little while later a group of three women walk through the cemetery gates. Among them is the daughter of the deceased. All three wear full black chadors and remain at a distance. After them come a group of Germans who turn out to be colleagues of the deceased. She was a janitor at an office building. There are about ten of them, almost all women, all wearing black. They carry a floral wreath and keep to themselves, offering a perfunctory hello to the others who have amassed in the courtyard of the cemetery.

Erinç arrives with the coffin. It is covered with a green cloth bearing ornate golden embroidery in Arabic script and rests atop a sturdy stainless steel gurney. With the aid of several men, we wheel the coffin over to a grassy area where the first funeral prayer is held. The men line up in rows, hands outstretched, palms facing the sky, heads bowed silently in prayer. Leading the ceremony is an Egyptian imam from the Al-Nur Mosque in Neukölln, a mosque that mostly caters to Arab Muslims and European converts. It’s the mosque where the daughter of the deceased converted to Islam. As the men pray the group of German mourners stands to the side. The three women pray separately, set back a short distance from the men.

The coffin is wheeled to the burial plot. We walk slowly down a dusty path flanked by two large green fields. On one side of us is the area for anonymous urn burials, which is flat and devoid of any grave markers. On the other is the Islamic section of the cemetery, where the graves are aligned east, facing Mecca. When we reach the gravesite, the gravediggers lower the coffin into the earth using pulleys and ropes. Another imam
steps forward and begins speaking in Turkish. He delivers a passionate funeral oration in which he beseeches Allah to forgive whatever sins the deceased may have committed and stresses the fact that she is a convert to Islam and that this is a major blessing. “We live in an infidel country” he says, “but we are burying her in Muslim soil. Praise be unto Allah.”

On June 16, 2015, Layla Bukhari was buried for a second time. Bukhari, a 34-year-old Syrian refugee and mother of two, drowned in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to cross into Italy. Her body was recovered by Italian authorities and interred in a makeshift cemetery in Sicily alongside countless others who had perished at sea. Many of the graves bore no markers of identification other than a small plaque with the word “Sconosciuto,” or “Unknown.” Bukhari intended to travel to Germany where her husband and children were awaiting a decision on their application for political asylum.

Two months after her death she arrived in Berlin. With the permission of her family, her body was exhumed and brought to Germany by the Center for Political Beauty, an activist group whose campaign Die Toten kommen, “The Dead are Coming,” sought to draw attention to the perilous conditions faced by refugees and to pressure political leaders to resolve the growing humanitarian crisis. Inspired by the story of Antigone, the group resolved to “turn refugees into people” by providing them with proper funerary rites in Germany.169

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168 Layla Bukhari is a pseudonym.
169 See <http://www.politicalbeauty.com/dead.html>. In describing their motivation, the organization’s leader, Philipp Ruch, stated “Our aim is to honor the dead by bringing them here [Germany] and giving them a proper burial.” Quoted in Eddy 2015.
Six months prior to Bukhari’s re-burial, journalist Udo Ulfkotte spoke to a crowd of 10,000 people at a rally organized by the far-right PEGIDA movement in Bonn. PEGIDA, which stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West, was established in October 2015 by public relations specialist Lutz Bachmann, to oppose what he saw as the growing influence of Islamic norms, values, and ideas in Germany. The movement has found institutional support and helped fuel the electoral success of the Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, which is currently represented in eight German state parliaments and holds seats in the European Parliament in Brussels. The AfD has floated the idea of banning mosques and has suggested that it may be necessary to shoot at refugees trying to enter the country illegally.170

At the rally Ulfkotte spoke passionately about how core German values were under attack. “Imagine what would happen,” he asked the crowd, “if I were to go to a mosque here in Germany and belt out Christian Christmas carols during Ramadan? It goes without saying that I would be arrested immediately and charged and convicted of a crime against fasting.” Germany has already succumbed to Islamic influences in its secular public institutions, he continued, noting that “In schools and kindergartens, out of consideration for Muslims, we no longer find the preparation of pork there. Islamization in our swimming pools means special bathing days with consideration only for Muslim clothing customs.” Alongside public schools and swimming pools, Ulfkotte was also

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170 For the rise of PEGIDA and AfD see Müller 2016. PEGIDA has staged public protests in the form of “evening strolls” first through Dresden, then in other parts of the country, in which demonstrators carrying flags and placards reading “Protect Our Homeland” march through the streets chanting “We are the people,” a slogan adopted by protestors against the East German government during the famous Monday Demonstrations in the run-up to the fall of the Berlin Wall.
concerned about the current state of German burial grounds. “Islamization in cemeteries means that Muslims must not be buried in earth “defiled” by Christians. They may bury their dead without a coffin or an urn, and so on.”

Although Ulfkotte misrepresents the actual legal situation in German cemeteries (most states do not allow burial without a coffin or urn), his comments speak to the ways that burial grounds can become politicized as sites of cultural conflict. As Bukhari’s exhumation and reburial also makes clear, the physical space of the cemetery can also serve as a site of political struggle. In the previous chapter, I examined the organization and administration of burial and the intermediary role played by Muslim undertakers. This chapter takes up the actual spaces of death and disposal in an effort to shed light on the Islamic deathscapes of Berlin.

In this chapter I am primarily interested in patterns of memorialization and the representation of ethnic, religious, and national identities on the tombstones of Muslim graves. In what follows, I analyze textual, symbolic, and architectural features of Muslim tombstones to demonstrate how posthumous identities are articulated in the spaces of death. Although some Muslims view the adornment or decoration of graves with images of the deceased or other symbols as inappropriate, ostentatious, or even haram, most of the graves of Berlin bore some sort of text or image identifying the dead.

My focus in this chapter is on Berlin’s three Islamic burial grounds: Friedhof Columbiadamm, Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow, and the Türkischer Friedhof. Islamic cemeteries are public spaces where Berlin’s Muslim communities give material form to

171 A video of his speech is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--0Ik0Pr25o>
their multiple identities and migratory histories. These burial grounds are a testament not only to the city’s evolving multicultural urban fabric but also to the heterogeneity of its Islamic communities, whose diversity is not always fully acknowledged in public debates about Muslims in Germany.

On the whole, Islamic cemeteries have provoked less political backlash than proposals to construct other visible markers of Islam in the European public sphere, notably mosques.\textsuperscript{172} City officials who object to the construction of such sites usually rely on technical language to voice their opposition. A project might be deemed incompatible with existing zoning or urban planning regulations or can be rejected because of the potential harm caused by noise and increased traffic.\textsuperscript{173}

Yet disputes over the building of mosques and other public religious symbols transcend the economic, spatial, and architectural concerns that structure other conflicts over urban space. They are stages for contentious debates about the position of Islam and Muslims in the West. In this sense, conflicts over visibility in the public sphere—who or what should be seen in public space—are disputes about who should be included in the national public.\textsuperscript{174}

Those who oppose the construction of mosques, minarets, prayer rooms, or other sites that are explicitly Islamic view such structures as anomalous and potentially

\textsuperscript{172} For a comparative analysis of debates over the construction of mosques in various European cities, including Toulouse, Marseilles, Berlin, Bradford, Deventer, Driebergen, and Lodi see Cesari 2005.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid. See also Matthey et al. 2013. Recall also the comments made by a resident of the town of Dudley, Massachusetts who worried that they would have to “listen to crazy music like the call to prayer” if the town moved forward with a proposal to construct an Islamic cemetery.
\textsuperscript{174} Göle 2002, Krase and Shortell 2015.
threatening elements in the supposedly secular urban landscape. In Germany, some detractors have suggested that efforts to build such structures are part of a concerted Islamic takeover of European neighborhoods and cities.\(^{175}\) It is perhaps unsurprising then, that mosques and other places of worship in several German cities have been vandalized or subject to arson attacks. According to a report issued by the German federal government, there were at least 219 politically motivated crimes directed at mosques in Germany between 2001 - 2011.\(^{176}\)

Compared to mosques, Islamic cemeteries have faced fewer incidents of desecration and vandalism. However, it is important to remember that the destruction of burial grounds has historically been part of the repertoire of political violence in Germany, notably during the Nazi era. After Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, the Nazis set out to reinvent the rituals, practices, and spaces of death as part of a broader effort to create not just a racial state, but a racial civilization.

As Monica Black notes in her excellent study of Berliners’ shifting relationship to the dead, the Nazis invested much energy in purging what they perceived to be foreign elements and racial outsiders from “German” cemeteries.\(^{177}\) The process of Aryanization and “purification” entailed, first the systematic exclusion of Jewish communities from the


\(^{176}\) Deutscher Bundestag. *Drucksache 17/9523. 07.05.2012.* Available online: <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/095/1709523.pdf> More recently, a half-built mosque in the German town of Dormagen was spray painted with swastikas and racist slogans including “off with you to the concentration camp!” See “German mosque vandalized with swastikas and graffiti” *Deutsche Welle* <http://dw.com/p/1E8OB>.

\(^{177}\) Black 2010.
right to burial in municipal cemeteries, and later, the destruction of Jewish burial grounds throughout the country.\textsuperscript{178}

Since cemeteries are exemplary sites of public memorialization, conflicts on and over burial grounds should be understood as struggles over memory and collective identity.\textsuperscript{179} The eradication of Jewish cemeteries during the Nazi period was part of a broader project aimed at reconfiguring the boundaries of the German nation, in part through the erasure of Jewish sites of memory and belonging.\textsuperscript{180} The opposition to Muslim burial grounds and the drive to bury Europe bound refugees in Muslim cemeteries shows how the spaces of the dead are contested resources in social life. They also raise new questions about the cemetery as a specific site of political struggle.

With reference to diaspora cemeteries, how do existing power dynamics between ethno-religious minorities and ‘native’ populations impact symbolic processes of place-making and the ways in which different groups assign meanings to particular places? The assertion that Germany is an “infidel country” but that its Islamic cemeteries are “Muslim soil” lays bare the political stakes of burial in the diaspora. It also demonstrates how diaspora cemeteries can carry completely different meanings for different actors. If diaspora cemeteries represent a symbolic re-inscription of space, what might these sites tell us about the changing contours of national, political, and religious communities, and

\textsuperscript{178} The desecration and destruction of Jewish cemeteries in Germany and other parts of Europe is an ongoing problem. See Cohen 1999, Halliday 2016, Rubin and Breeden 2015.

\textsuperscript{179} Recall the controversy over Ronald Reagan’s 1985 visit to a German military cemetery in Bitburg to commemorate the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The visit provoked much outrage when it became known that several members of the SS were buried there. Reagan’s trip was mocked by The Ramones in their song “My Brain is Hanging Upside Down (Bonzo goes to Bitburg)” which contains the lyrics: “You’re a politician / Don’t become one of Hitler’s children.” See also Hartmann 1986.

\textsuperscript{180} I will return to the theme of the erasure of “unwanted bodies” in the conclusion.
about conflicts between different constructions of the sacred and the secular? Can such sites be understood as ‘[necro]geographies of resistance’?\footnote{I take the phrase ‘geographies of resistance’ from the edited volume of the same title. See Keith and Pile 1997.}

### Berlin’s Islamic cemeteries

With these questions in mind, I turn now to the three Islamic burial grounds in Berlin. The tombstones that will be analyzed here are located in *Friedhof Columbiadamm, Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow*, and the *Türkischer Friedhof*. The first two of these cemeteries are publically owned and operated by the municipal government of the city of Berlin. *Friedhof Columbiadamm* was built in 1861 by Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV for members of his garrison and was originally known as *Garnisonsfriedhof* (Garrison Cemetery).\footnote{Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and Environment. “Columbidamm Friedhof.” <http://141.15.4.17/umwelt/stadtgruen/friedhoefe_begraebnisstaetten/de/graeber_ogk/friedhof_columbiadammm/index.shtml> Accessed May 1, 2016.}

Fallen soldiers from the Austro-Prussian War (1866), the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), as well as World War I are buried in this 25-acre cemetery, which also contains more recent graves of many civilians, including Muslims. This cemetery is not an Islamic cemetery in the literal sense it is a mixed-use burial ground where the remains of individuals of different religious faiths are buried together.

“Hans is in one plot, and Hasan is buried right next door,” is how Bülent, one of the undertakers whom I introduced in the previous chapter, put it when describing the
religious and ethnically mixed topography of the Columbiadamm cemetery. Nonetheless, owing to its central location in Neukölln, near the former Tempelhofer Airport, Columbiadamm is a popular burial site for Berlin’s Muslim communities, though there are very few plots currently available for lease.

Adjacent to Friedhof Columbiadamm is the Türkischer Friedhof ("Turkish Cemetery"), which is located within the courtyard of the Şehitlik Mosque, the largest domed mosque in Berlin (see figure 8).

*Figure 8: Map of Friedhof Columbiadamm. The Türkischer Friedhof is marked in white.*

This cemetery has a unique history as one of the earliest burial grounds for Muslims in Germany. On October 29, 1798, Ali Aziz Efendi, a high-ranking Ottoman diplomat and
first permanent ambassador to Berlin died unexpectedly after serving in the Prussian Kingdom for one and a half years. Getting his body back to Istanbul would have taken months, so the ambassador was buried in a small parcel of land donated by King Friedrich Wilhelm III in the Hasenheide-Blücherstrasse—known today as Columbiadamm. In 1804, the Ottoman chargé d’affaires in Berlin, Muhammed Esad Efendi, died and was buried alongside Ali Aziz Efendi. These two graves were untended and largely forgotten during the Napoleonic Wars and the French occupation of Berlin.

In 1834, a farmer discovered the burial ground and new tombstones with the names of the dead were erected on the site. In the ensuing years, several Ottoman military and political dignitaries came to be buried alongside Ali Aziz Efendi. In 1865, King Wilhelm donated a 33 square meter area of the Prussian Garrison Cemetery to the Ottoman Embassy for use as a cemetery, and the Ottoman graves were disinterred and moved to the new site, where they remain today. A monument commissioned by Sultan Abdülaziz and designed by German architect Gustav Voigtel was erected in 1867 was erected on this site to commemorate the Ottoman dignitaries (Figure 9). Built of red and white terracotta, the monument is topped with a gold crescent moon and has several plates bearing the names of the dead who lay under it (Figure 10).  

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183 For the story of Ali Aziz Efendi’s death and burial as well as the history of the Turkish Cemetery in Berlin see Mertek 2010 and Yavuz 2008.
During the First World War, a number of wounded Turkish soldiers were brought to Berlin for medical treatment. Those who perished were interred alongside the Ottoman dignitaries and the cemetery was named “Türk Şehitlik” (Figure 11). In addition to Ottoman-Turkish citizens, Muslims from other nations who died in Berlin were buried in this cemetery. The land itself is owned by the Turkish government and is not subject to German burial laws. Between 1999 – 2005, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB) financed and oversaw the construction of a large domed mosque in classical Ottoman style on these grounds.

184 In Turkish the word “Şehit” means “martyr” and has religious connotations but is also commonly used to describe soldiers who die in battle.
Although the last burial in the Turkish Cemetery took place in 1989, the mosque courtyard is still a very popular site for funeral ceremonies, even for individuals who are not interred in Germany. In fact, several funerals that I attended at the Şehitlik Mosque did not involve a burial. After the ceremony and collective prayer for the dead, the deceased was taken straight to the airport for repatriation. On Fridays in particular, there were often multiple such funerals in the course of a single afternoon.

![Figure 11: Entrance to the Şehitlik Mosque and Cemetery](image)

Muslims who are unable to bury their dead in Columbiadamm or the Turkish Cemetery usually inter them in the Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow, located on the western outskirts of Berlin in the neighborhood of Gatow-Spandau. Established in 1982
Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow is a 34-acre, municipally owned burial ground that contains separate sections “Grabfelder” (grave fields) for Christian, Greek Orthodox, Muslim, and anonymous urn burials. The Islamic section was consecrated in 1988.

Its entrance is marked by a multilingual sign that has text in German, Turkish, and Arabic, reflecting the multinational heritage of the dead buried within it (Figure 5). While its geographical location is less central than the other two cemeteries, Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow is where most of the city’s Muslims are able to find burial spaces for their dead. It is where the Polish convert whose funeral ceremony I described at the outset of this chapter was buried. It is also where political activists reburied the exhumed body of Layla Bukhari.

Figure 12: Entrance to the Islamic burial section of Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow
In June 2014, I visited each of Berlin’s Islamic burial grounds to photograph
tombstones, burial plots, and the cemetery landscape itself. In total, I captured images of
160 Muslim graves. I then created an excel spreadsheet that contained information for
each tombstone along the following axes: (1) Name (2) Sex (3) Year and Place of Birth
(4) Year and Place of Death (5) Age at Death (6) Language(s) of Inscriptions (7)
Epigraph (8) Images (9) Gravestone Design (10) Kinship Terminology.\textsuperscript{185}

The vast majority of the tombstones (125 out of 160) were erected between 1994
and 2014 (see figure 13). This is in part due demographic factors. The number of elderly
Muslims in Germany was considerably smaller in the 1980s and 1990s than it is today. It
is also a reflection of the fact that Muslim burial in Germany was less common (though
still practiced) before the 1990s. Another important reason why there are fewer
tombstones from earlier decades is because of legal restrictions on the number of years
that a grave plot can be used before its inhabitant is disinterred and the grave is recycled.

In Berlin, as in most parts of Germany, this period is twenty years.\textsuperscript{186} Families can
renew the length of the plot for another twenty years, though if no action is taken, the
grave is reused and the gravestone is demolished. Certain “historic” graves are exempt
from this law if they are registered and approved by the municipal cemetery
administration. As mentioned above, none of the graves in the Turkish Cemetery are
subject to German burial laws since the Turkish government owns the land.

\textsuperscript{185} This categorization scheme is influenced by other studies of tombstones and grave markers. See Baird
\textsuperscript{186} See Berlin’s Funeral and Burial Laws, available online at:
discuss these laws at greater length in chapter four.
To better understand how Islamic tombstones fit into broader patterns of memorialization and memorial culture in Germany, I also visited several municipal graveyards in Berlin where the city’s Protestant and Catholic populations are buried. Additionally, I visited Berlin’s two historic Jewish cemeteries (which are exempt from grave reuse laws), and two of the city’s military cemeteries (also exempt). The latter contained the remains of soldiers from both the first and second world wars. Finally, I visited the Soviet War Memorial in former East Berlin’s Treptower Park, which is both a military cemetery and massive memorial built to honor Soviet soldiers killed during the Battle of Berlin in the final months of World War II.
Where possible, I contrast the graves of Berlin with Muslim tombstones in other parts of Germany to show recurrent themes and practices. Rather than analyzing the cemeteries individually, I focus on thematic patterns that became evident after viewing all of the tombstones as a whole. While my archive is mostly geographically limited to Berlin, the existence of similar instantiations of individual and collective identity in Islamic cemeteries across other parts of Germany leads me to believe that certain forms of symbolic representation are widespread. A more systematic study is still needed to confirm this hunch.

In what follows I will focus on the linguistic, visual, and architectural features of Muslim tombstones in an effort to understand how Berlin’s Islamic deathscapes help shape individual and collective identities among its Muslim communities. I don’t mean to suggest that there is a simple causal link between symbolic constructions of identity and social reality, since the relationship between signifier and signified is far more complex in practice. Symbols and symbolic systems are a primary means through which we give meaning to the world we inhabit. They offer a vehicle to interpret our social world and to make sense of our place within it.

While symbolic systems are culturally learned and transmitted through a broad range of human activities, inherited meanings are rarely static or immutable. Part of the reason that signs and symbols accrue potency is because of their multivalent and indeterminate qualities. To state the obvious, the same sign or symbol can mean different

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187 Images of other tombstones were provided by Erdoğan Karakaya who maintains a website which chronicles Islamic cemeteries in Germany. See <http://www.initiative-kabir.de/>. Sid Rothstein contributed images from the Islamic cemetery in Dusseldorf.
things to different people. As such, there is no easy link between symbolic representation and signification, since symbols themselves are a terrain where struggles over meaning are fought out.

The repetition of certain symbols and symbolic forms on tombstones however, suggests that families who erect such monuments draw on preexisting repertoires of collective identity. Each tombstone serves to memorialize an individual, or in the case of family plots, an entire family or kin group. In commemorating a single person however, tombstones often situate individual biographies within a broader community or set of communities and histories. The most prevalent groupings among the Muslim tombstones of Berlin are national, linguistic and religious communities. Membership in such communities is made manifest through overt symbols of national and religious belonging but also through the choice of epitaph and the languages through which individual stories are given voice.

**Writing the dead I: Qur’anic verse and Islamic text**

As an amalgamation of person, place, text, image, and name, the grave is a particularly dense semiotic object.\(^{188}\) By means of writing, the name of the grave’s inhabitant is attached to a long-lasting, material artifact—the tombstone—and made durable in time and fixed in space. The tombstone records and displays the dead in a public way. It also opens up a line of communication between the living and the dead.

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\(^{188}\) See Ho 2006: 24. My discussion here is influenced by Engseng Ho’s analysis of the communicative function of the tombstone.
Writing is a silent visual signifier that can occasion meaningful speech. It allows visitors to greet the dead by name. The deceased live on through the voice of the tombstone, which speaks to the ears of the living, reminding them, among other things, of their own mortality. As Engseng Ho puts it, “writing is an inert switch that converts the grave from a silent to a sonorous state when activated by the approach of a living Muslim person. In this sense, writing is a foundational step in the creation and realization of potentials for signification.”\(^{189}\)

One of the few existing studies on burial spaces for Muslims in Germany offers some observations on the use of textual and visual markers on the tombstones of Muslim graves. The study, which was published in 1986 in _Deutsche Friedhofskultur_ (German Cemetery Culture), the trade journal of the Association for German Cemetery Administrators, notes at the outset that Muslim graves are largely “untended” and expresses its “wonder about the lack of care given to the gravesites.”\(^{190}\) Noting that tombstone inscriptions are not subject to regulation, it observes that “one infrequently finds a memorial with only Hebrew or only Arabic writing.” Most tombstones, it points out, contain both German and non-German text. Furthermore, “Islamic symbols are not to be found on the gravestones.”\(^{191}\)

My own observations of Muslim tombstones in diaspora cemeteries leads me to a different conclusion. I find that the majority of textual inscriptions are monolingual and that Islamic symbols are fairly prevalent. The graves of Berlin contain a multitude of

\(^{189}\) Ibid, 25.
\(^{190}\) Haas-Ruup 1986: 127.
\(^{191}\) Ibid: 128.
different messages written in a myriad of languages. They are often addressed to the deceased herself but in many cases speak directly to the living, inciting them to action. The most common appeal is for prayer. Variations on the phrase “Ruhuna Fatiha” including “al Fatiha,” “al Fateha,” “el Fatiha,” or simply “R. Fatiha” or “Fatiha” were present on approximately one third of the tombstones, on the graves of the old and young alike (see figures 13-14). The Turkish phrase “Ruhuna Fatiha,” translates to “Fatiha for his/her soul.” It refers to the Sura al-Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Qur’an, which is a central part of Islamic worship and an obligatory part of the daily prayer.

Figure 13: Grave in Dusseldorf with “Ruhuna El Fatiha”  Figure 14: Grave in Berlin with “R. Fatiha”
Injunctions on tombstones for passers-by to pray for the soul of the deceased are not unique to Islam nor to the contemporary period. Such communicative acts create potentials for signification by delimiting a community of mourners and believers. As Hans-Peter Laqueur writes with reference to Ottoman tombstones that bear similar injunctions to prayer, “Although Fatiha is read for someone in particular, reading Fatiha means a request to God to forgive all the evil deeds of all living and deceased [Muslims]. This is why a religious Muslim, when he enters the cemetery, reads Fatiha not for someone in particular, but for all the deceased, to be forgiven by God.”

The act of writing Fatiha on a tombstone marks the individual deceased as a Muslim but also situates her within a broader collective Islamic community by instigating communicative action between the deceased and other members of the community of faith. It signals the existence of a Muslim identity while simultaneously entreating other Muslims to profess their own Islamic identity through ritualistic acts of prayer. By acknowledging the deceased as Muslim and by praying for the souls of all Muslims, the observant visitor to an Islamic cemetery reflexively produces the wider Islamic community through pious symbolic action.

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192 The practice dates back to Ancient Rome and is famously captured along the Appian Way. Roman law required that the dead be buried outside human settlements and entering the city entailed passing through a community of the dead. The paths leading to the city's gates were lined with sepulchers, mausolea, and other repositories of dead bodies that were intended to be seen and read, not only by the decedent's friends and family, but by travelers and strangers alike. Tombs called out to passersby, asking them to pause, reflect, and remember with injunctions such as: “You are human, stop and contemplate my tomb, young man, in order to know what you will be. I did no wrong. I performed many duties. Live well, for soon this will come to you.” See Carrol 2006 and Kaster 2012.

During my own trips to the cemeteries, I often saw other visitors praying by graves. This practice was ubiquitous during religious holidays. Sometimes their prayers were enacted in silence. On other occasions, visitors played prerecorded prayers with their cell phones. The sonic landscape of the cemetery was thus punctuated with tinny songlike prayers in Arabic. The practice of playing MP3 prayers on mobile phones might be understood as another means through which the space of the cemetery is sacralized and made Islamic.

The broadcasted prayer lends a sonic religious texture to the cemetery, which while ephemeral, nonetheless marks the space as a place of worship. In Muslim majority countries, where cemeteries are often near mosques, Islamic acoustics are provided by the call for prayer, which is relayed from loudspeakers attached to minarets. In diaspora cemeteries, which are not necessarily close to a mosque, let alone one that is permitted to broadcast the call for prayer (the Turkish Cemetery is an exception in this regard), the use of cell phones to play MP3 prayers might be read as a strategy to enact the sonic function filled by the mosque in other national contexts.¹⁹⁴

Beyond the variations on Fatiha, the tombstones of Muslim graves in Berlin were marked by other written religious motifs that lent them an Islamic quality. The most common phrases inscribed on the gravestones were “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim” (“In the name of God”), which was written exclusively in Arabic script; the Shahadah

¹⁹⁴ One of the undertakers, Bülent, noted during one of our conversations that his customers were often disappointed when they found out that there were no burial plots available in the immediate vicinity of the Şehitlik Mosque. “They say the want to hear the sound of the call to prayer” he told me disparagingly, “but they never bothered to go to the mosque when they were alive! They didn’t hear it then, what does it matter when they’re dead?”
(“There is no God but God and Mohammed is his Prophet”) and “Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un” (“Verily we are from God and to Him we shall return”) [Surah al-Bqara 2:156] also both written exclusively in stylized Arabic script. The latter is a reference to death and the afterlife and to the belief that life on Earth is temporary and that all living beings are destined to return, sooner or later, to God.

Sura Fajr (89:27), was also a common Qur’anic inscription found on tombstones, and reads as follows: “(It will be said to some) O, you serene soul! Come back to your Lord well-pleased (with Him) and well-pleasing (Him), So enter among My servants, and enter into My Garden.” This verse too, is central to Islamic eschatological beliefs on death, resurrection, and the afterlife.¹⁹⁵ Finally, a handful of tombs had explicit references to the Prophet Mohammed such as “May your home be Heaven and may Mohammed be your neighbor.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ See Smith and Haddad 2002.
¹⁹⁶ I thank Sara Mourad and Raha Rafii for their help in translating the Arabic inscriptions.
In sum, approximately 55 percent of the tombstones surveyed here contained some form of Islamic text or references to Qur’anic verses, which serves to distinguish them from other religious faiths and mark them as explicitly Islamic.

**Writing the dead II: genealogies, biographies and commemorative culture**

Beyond references to religious beliefs and identities, the Muslim graves of Berlin also contain secular histories in the form of epitaphs. The vast majority of the written text on these grave markers is not in German. Of the tombs surveyed here, 77 percent bore monolingual inscriptions in Turkish, Arabic, or Bosnian. The remaining 23 percent had dual or trilingual inscriptions with one of the languages being German. Older graves (those before 1994) were largely monolingual and did not contain any German text,
though the graves of notable political figures buried in the Turkish Cemetery had inscriptions in both Turkish and in German. Only one grave in this earlier period, that of a 28-year-old Turkish man, bore an epitaph written solely in German. The text on this grave follows a standard German commemorative convention and reads as follows: “Hier ruht mein lieber Mann” (Here lies my dear husband). The presence of German commemorative conventions on the tombstones of Muslim graves becomes more widespread from the 2000s onwards, a point which I shall return to below. What is important to underline here is that the existence of monolingual graves in non-German languages is a practice that was not only prevalent in an earlier period, but continues to this day.

Given that these cemeteries are located in Germany, the use of non-German languages to commemorate the dead raises questions about the intended audience. Who are these tombs speaking to? Does the choice of a mono or multi-lingual tombstone reflect the linguistic capabilities of the deceased or the desire to communicate with a particular linguistic community? Language, which is central to the construction of national identity, creates a linguistic community whose members are mutually intelligible to one another. While intelligibility does not automatically translate into a sense of shared community, the choice of language on a tombstone functions as a boundary mechanism that ascribes a particular linguistic identity on the deceased and delimits the community of mourners.

Lengthy, moralistic epitaphs inviting the reader to pause and reflect on the life of the deceased as a mirror of their own mortality as exemplified in the Roman “Siste,
*Viator*” convention were less common among the Muslim tombstones, though they did exist (Figure 17). More likely, biographical information was conveyed through shorter inscriptions that contained a family’s genealogy, kinship terminology, places of birth and origin, and occasionally information about the deceased’s occupation, hobbies, or interests. Often, these texts were paired with images and icons.

For our purposes here, what is notable about the non-religious aspects of tombstone inscriptions is both their role in delimiting a community of linguistic intelligibility and in instantiating a shared, collective diasporic history. “Graves, while they are endpoints for migrants,” writes Ho, “are beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in a land.” I would add that migrant graves in the diaspora serve another important purpose. While as Ho points out, they anchor descendants in the country of settlement, they also remind them of the migratory journeys that preceded them. In this sense, the diaspora grave also functions as a record of mobility.

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197 See ft. 24.
198 Ho 2006: 1.
The convention of marking the date or year of a person’s birth and death was widespread and present on approximately 90 percent of the tombstones. By and large the Gregorian calendar was used to mark time, though in a handful of cases, the dates were inscribed with the Hijri calendar. References to a place of birth outside of Germany were present on around 25 percent of tombstones, while references to a non-German country (presumably, but not necessarily the place of birth) were present on an additional 10 percent of the Muslim graves. In sum, around a third of the graves analyzed here explicitly invoked the country of birth or origin through written text (see Figures 18, 19).
This finding is consistent with studies of diaspora cemeteries in other national settings.\textsuperscript{199} When the place of origin was not explicitly referenced on the tombstone in writing, ethnic or cultural context was referenced through symbols and icons incorporated into the design, which I take up at greater length in the next section.

The invocation of the place of origin by reference to the place of birth offers factual, biographical information, and also serves to concretize and make explicit a migratory history. This practice is not unknown among “native born” Germans, although when places of birth are mentioned, they usually convey the fact that the deceased was born in another part of the country. In the Muslim cemeteries of Berlin, this practice is largely restricted to people who were born abroad. While German origin might be taken for granted and therefore unspecified in the burial grounds of ethnic majorities, the decision to reference the country of birth makes clear that certain families want to honor both their ancestral roots and migratory routes.

Acknowledging the place of birth also recognizes the fact that the deceased is not buried in their natal soil. Unlike individuals who are repatriated for burial, whose presence is absent, the graves of foreign-born Muslims in Germany provide a more readily accessible referent for subsequent generations of migrants, reminding them of the transnational circuits and circulations preceding their own arrival in Germany. Though there are different reasons why individuals are buried in the country of origin or settlement (see chapter 5), marking a foreign birthplace signals that repatriation was not pursued. Though local burial might be the result of a willful choice or because of

financial or other constraints, the grave of the foreign born immigrant marks the reality of their existence in a new land.

Figures 18-19: Graves in Berlin showing places of birth outside of Germany (Morocco and Somalia). Note that Figure 18 also bears the German memorial convention “Ruhe in Frieden” (Rest in Peace).

Kinship terminology and allusions to familial lineage were present on 25 percent of the tombstones. Such invocations were typically written from the perspective of mourners and surviving family members. A common formulation was “Our/My Dear/Beloved” followed by the kin-relation (mother, father, brother, sister, daughter, son, etc.). This type of referent was especially common among multilingual graves (see below). Among Bosnian graves, 85 percent referenced communal and kinship bonds by
naming individuals who contributed to the financing of the tombstone. Variants on the phrase “Spomenik Diže” [“monument erected by”] preceded a list of names. These individuals were not necessarily family members of the deceased.

In some cases, the individuals named bore a direct familial relation to the deceased, and were recognized as such (aunt of, son or daughter in law of, spouse and children of, etc.). In other cases, the individuals whose names were etched on the tombstone were members of the Bosnian community, presumably friends or acquaintances of the deceased. Such practices serve to commemorate the deceased while situating her within a wider community. In these cases, the main referents are familial, social, and ethnic bonds.\(^\text{200}\)

The use of kinship terminology to invoke the mourners’ relation to the deceased was particularly pronounced on mixed language graves. The deployment of these relational terms was often coupled with commemorative phrases borrowed from local idioms, which might be read as a sign of a broader shift in diasporic memorial culture. For example, expressions like “hier ruht” (here lies), “ruhe in frieden” (rest in peace), “für immer in unseren Herzen” (always in our hearts), and “wir werden Dich nie vergessen” (we will never forget you), began appearing on a greater number of tombstones from the late 1990s and became much more widespread in the 2000s.

\(^{200}\) According to Amilia Buturović, author of Carved in Stone, Etched in Memory: Death, Tombstones and Commemoration in Bosnian Islam since c.1500 Bosnian graves often bear the names of those erecting the tombstone “as a testimony to both posterity and visitors.” The names are usually those of the closest kin but sometimes are those of friends or relatives. In Bosnia, this practice dates back to pre-Ottoman times, and while not as common in the Ottoman period, was revived as a common practice in the 20th century. Personal correspondence.
These expressions were articulated in German and translated literally into other languages. Just as memorial stones bear symbols of ethnic, religious, or national affiliation, they also show features of syncretism and assimilation to the majority culture. While religious references and Qur’anic scriptures may be written in Arabic script, inscriptions in German or the usage of common German phrases to commemorate the dead suggests a degree of acclimation to local customs of memorialization.

Figures 20-21: Graves in Berlin and Dusseldorf with multilingual inscriptions following German memorial conventions. Note that Eveline Yarici’s grave says “I will never forget you” in Turkish and “We will never forget you” in German.

Part of this acclimation can also be seen in the movement towards more individualized and personalized forms of memorialization. In certain cases, such as the grave of the boxer (Figure 22), signs of individual identity take precedence over communal referents. One reading of the broader processes of assimilation that immigrant
communities undergo over time is to see it not solely through the ways in which they adopt the cultural practices and repertoires of dominant groups in society, but rather in the subtle shifts from group based notions of collective identity towards more individualist configurations of subjectivity. As features of individual identities come to supersede those of geographical or national origins, the imagined unity of an immigrant community is disrupted.

Figure 22: Grave of Can Kayam in Berlin

You had / to leave us so early, / but in our hearts you will / live on always. / A Fatiha for your soul
These shifts are also evident in the plastic features of the tombstone. The use of heart-shaped, abstract, or open book forms is a relatively recent formal innovation in Muslim cemeteries. Portraits of the deceased, either photographic inlays or etched directly into the stone, became more commonplace in the 2000s. These changes might be the result of institutional or economic constraints in the market for grave monuments as certain ready-made designs are more widespread and potentially cheaper. With the adoption of German-style memorials, innovations in tombstone design are also visible. Through the use of novel symbolic and architectural forms, the Muslim graves of Berlin articulate new situational national and religious identities in visually striking ways.

**Seeing the dead I: flags, photos, moons and stars**

Most of the Muslim graves of Berlin, 75 percent to be precise, have some sort of image. These visual markers can be classified in to three broad categories: national or patriotic symbols, religious motifs, and images of individuality. The relationship between image and text, between icon and the written word, is complex. In some cases, such as the grave featuring the Mercedes-Benz (Figure 17), where a symbol of conspicuous consumption is paired with an exhortation to recognize the ephemeral and fallacious nature of the material world, the image seems to contradict the text, or at the very least, complicate our reading of it.

Images add texture and depth to the written word of the inscription by providing new symbolic referents or by reinforcing the meanings of the text. In this sense, the grave
is a composite form. Visual, textual, and architectural features work together to create an array of signs that lend a sense of fixity to the identity of the deceased.

“It is not reality that photographs make immediately accessible,” writes Susan Sontag “but images.” Through photographs we have access to a time that precedes us. Sontag notes that with photographs, it is possible for adults to know how they and their parents and grandparents looked as children, a possibility that was non-existent before the invention of the camera. “What the photograph record confirms,” she continues, “is more modestly, simply that the subject exists.”201

Photographs on gravestones record the fact that the subject existed. Furthermore, they fix the subject in time. Images of the deceased often record an earlier era of the subject’s life, a moment where the individual in question is healthy, vibrant, and full of life. They allow observers to imagine the deceased as a living person and offer a pleasant image that masks the reality of the transformation that the body has undergone, now lifeless and decomposed in the earth.

About 25 percent of the tombstones feature images of the deceased. The use of portraits is a fairly recent phenomenon. The earliest of these tombs dates to 1997. There are two primary means through which the likeness of the deceased is visually represented on the grave. One technique involves the use of laser engraving. In such cases, an image is etched directly into the stone (Figures 23-24). It is also common to mount a portrait of the deceased (in color or in black and white) on to the tombstone. Less common, but still existent are makeshift photographic memorials. In these situations, friends and families

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201 Sontag 2001: 165.
have developed a homemade solution by placing framed photographs of the deceased near the gravesite, often in conjunction with other objects and personal mementos. Such graves have the quality of reliquaries.
Figures 23 – 26: Graves with portraits and photos in Württemberg, Düsseldorf, and Berlin
While the use of portraiture might reflect a shift toward individuation, other images and symbols that appear alongside images of the deceased serve to situate the individual dead within broader collectivities. The most conspicuous of these signs is the flag. Flags are not unheard of objects in the cemetery, though they are often affixed to the graves of individuals who died in the service of the state. Most commonly they appear alongside the tombs of soldiers, both known and unknown.

Whether or not they convey onomastic information about the deceased, soldier graves and the flags that decorate them are important elements in the construction of national communities. Soldier dead remind the living of the sacrifices made for the nation. The spectacle of mortality connects a single, concrete body to the mystical body of the nation, symbolized by the flag. The corporeal body is linked to the body politic, marking the individual as a member of a transcendent community. This act of metonymy is enabled in part, through the flag, which couples soldier and nation, linking individual sacrifice to collective identity.

In cases where commemorative practices are more explicitly shaped by the state, like in military cemeteries, the utilization of national flags on or near tombstones is perhaps a more explicitly calculated strategy to bolster patriotic sentiment. It also serves as a reminder of the state’s sovereignty—its power over life and death. What are we to make of the fact that the flags marking Berlin’s Muslim dead are to be found not on the graves of soldiers, but rather, of civilians? These private acts of commemoration

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nationalize the dead and place them within a particular political community. They can be read as symbols of real or aspirational patriotism. Whether or not the individual in question actually harbored strong patriotic sentiments is less important than the message conveyed by the existence of a flag on a tombstone, which links the dead to a specific country.

The flag is a recognizable visual marker that has the potential to reach a wider audience than an epitaph or inscription, particularly if the text is written in a language that is foreign to the observer. It is a powerful symbol of national belonging and conveys a range of emotional attachments to a political community. In diaspora cemeteries, the flag of another country sends a strong, and potentially paradoxical message to visitors. Like the practice of marking a foreign birthplace, the flag’s presence on a tombstone acknowledges a migratory history and signals membership in another national community. Though the bodily remains of the deceased are buried here, their sense of identity derives from elsewhere.

Among the different political communities represented within Berlin’s Islamic cemeteries, one country stands out. The Turkish flag appears far more frequently than any other national grouping. About 10 percent of the tombstones surveyed here include flags. Of these, approximately 90 percent are Turkish. The only other nationality represented with a flag is Palestinian. The earliest tombstone bearing a Turkish flag dates from 1966 and several other examples can be found from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s. The image is common on more recent graves from the 2000s onwards as well. One could read this as a sign of greater nationalist sentiment among Berlin’s Turkish population, or
as a strategy deployed by Turkish Muslims to distinguish themselves from other ethnic

groups.

Perhaps national identity supersedes religious community in certain cases, though
the existence of Islamic referents on almost all of the graves featuring Turkish flags
suggests that this is not the case. What is notable is that the flag appears on the
tombstones of both old and young alike. Around 25 percent of tombstones with flags
belong to stillborn babies or infants who died within weeks or months of being born.
Figures 27 – 30: Graves with flags in Heilbronn, Ludwigshafen, and Philadelphia

The use of a flag on a baby’s grave says more about the living than the dead. The notion of a nationalistic baby seems untenable, but the decision to mark such tombstones with symbols of the Turkish nation can be read as an effort to construct identity where personhood is not yet developed. The flag here might reflect the deceased’s actual
citizenship, particularly if the grave was erected before 2000 when *ius sanguinis* laws were in force, barring non-ethnic Germans from the possibility of acquiring German citizenship by birth.

They also contain an aspirational element that projects future national sensibilities on a life whose potentiality has been foreclosed. Such sensibilities need not be restricted to one nationality, as the image of the Turkish-American child from Philadelphia makes clear. This example is an exception. While the graves of Berlin were at times multilingual, not a single one was multinational, at least as far as the display of multiple national flags was concerned.

Alongside the flags pictured above, an additional 20 percent of Muslim tombstones bear flag-like symbols, featuring a crescent moon and star. These symbols share a structural affinity with the Turkish flag, though they should be read as symbols of Islam rather than symbols of the nation-state. The Turkish flag, which features a white crescent moon and five-pointed star on a red background, is derived from the late Ottoman flag, which also bore a white crescent moon and star, though the proportions were different. Former territories of the Ottoman Empire, including Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria adopted a crescent moon and star in their own national flags and though the symbol pre-dates the emergence of Islam, it has played a prominent role in the iconography of Muslim countries and Islamist movements in the 20th century.203

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203 The crescent moon and star are featured on the national flags of several Muslim majority countries including Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Malaysia. It is also present on the flag of the U.S. based Nation of Islam.
As a religious icon, the crescent moon and star features most prominently on the graves of Bosnian Muslims. Half of all Bosnian tombstones bore this image. Like Qur’anic inscriptions, the crescent moon and star mark the dead as Muslim. While at face value, burial in an Islamic section of a cemetery might be taken as evidence of one’s religious faith, such symbols distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims, as evident in the joint plot of the Turković family, which is a mixed marriage (see figure 32). The absence of the crescent and star over Svetlana Turković’s image marks her as a non-Muslim.

Concurrent to the prevalence of lunar imagery on Bosnian tombstones is another trend that merits attention. In the diaspora cemeteries of Germany, one can find graves built in the likeness of mosques and minarets. Although the practice is not restricted to the Bosnian community, this novel architectural form first appears among the graves of Bosnian Muslims. Ostentatious and highly unorthodox, the mosque grave is a recent and unusual development in Islamic funerary architecture.

Figures 31-32: Graves with crescent moons and stars in Berlin and Mannheim
Seeing the dead II: mosques and minarets

The domed mosque with its pointy minarets might very well be the most widely recognized symbol of Islam. A mosque need not be defined by these stylistic signifiers however, as there are no guidelines in the Qur’an or the Hadith that prescribe a certain architectural form to these places of worship. As Aksamija points out, mosques built in different social, political, and cultural contexts since the 7th century demonstrate considerable formal diversity and are a testament to the richness of Islam’s architectural vocabulary. To insist on domes and minarets as defining elements of mosques, particularly in migratory contexts, contradicts the fluid architectural definition and historical variation in forms and types. For Aksamija, rather than transplanting existing architectural forms, diasporic mosques should serve as an “interactive cultural sphere” for the development of new ideas that meet existing needs of Muslim communities.

As both an artist and architectural historian Aksamija is primarily concerned with transformations and innovations in mosque design. Her projects challenge the structural formalism of inherited forms and question the territoriality and fixity of contemporary mosque architecture. The existence of mosque shaped graves in diaspora cemeteries raises new questions about the mosque form and its replication and circulation in

204 Aksamija 2015.
205 Ibid: 122
206 See for example, her “wearable mosque,” which are clothes that transform into prayer rugs. Aksamija also helped design the second Islamic cemetery in Austria, built in Altach in 2011. (The first Islamic cemetery in Austria was built in 2008 in Vienna). This cemetery won the highly prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2013 and, according to Aksamija, is an important example of how “Islamic funerary architecture can contribute to cultivating pluralism in Europe.” See Aksamija 2014.
different settings. These graves look more like the traditional mosques that Akšamija criticizes, yet are nonetheless innovative since the mosque form is transplanted and repurposed for a different end.

The mosque grave brings the mosque—a place of collective worship that might be located near or adjacent to a burial ground—into the heart of the cemetery itself, albeit in miniaturized form. Beyond the striking visual effect generated by the existence of mini-mosques among tombstones, the mosque grave occasions a socio-spatial reorientation for worshippers and mourners. For example, the spatial dynamics of a funeral procession, which would normally begin at the mosque and end in the cemetery, are collapsed as mosque and grave merge into one site.

The line between sites of worship, pilgrimage, and prayer become blurred as the gravesite is reimagined as something more than a place for the deposition of human remains. The dead Muslim body, which endows the soil with Islamic qualities, is directly linked to the most recognizable symbol of Islamic faith. The proximity of the mosque to the dead body also mimics the medieval Christian practice of burying the dead directly under the grounds of the church. This practice, usually reserved for the rich or the holy, is given a new lease in the diaspora cemetery. If you can’t bury under the mosque, why not build a mosque over your grave?

The landscape of the cemetery is also transformed as it is imbued with new religious iconography. Just as the grand rural cemeteries of Europe and North America drew upon a variety of monumental styles that referenced the ancient world, such as
obelisks, tiny pyramids, temples, broken and draped columns, urns, and sarcophagi, the diaspora cemeteries of Berlin invoke the formal symbolism of Islamic architecture to link religious ideals and beliefs about death and the afterlife to physical space. Unlike Greek or Egyptian temples which are no longer used as places of worship, the mosque form is at once historic and contemporary. What is novel about the mosque grave as a cultural and architectural practice is how the built form of the mosque is deracinated from its original or everyday context and location, and appears in a new and unexpected locale. It is an example of what Christiane Gruber has termed “Islamic architecture on the move.”

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207 On the use of funerary architecture from the ancient world in 19th and 20th century cemeteries in the West see Ragon 1983.
208 Gruber 2016.
In her analysis of the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in Tehran, where many families have placed miniaturized replicas of the Dome of the Rock on top of relics cases of Iranian war martyrs, Gruber argues that these diminutive holy sites “visually insinuate the
deceased’s deliverance through death as well as his salvation in the afterlife.”\textsuperscript{209} The mosque grave might be approached in a similar vein, as representing a kind of aspirational deliverance and salvation for the spirit of the deceased. As Gruber notes however, “such mobile small-scale structures also contribute to the articulation of political positions.”\textsuperscript{210} What sort of politics is articulated by the construction of mini mosques in public cemeteries?

I want to suggest here that the use of Islamic architectural elements like the mosque grave in the diaspora cemeteries of Berlin is in part, a response to the political challenges faced by the city’s Muslim communities. The incorporation of religious architecture and design in the public space of the cemetery represents an innovative step towards the normalization of Islamic symbols in the German landscape. As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the visibility of such symbols has provoked controversy and efforts to build actual mosques and places of worship have been undermined by those who find the existence of such buildings threatening or out of place. The placement of miniature mosques in the space of the cemetery reflects efforts by Germany’s Muslim communities to express their religious identities and beliefs in the public sphere.

Just as Muslim tombstones may display features of syncretism and assimilation to the dominant culture, they also showcase the ways in which Islamic elements become incorporated into the urban fabric. They help to Islamize German public space. Rather than assuming that the expression of national, ethnic, or religious belonging is simply

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid: 12.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid: 13.
evidence of cultural retention, I think it is also helpful to understand these gestures as
evidence for the changing nature of German identity. Read in this light, expressions of
Islam are not expressions of an outside, extraneous, or foreign culture, but are part of
Germany’s evolving and dynamic society. While mosques and minarets might currently
seem out of place in the cemetery or the city, their proliferation might neutralize their
effect and make them as invisible and unremarked upon as the crosses and church towers
that are an integral part of Berlin’s urban fabric.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on symbolic representations of individual and collective
identity on the tombstones of Muslim graves in Germany. As we saw, families draw on
existing repertoires of collective identity such as flags and crescent moons, to mark the
deceased as part of a broader ethnic, religious, or national community. They also use
more personalized symbols of identity, such as photos and epitaphs to distinguish the
individual within the collective. Through the choice of language, epitaph, symbolic
imagery, and gravestone design then, the living commemorate the dead and convey
information about the deceased and their community.

Cemeteries and other spaces for the dead reflect the changing conditions of the
living as well as shifting meanings and discourses about life and death. Such spaces are
invested with cultural and symbolic meaning by the living and represent microcosms of
the societies that establish them.211 Having been erected in Germany, the tombstones that

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211 Maddrell and Sidaway 2010.
I have analyzed in this chapter are the result of a conscious decision by families to bury their dead in the country of settlement in lieu of repatriation. As a diverse minority that is viewed with some suspicion by dominant groups, Muslims in Germany use posthumous practices to articulate and enhance their identities and to mark points of convergence and divergence from the surrounding culture. Of course, as a part of that culture, they are actively involved in shaping it. Today’s markers of difference, such as mosque graves, might be viewed with indifference with the passing of time as Islamic symbols in the public sphere become more widespread and normalized.

Nonetheless, through the decision to bury their dead in Germany, immigrant families lay a claim on German soil as their own. Though their tombstones might display markers of alterity, their corpses attest to the fact that they are, in death, here to stay. In the next chapter I turn to the different factors that influence decisions about the location of burial. While the vast majority of the first generation of migrants chose repatriation over local burial, the number of burials in Germany is on the rise. By investigating the different reasons why individuals choose to be buried in one place over another, I aim to show how attachments to peoples and places are articulated and made meaningful through burial practices.
CHAPTER FOUR: BURIAL AND BELONGING

Field Notes: June 14, 2013

It’s Friday evening and the streets of Neukölln are humming with activity as I make my way to the Sufi Center Berlin. One of my contacts, a member of the center whom I’ll call Nergis, has invited me to observe a sohbet (lit. “conversation”), a Sufi ritual where members engage in a lengthy discussion under the guidance of a sheikh. “You won’t be bored,” Nergis told me, “sometimes we stay up talking all night!”

I walk by the Sufi Center twice before I realize where it is. Other than a small plaque, there is little visible signage to indicate the Center’s entrance. Rows of neatly arranged shoes line the hallway. I notice Nergis and her daughter as I take off my shoes and they greet me with big hugs and kisses, pulling me in through the doorway through a narrow corridor that leads to two large rooms. “Come, sit” Nergis tells me, “have some tea.”

The floors are lined with wall-to-wall carpeting in deep crimson. On the wall is a large portrait of Sheikh Nazim al-Qubrusi, the spiritual leader of the Naqshbandi order. Another poster proclaims “Yeni Osmanlıyız” (We are the new Ottomans). There are thirty to forty people in the room, most of them in their twenties and thirties. Sufi devotional music plays lightly in the background. I sit next to a young man who tells me his name is Arman. He is training to become a police officer and is currently enrolled in the police academy in Berlin.

“My German colleagues can be skeptical sometimes,” he says. “They ask me, don’t your people see you as a traitor? They still view us as outsiders. But I’m a German citizen. My parents are Turkish and I’m Turkish too. Those are my roots. But I was born here. I grew up here. I’m a Turkish-German. I had to give up my Turkish citizenship to become a police officer.”

Just then, a young German man wearing a black vest, baggy pants, and a fez arrives with some tea. I ask Arman about his outfit after he leaves. It’s rare to see anyone, outside of the occasional tourist, wearing a fez these days. Arman laughs. “Our German brothers are more Turkish and more Muslim than we are!”

Nergis comes over to tell me that the sohbet is about to begin. There are two sohbes that take place concurrently, one in German, another in Turkish. I follow her into the second room where the Turkish sohbet will be held. Around a dozen people are already seated on brightly colored kilim pillows and on long wooden benches that line the walls. I take a spot on a bench as more people filter in. In the middle of the room, perched on a plush, red velvet chair is Sheikh Kadir. He is in his 40s, with a long beard and a black Kangol hat. He’s barefoot and dressed in a white linen shirt and black pants. There are more fezes mounted on the wall, as well as a string of multicolored lights and a
flat screen TV, which broadcasts live images from the other room. The younger people are talking with one another. Some of them are on their phones sending text messages or looking at Facebook.

Sheikh Kadir calls the sohbet to order and offers a few opening remarks about the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, which have been ongoing for several weeks. Initially sparked by the government’s decision to develop a public park in Taksim, the protests grew into a large-scale demonstration against the AKP and (then) Prime Minister Erdoğan. Thousands were arrested and several protestors were killed by the police.

“Their goal is to split Turkey in half!” exclaims the Sheikh. “Erdoğan is not a dictator. He was elected into office. If you want to get rid of him, you have to organize and vote him out.” “Erdoğan isn’t perfect,” he continues, “but we’ve seen his good deeds in places like Bosnia and Africa. This government has served the people better than any one that came before it.”

“Europe has sucked the blood of Muslim countries. It continues to do so. The Islamic world continues to shed blood because there isn’t a Caliphate. We want a Caliphate. We can’t have world peace without it... We have a five thousand year history. We’ve defended Islam with the sword. A Sultanate suits us... The U.S. has a path that it will not stray from. What is this path? World domination. The goal of the Masons is to take over the Middle East!”

The Sheikh has been speaking with great passion for several minutes. “I’ve gotten a little excited and gotten ahead of myself here” he observes with a chuckle and begins to speak about the value of every human being. “You must respect all human beings,” he continues. “They have a heart, a soul. They have honor.” Scanning the room, he sees me and offers a welcome. “I think you’re new here, right?” Before I can respond Nergis jumps in and tells Sheikh Kadir that I am in Berlin doing research about Turks in Germany. Kadir smiles. “That’s wonderful,” he says. “You can ask me anything.”

Over the next thirty minutes, I pose a series of questions to Sheikh Kadir, who responds at length to each of my queries. We talk about the history of Turkish migration to Europe, the challenges and opportunities for Muslims in Germany and the politics of integration and assimilation. The audience mostly remains silent though attentive and the whole thing feels like a public, filmed interview.

“People use the term gurbet to describe their experience here in Germany,” I begin. “What does gurbet mean to you?” Sheikh Kadir thinks for a moment, strokes his beard and offers the following interpretation. “Our forefathers said that your home isn’t where you are born, but where you find work and make a living. In Islam we have the hicret. Historically, the hicret refers to Mohammed and his followers’ migration from Mecca to Medina in 622. The word, which derives from Arabic, means to abandon, leave, or migrate from one place to another.

212 “Memleket doğduğuun yer değil, doyduğuun yerdir,” a Turkish proverb which means home is where you find work and make a living.
213 Historically, the hicret refers to Mohammed and his followers’ migration from Mecca to Medina in 622. The word, which derives from Arabic, means to abandon, leave, or migrate from one place to another.
country where they live. If you don’t like German laws, then go back to Turkey. You have to obey the law. You can bring your culture with you. Islam is flexible in this regard. The Ottomans incorporated many new customs and traditions. But when we talk about gurbet, mankind is already living in gurbet because our true home is in heaven. Our real homeland is heaven. They call us foreigners but human beings everywhere are living in gurbet.”

Sheikh Kadir continues, touching on the issue of death, burial, and belonging. “Of course, our fathers came here forty, fifty years ago and languished. My father, who came here [from Turkey] forty years ago in a plane, went back in a coffin. Islam doesn’t allow for burial outside of where you die. That’s why you should bury me here in Berlin when I die” he continues.” “And bury me next to you!” chimes an audience member.

“This country where we live, Germany... Germany is a political entity. The soil belongs to Allah. People should be buried where they die, because we, as human beings are living in gurbet in this world. But the notion of gurbet as a migrant ended with our parents’ generation. We are in our homeland. The same is true for you in the United States. We are Europeans now. European-Turks. This is our homeland, but Turkey is our fatherland…”

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Death in the diaspora raises existential questions about the meaning of home and homeland. As Sheikh Kadir’s comments make clear, burial practices are an important means through which migrant communities express attachments to their perceived homeland. Kadir de-emphasizes the physical location of burial, focusing instead on transcendental considerations, such as the salvation of the soul. Yet even as he dismisses the practice of repatriation, Kadir acknowledges the extraordinary meaning of the soil. His comment that Germany is a political entity and that the soil belongs to Allah echoes an observation made by an imam during the funeral of a polish convert in one of Berlin’s Islamic cemeteries. “We live in an infidel country, but we’ve buried her in Muslim soil.”
Having analyzed the symbolic representation of ethnic, religious, and national identities on the tombstones of Muslim graves, I turn now to the different reasons why individuals decide to inter their dead locally or repatriate for burial and the significance that they attribute to the place of burial. We have already seen how funeral funds help structure burial outcomes by providing moral and material incentives for repatriation. We have also seen how Muslim undertakers link attitudes and expectations around death and burial to broader debates about socio-cultural integration. Islamic funerals can become politicized events. Recall the exhumation and reburial of Layla Bukhari, or SPD member Bilkay Öney’s comments during deliberations over changes to Baden-Württemberg’s burial laws: “Integration must cover the whole span of life—from the birth to the death of a person.”

The inevitable ageing of Germany’s Muslim population has given rise to new policy debates over the legality of Islamic burials. Cemetery regulations and burial laws in Germany are under the legislative purview of the Länder. As a result, there is a considerable amount of variation across states with respect to rules pertaining to everything from the permissibility of an open-coffin funeral or burial at sea to the legality of privately owned crematoriums and cemeteries. In some cases, existing laws may be at odds with an individual’s cultural values, religious convictions, or personal preferences. Conflicts over the treatment of corpses can lead to emotional anguish and legal disputes.
since there are myriad beliefs about the proper way to dispose of dead bodies based on different conceptions of the body and of the afterlife.\textsuperscript{214}

For example, certain groups such as Jews, Muslims, the Hmong, and Navajo (Dine) proscribe mutilation of the dead and may have religious objections to autopsies. In situations where family members contend that an autopsy should not be performed, the question is whether state authorities have a sufficiently compelling interest, such as suspicion of foul play or a perceived threat to public health, that outweighs the right to religious freedom. In other situations, emotional distress can result from the mishandling of the body by those entrusted to prepare it for burial. Take the case of Axel Flores, a Guatemalan immigrant in California whose corpse was confused with another person’s and accidentally cremated. For Flores’ family, this meant that he would not only be denied a proper burial, but that he would be denied entry into heaven, since they view cremation as a sufficient condition to prevent salvation.\textsuperscript{215}

While an accidental cremation might seem exceptional, I heard several stories from both Muslim undertakers and representatives of Islamic associations in Berlin about situations where a deceased Muslim was “saved” at the last minute from the agony of cremation.\textsuperscript{216} A more quotidian set of problems faced by Muslims in Germany has to do

\textsuperscript{214} Renteln 2005.  
\textsuperscript{215} Brandes 2002.  
\textsuperscript{216} Municipal authorities responsible for the disposal of indigent or homeless persons with no known relatives rely on cremation, which is more cost effective compared to burial. Most of the stories I heard were cases where a funeral director or Islamic organization would receive a phone call from a hospital, morgue, or police station notifying them of the existence of an unclaimed and unknown Muslim corpse. Funeral homes who took on such cases receive little or no money to dispose of the body. The point, however, was that they provided proper Islamic burial rites as a good deed and out of a sense of religious duty since they believed that cremation would prevent the deceased from attaining salvation.
with incongruities between burial laws and Islamic funerary traditions. In what follows I will explore some of these gaps in greater detail. While legal pluralists have rightly insisted that the law should strive to accommodate different cultural practices surrounding the dead to as great an extent as possible, I want to argue here that the law remains secondary to decision-making processes about where to bury a body. Local burial laws impact the feasibility of Islamic funerals; however, family ties, ideas about the soil, and feelings of social exclusion play a greater role in determining burial outcomes than the laws circumscribing burial practices.

In discussing their own burial preferences and reflecting on the decisions of others, many of my interview partners asserted that the strength of one’s ties to Germany or their country of origin would largely determine why any given individual would be buried in one place over the other. In probing further, I discovered that the notion of a tie functioned as an unstable referent that encapsulated a variety of ideas about family, soil, and belonging. Family members (both past and future generations) play an important role in structuring claims about the significance of land and territory, while experiences of social exclusion, alienation, and discrimination serve to justify why individuals might prefer repatriation over local burial.

**Islamic funerary traditions and the laws of the dead in Germany**

Though regional, ethnic, and sectarian differences are conducive to some disparities across Islamic funerary traditions, it is possible to identify a set of common practices that are observed during the preparation and interment of the dead body. These
include the ritual cleansing, washing, and shrouding of the corpse, the recitation of
funeral prayers, and coffinless burial in a grave facing the Qibla in Mecca. Mortuary
prescriptions are stipulated by the Prophet and there are several Hadith that offer
guidance on how to prepare a Muslim corpse for burial. Collections of sacred law in the
genre of Fiqh, or Jurisprudence, also include a chapter or book entitled “The Book on
Funerary Practice” (Kitab al-Jana’iz).

According to Leor Halevi, a scholar of early Islam, it was through the
establishment of unique “Islamic” death rites and concomitant forms of socialization and
social interaction, or what he calls the “Islamization of death and society,” that early
converts to Islam and pietists sought to distinguish Islamic from non-Islamic rituals, such
as those of Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian practitioners.217 “In this environment,
where Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians had already established distinctive confessional
rituals,” he writes, “it became an essential task for Muslim ideologues to enact a funerary
form that would signal the divergence of Islamic society from non-Muslim societies.
Hence, their funerary laws were driven, in part, by an all-too-human drive to reach social
and religious distinction.”218

Islamic ideas about death and resurrection shape a number of mortuary rituals.219
These include actions that should be performed in the lead up to and at the moment of an

217 Halevi 2011.
219 The most comprehensive account of Islamic beliefs about death and the afterlife is Smith and Haddad
(2002), which brings together a range of classical, modern, and contemporary sources, including Qur’anic
scripture and commentaries (tafsirs), eschatological manuals, theological writings from both Sunni and
Shi’i traditions as well as works from the major schools and thinkers of Islamic philosophy. My overview
of Islamic funerary rites draws on this volume as well as Abu-Zahra’s (2000) study of Islamic rites of
individual’s death, guidelines for the preparation of corpses for burial, and instructions for the recitation of funerary prayers and grave visits. When a person is dying, their body should be turned on its right side with their face towards the Qibla. If this is not possible, their head should be raised slightly and their feet should be turned towards the Qibla. The dying person should be given water and if they are unable to swallow, drops of water should be placed in their mouth. A Quran should be placed near the dying person and the Surah Yā Sin should be recited along with the Kelime-i Tevhid and Kelime-i Şehadet (the Shahada). Hadith prescribe that if the confession of faith is recited at the moment of death the deceased will go to Heaven.

According to a health care professional, whom I’ll call Katrina, German hospitals are ill-equipped to serve dying Muslims. Katrina, who I interviewed in her home in Kreuzberg in 2013, teaches courses on intercultural care to social workers and nurses. An energetic woman in her early 60s, she is particularly concerned about conveying sensitivity to religious and cultural beliefs to her students. She spoke to me at length about the problems faced by elderly migrants, who suffer from chronic diseases at a higher rate than native Germans.

“The Gastarbeiter are getting old and they can’t go back to Turkey or somewhere because they don’t have the health care system to treat them in the same way like we do here,” she noted. “So all of these workers, who worked in very dangerous conditions, in the mines, in the car factories, who developed illnesses because they were breathing in

passage and a handbook produced by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs entitled “Funeral Services Guidebook” (Cenaze Hizmetleri Rehberi).

220 “La ilaha illallah” (There is no god but God), “Eşhedü enlâilâhe illallah ve eşhedü enne Muhammeden abdühü ve rasülüh” (There is no god but God and Mohammed is his Prophet and Messenger).
toxic air, who suffer from rheumatism and back pain because of the harsh conditions under which they worked, all these people are ill now and are retiring much earlier than the Germans since they performed the heavy, dirty work.”

Katrina observed that hospital staff, including doctors, nurses, and administrators, often lacked the cultural know-how to provide proper medical treatment to elderly immigrants. “We have older people here and we have to take care of them,” she told me,

“But the hospitals here in Germany can’t deal with them because the nurses don’t know how to treat them. When a Turkish man comes to a hospital, they [the medical staff] have to know special things. They have to know something about Turkish culture and cultural norms. When someone is dying, for example, they have to know about proper death rites. Is there a Qur’an in the hospital? Is there anyone who can say a prayer for a dying Muslim? How should they comfort the dying patient and help the families? These are the kind of things that we are trying to teach people here in Berlin, but it’s just the beginning. And it’s very difficult, because the hospitals say that they have too much work and not enough staff. They see patients from many different countries, from Italy, Spain, Japan. They see Yiddish people. And for a nurse to learn all these different traditions… It could take years. So it’s a big problem, but in my classes I try to teach them culturally sensitive medical care. It’s very important I think, and others are starting to recognize this as we get more and more older migrants.”

For Katrina, it is imperative that health care professionals are knowledgeable about different cultural and religious ideas about death and dying in order to provide appropriate end-of-life care to their patients. She draws attention to the need for more comprehensive training for medical staff and greater resources to assist immigrant families. Like the undertakers we learned about in chapter three, Katrina’s work has an explicit pedagogical dimension that aims to educate German professionals about Islamic rites, rituals, and beliefs, particularly as they pertain to death. Such efforts reflect a desire

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221 Author interview 6.16.13 Berlin.
222 Ibid.
to ensure that all patients who are treated in the German health care system are provided with the opportunity for a ‘good death.’

Since health care professionals, patients, and relatives of the deceased might have different views on what constitutes a ‘good death’ based on their own cultural preconceptions and beliefs, the development of culturally competent care represents an important step towards the management of death out of place. Yet the realization of a ‘good death’ entails not only the enactment of proper rites in the moments leading up to the actual death of a person, but also the appropriate handling of bodies and the social organization of bereavement and funerary rituals after death.

For Muslims, these rituals include the washing, shrouding, and burial of the deceased. Upon death, all clothing and personal articles are to be removed from the individual’s body. A piece of cloth can be used to wrap around their head and chin to prevent the mouth from opening. Their eyes should be closed and their arms and hands should be brought to their side. Their legs are to be straightened and a piece of cloth can be used to bind the feet together. The dead should be covered with a sheet until the ritual washing (ghusl) of the body. All Muslims with the exception of martyrs are to be washed after death.

223 In some cases, however, notions of culturally competent care can serve to reinforce an exclusionary dynamic if migrant patients are othered vis-à-vis native populations. Researchers in the field of palliative care have stressed that practitioners should adopt a ‘patient centeredness’ approach where the individual uniqueness of each patient should be the starting point rather than the supposed ‘otherness’ of patients with migrant backgrounds. Different ideas about a ‘good death’ might not always spring from a person’s migrant status or to clearly delineated cultural frames of reference, as is sometimes assumed by health care professionals. See Ammann et al. 2016 and Torres et al 2016.

224 The “Funeral services guidebook” states that in cases where “it is unclear whether the deceased is a man or a woman, they should not be washed, but given ablutions without water (teyemmüm). For shrouding
Only close family members or professionals of the same sex as the deceased should perform the washing. If the deceased is a child a man or a woman may perform the washing, regardless of the child’s sex. The deceased is placed on his or her back with their feet facing towards the Qibla. The washing begins on the right side and the body should be washed several times with water mixed with lotus leaves. The final rinsing should be with water mixed with camphor leaves. The ghuss is meant not only to clean and cleanse the body of impurities, but symbolizes the deceased’s re-birth.

After the body is washed, it is shrouded with a simple, unadorned, white cloth known as kefen. The kefen of a male consists of three white sheets: the outer sheet (Lifafe), the second sheet (Izâr, used to shroud from the head to the foot), and the third sheet (Kamîs, “the shirt,” used to shroud the torso). For women, the kefen consists of five white sheets: the Lifafe, Izâr, Kamîs, as well as a sheet to cover the chest and another to cover the head and hair. The left hand of the deceased is placed on their chest and the right hand is placed on top of the left hand as in prayer. The body is shrouded from the left to the right side. Once the shrouding is complete, the sheets are fastened with shorter pieces of cloth, one above the head, another under the feet, and two around the body.

There are no laws that directly impede the washing and shrouding of a corpse in Germany and families can opt to have the body of the deceased prepared in line with Islamic tradition in advance of local burial or repatriation. According to the undertakers I

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these individuals are recognized as women and shrouded accordingly.” The manual also states that “headless” Muslims whose “bodies are mostly intact” should be washed but “headless” Muslims “who are missing most of their bodies should not be washed, shrouded, or given a funeral prayer. They should be wrapped in cloth and buried.”
spoke with, family members and relatives of the deceased were typically reluctant to perform the ritual washing and usually preferred to entrust the task to professionals or volunteers. Recall that one undertaker, Mehmet, interpreted this trend as a sign of “Westernization” among Muslims in Germany. “Since death is a taboo now,” he told me, “we tend to stay away from it. But it didn’t always work like that. The families used to wash the body. Now we have professionals who do it.”

Mehmet believed that it was important from a psychological perspective for family members to wash the bodies themselves, since this would aid them in the process of grieving and accepting the loss of a loved one. In most cases however, the washing and shrouding of the corpse is organized through the funeral company, whose staff will either prepare the body themselves or outsource it to the local mosque. This ritual rarely takes place in hospitals or private homes. In Berlin, the Şehitlik mosque has a room adjacent to its small morgue in the basement of the building equipped with special equipment where Muslim corpses are washed and shrouded before burial (see Figure 38).

226 Author interview 8.13.14 Berlin.
More consequential to the performance of Islamic funerary rites are laws that mandate the use of a coffin for burial, obligatory waiting periods of forty-eight hours between death and burial, time limits on the leasing of grave plots, and mandatory autopsies when the cause of death cannot be determined. As discussed previously, practical obstacles such as the limited availability of Islamic cemeteries where plots are segregated confessionally and graves that can be aligned towards Mecca pose further challenges. Of the approximately 32,000 cemeteries in Germany, only 250—less than 1% -- have sections reserved for Muslim graves.\textsuperscript{227}

Owing to Germany’s federal system, burial laws are determined on a state-by-state basis. According to one scholar of German sepulchral law and culture, the highly

\textsuperscript{227} <www.initiative-kabir.de>
regulated nature of all matters related to burial in Germany is a direct consequence of the “pronounced technocratic paternalism” of its administrative system. My discussion here is primarily limited to the burial laws of Berlin, which are relatively more accommodating to Muslims compared to other states.

The Berlin Burial Law (Berliner Bestattungsgesetzes) was enacted on 2 November 1973 and subsequently amended several times, most recently in 2010 to allow for shroud burial. Before this change, the law stipulated that “corpses are to be interred in a coffin before transportation to the place of burial and are to be buried in a coffin.” Furthermore, “the coffin must be hermetically sealed so as to prevent the seepage of moisture and to hinder the release of outward odors.” In 2010, as part of a broader package of legislation under the rubric “Law Regulating Participation and Integration in Berlin,” Article 10 of the Berlin Burial was amended as follows: “In exception to the obligation to bury corpses in a coffin (§10, point 1), corpses can be buried in a burial shroud and without a coffin for religious reasons in cemetery sections specified by the cemetery administration. The corpse is to be transported to the burial site in an appropriate coffin.”

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228 Schultz 2013: 17.
229 For more information about funeral, burial, cremation and cemetery laws in other German states, see the website of the Aeternitas e.V., a non-profit consumer advocacy group whose mission is to liberalize all aspects of funeral regulation in Germany. <http://www.aeternitas.de/>
With this change, Berlin became one of five states at the time in Germany that allowed for coffinless or shroud burial. In practice, however, shroud burial is only possible if municipal cemetery authorities (*Friedhofsverwaltung*) grant exceptions to allow for burial practices that conform to different religious beliefs. Ismail, the undertaker who offers classes about Islamic beliefs around death, told me that in spite of religious dictates or existing practices in the country of origin, his Muslim customers in Germany were usually amenable to the idea of burial in a coffin:

“It's not easy of course. We live abroad, our people here want to be buried according to their religion. In our countries, you know, people are generally buried with just a shroud. In Arab countries, in Turkey, etc. In Germany, in some states this is okay, in others it is not allowed. In Berlin it is not yet allowed. Legally in Berlin its been accepted, but it hasn't yet been implemented. Because there needs to be a planning session in the cemeteries. They need to figure out how to do it. We're still waiting. On this matter we haven't experienced any problems as of yet-- someone insisting that they are buried only in a shroud. When we say a coffin, our people don't disagree. No problem they say, a coffin is okay. We have a fatwa from Mecca that says there is no problem with a Muslim being buried in a coffin. If necessary we show that too. But we haven't experienced any problems with that. A coffin is okay. And 99% are buried in a coffin. Sometimes there are a few cases, in Hamburg or Hannover who insist on a shroud burial. Whatever the family wants we try to accommodate them.”

Whether Ismail’s customers were willing to bend religious tradition or whether they were resigned to accepting existing German burial laws remains unclear, a point I shall return to below. In spite of the shroud burial law being in effect for more than three years during the time of my fieldwork however, not a single shroud burial had taken place in Berlin.

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233 The other states were North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, and Hamburg. Since 2010 several other German states have eased laws on the mandatory use of coffins for burial and have granted exceptions for both “religious,” “ideological,” and “philosophical” reasons. However, the implementation of shroud burial still remains difficult in practice.
234 Author interview 6.27.13 Berlin.
235 According to newspaper reports, the first shroud burial in Berlin occurred in October 2014. A Jordanian man in his 50s was buried without a coffin in the Muslim section of the Gatow-Spandau cemetery. See Bierman 2014. After I learned about the shroud burial, I called Erinç, one of the undertakers, and asked him about it. He told me that it had happened but that it was still an exception rather than the norm.
Although that is now changing, the number of people buried without a coffin remains low because of cemetery compliance and regulations on the handling of corpses.\footnote{As stated above, cemetery administrators must grant exceptions for burial without a coffin. Furthermore, undertakers and cemetery personnel are not legally permitted to handle a corpse that is not in a coffin. In practice, this means that family members must lower the shrouded corpse into the grave. This poses a number of challenges. According to one of my undertaker informants, family members are reluctant to handle dead bodies. Logistically, the lowering of the body into the grave is difficult owing to the depth (1.60m) and width (1m) of the plot, which makes it difficult for individuals to go in and get out of the grave without disturbing the body.}

A more consequential aspect of the Burial Law concerns the mandatory waiting periods between death and burial and time limitations on the use of a grave plot. The law specifies that burial is only permitted within forty-eight hours after death if medical authorities demand rapid interment to avoid the spread of infectious diseases.\footnote{\textit{Bestattungsgesetz} \S21.} This rule exists “in order to prevent premature burial.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} Once buried, corpses remain underground for twenty years, after which the lease on the burial plot must be renewed. If payments are not made, the remains are exhumed and another corpse is buried in the grave, a practice that is known as “grave recycling.”\footnote{\textit{Friedhofsgesetz} \S11.} The exhumation of bones and re-use of graves contradicts the Islamic principle of perpetual rest for the dead.\footnote{While it is widely accepted that the grave of a Muslim should not be disturbed if there are remnants of flesh, bones, or other body parts still present in the grave, there is some disagreement among Islamic scholars about the legality of clearing out graves. Some argue that it is permissible to dig up a grave and use the land for agriculture, construction or other useful ends if the body has decomposed and turned into soil and dust. Some argue that a grave can be dug up when the body has decomposed but that the land can only be used for the burial of other bodies. See Kadrouch-Outmany 2012 for an overview.}

These two aspects of the burial law were a source of concern for some of my interview partners. A group of elderly Turkish women in their seventies and eighties whom I spoke with at their retirement home in Neukölln were split on the issue. “They’ll bury me here when I die, I’m a German citizen after all” one of them told me. “Are you
another woman interjected, “they dig you up after ten years and dump someone else in the grave!” The woman who wanted to be buried in Germany told me that her husband had been repatriated to his natal village near Yalova, Turkey for burial but that she didn’t want that for herself since her children lived in Germany. This point was made by several other interviewees as we shall see in the next section.

Others were worried about situations where the corpse would be kept waiting for extended periods of time. Like Judaism, Islamic tradition forbids cremation and dictates a speedy burial, though there are no specific guidelines in the Qur’an about what this entails. In practice, most Muslims have interpreted this as a twenty-four hour rule. If possible, an individual should be buried on the same day that they die or within twenty-four hours of their death. This is because of the belief that the corpse is sentient and continues to feel pain until it is buried. While German law stipulates a minimum forty-eight hour waiting period after death, burials can take much longer because of lengthy bureaucratic procedures, as we saw in chapter three.

According to many of the undertakers I interviewed, delays to burial caused considerable distress for their customers and resulted in angry and emotional outbursts directed at them. Recall the story of the döner producer who was compelled to wait outside of the cemetery gates by administrators who refused to allow the burial of his

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241 There are several Hadith that cite Abū Hurayra’s reporting of Mohammed’s pronouncements on funerals: “Hasten at a funeral, for if (the dead person) is good, you would (soon) bring him close to the good. And if it is otherwise, it is an evil of which you are ridding yourselves.”

242 In the writings of al-Ghazālī, the soul is thought to remain with the body until it is brought to the grave. It continues to experience pain until it reaches its final destination. Furthermore, the soul cannot be interrogated by the angels of death, Munkar and Nakir, who weigh the individual’s good and bad deeds to determine whether they will ascend into Heaven or descend into Hell, until the body is in its grave. See Smith and Hadded 2002, especially pages 33 – 50.
mother before the forty-eight hour waiting period had elapsed. When asked about the
Islamic injunction to bury the dead quickly, one of the undertakers, Erinç noted that this
wasn’t always possible in practice and that the anger that ensued was often misguided:

Our religion says that a corpse should be buried as quickly as possible. But when the
public prosecutor keeps a corpse for a week, people wait. Nobody really protests. Why?
Because it’s the state? Because it’s the law? But if we can’t bury a body in one or two
days people create a lot of stress for us. They ask us why we can’t do it faster. If they
really cared, they’d complain to the prosecutor. But they don’t say anything, because
whenever the prosecutor bares his teeth, they shut right up.

In Erinç’s account, Muslim families are less likely or willing to raise objections or
express concern about ensuring a speedy burial when confronted with the state. From the
undertaker’s perspective, frustrations that should be channeled towards laws
circumscribing burial possibilities are instead directed at him. While shedding light on
the power dynamics at work in citizens’ experiences with the state, this anecdote also
offers insight about the ways in which individuals react to undesirable laws and how they
resolve different normative frameworks that are potentially at odds with one another.

Resignation expressed in the face of the law might be understood as a
consequence of the marginalized position of immigrants in Germany. Although granted
formal equality, ethno-religious minorities might feel intimidated by state authorities and
hesitate to press their claims. On the other hand, this reaction might also indicate that
religious traditions are more flexible than conventionally assumed. As Campo has
argued, “Muslim funerary and bereavement practices take shape in the space of what is
prescribed and what is performed, where the performed might also contradict or resist the
prescribed.” Such flexibility helps explain why families who decide to transport their dead to the country of origin tend to disregard or at the very least, worry less about the temporal requirements for burial. According to many of my informants, getting the body “back home” was more important than ensuring a rapid burial. People were less concerned about the possibility that the process of repatriation might take several days because they were comforted by the belief that the body was being taken to its proper resting place.

Given inconsistencies between German burial laws and Islamic funerary traditions, how do Turkish-German Muslims address the challenges posed by death out of place? Having sketched out the legal and religious landscapes, I now turn to the various factors that influence their decisions about where and how to be buried and the significance attributed to the location of burial. As evidenced by the narratives below, end-of-life rituals and practices help clarify social identities and group boundaries. The act of burial renders visible a variety of overlapping commitments, loyalties, and attachments, be they at the level of the family or the nation, to particular ethnic groups and religious communities, and to places and territories. Such attachments are made meaningful by ideas about genealogical continuity and are central to conceptualizing the links between burial and belonging.

\[243\] Campo 2006: 160.
A home after death

Few existing cross-national surveys on immigrant attitudes and values in Europe consider end-of-life choices and preferences. Those that do offer limited information. One such example is the Generations and Gender Survey, a longitudinal survey of eighteen to seventy-nine year olds in nineteen (mostly European) countries.\textsuperscript{244} It contains a sample of around four thousand Turkish migrants and includes several questions about religious practices and beliefs, including whether or not it is important for a funeral to include a religious ceremony. While the survey shows that 87\% of Turkish respondents believe that a religious ceremony is an important component of a funeral (compared to 66\% of non-migrants), this information tells us nothing about what constitutes a religious ceremony, whether such a ceremony is viable given restrictions on burial practices, and whether religious beliefs even factor into decisions about where the body will be buried.\textsuperscript{245}

The only quantitative research on the burial choices of migrant communities in Europe that I am aware of is Attias-Donfut et al.’s 2005 study of the preferred burial locations of immigrant groups in France.\textsuperscript{246} The authors propose three categories of

\textsuperscript{244} See <http://www.ggp-i.org/>
\textsuperscript{245} Drawing on data from the GGS Survey, Milewski and Otto (2016) find that compared to other religious indicators, such as attendance at places of worship or the importance of having religious rituals during other crucial life-course events such as marriages, funeral ceremonies are seen as the most important religious practice, even among respondents who do not attribute high importance to religious practices in other life stages. The authors conclude that “although religiosity may have declined and may continue to do so, Turkish migrants and their descendants place considerable weight on religiosity at the end of life.” Milewski and Otto 2016: 173
\textsuperscript{246} Their study is based on data from a survey conducted in 2002-2003 among 6,000 immigrants aged 45 to 70 through a joint initiative of the French National Pension Fund (CNAV) and the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). The survey on ageing and retirement of immigrants in France (\textit{Passage à la retraite des immigrés}) included responses from immigrants (defined by place of birth—
factors that influence burial decisions: territorial attachments to ‘home’ and ‘host’
countries, religious affiliation, and family attachments via kinship ties. While not
focusing on migrants, other studies of burial preferences in Spain, France, and Sweden,
also stress the importance of religious, family, and territorial attachments in decisions
about the location of burial.247

Such studies are useful for understanding general trends and might also find a
practical application in estimating future demand for burial spaces in different places. Yet
teasing out the different elements that influence burial preferences and what they mean
for migrant communities whose funerary practices are undergoing change in the context
of migration requires fine-grained ethnographic research and interviews that survey data
alone cannot provide. This chapter contributes to a small but growing area of qualitative
research on burial preferences in migratory settings and finds that in addition to familial
and territorial attachments, feelings of social exclusion also play a prominent role in
shaping burial decisions.248

The narratives presented below draw on interviews conducted in Berlin between
2013 – 15. In selecting my interview partners, I was guided by contacts at mosques and
cultural centers that serve different segments of Berlin’s immigrant communities,
including members of Sunni, Shi’a, and Alevi faiths as well as individuals with both
Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds. I also visited youth centers and senior citizens’ homes
in order to capture the perspectives of different generational cohorts. Many conversations

outside of France—and nationality at birth—non French), from Spain, Italy, Portugal, Algeria, Morocco,
and Tunisia.
247 On Spain and France see Casal et al 2010, on Sweden Marjavaara 2012.
were held with strangers in coffee shops and restaurants, and I was often invited into people’s homes to speak at further length over coffee or tea. Snowball sampling allowed me to make new contacts through existing interlocutors and helped earn the trust of respondents who spoke candidly about sensitive issues. On more than one occasion, my interview partners became very emotional while describing the death and burial of a loved one. In spite of the difficult nature of the topic however, most respondents were forthcoming and open about their experiences.

Through these conversations, I learned that burial laws and religious norms were often of secondary importance to end-of-life decisions. In explaining their own preferences and reflecting on the decisions of others, my interview partners emphasized the role of the family, the significance of territory and soil, and one’s own position within German society as the most important factors influencing burial outcomes. While as previously mentioned, some of my respondents expressed unease about time limitations on German grave plots, only one person maintained that this was a compelling reason to forgo burial in Germany. Ideas about family, soil, and social position lent credence to my interlocutor’s attachments to Turkey and Germany and were central in their narratives about the significance of life, death, and burial in the context of migration.

Though I have distinguished them for analytical purposes, narratives about family ties, the significance of soil, and the importance of social position often overlap, complement, and at times contradict each other. Families, for example, can act as both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors when it comes to determining the proper burial location. Likewise, the soil itself is endowed with a multiplicity of meanings. Finally, feelings of
social exclusion can translate to a stronger desire for repatriation but conversely, burial in Germany can serve as a means by which to assert one’s true place in the body politic.

In one of the earliest studies of Islamic funerary practices in Germany, Gerdien Jonker observed that “Islamic burials are still a very rare sight in Berlin” and “until the recent past, only 2% of Muslim migrants have actually been buried there.” Her ethnographic research in the mid-1990s called attention to the ambivalence of migrants between “here” and “there” as they confronted death outside of their natal lands. According to estimates by Islamic undertakers in Berlin, in 2014-2015, around twenty to thirty percent of Turkish Germans were buried locally while seventy to eighty percent were repatriated to Turkey for burial. As we saw in chapter two, members of funeral funds were repatriated at an even higher rate—95%—owing in part to the material incentives provided by the funds themselves.

In assessing this trend, my interview partners suggested that the increase in the number of local burials was driven in part by the widespread recognition that Turkish families had become permanent residents in Germany. The decision to be buried in Germany was viewed as a coming to terms with the decades-long process of settlement. One of my informants, a Kurdish man in his mid-40s whom I’ll call Murat saw a direct connection between burial and settlement. Murat helps organize funerals for the Kurdish community in Berlin and has been living in Germany for more than fifteen years.

I met him at the Navenda Mizgefta Mezopotamya mosque, just off the busy commercial strip of Karl-Marx Straße in southern Neukölln. The yellow walls of the

249 Jonker 1996.
mosque courtyard were spray painted with partisan graffiti, which included several slogans in support of the Kurdish separatist movement and the PKK. Speaking with reference to the third generation, he told me “They are here for good. God forbid, but when they die, they are buried here. This proves that they are here to stay. They aren’t immigrants. They are permanent members of this society.”250 He noted that in an earlier era, only stillborn babies were buried in Germany but that increasingly, adults were buried there too. “For people who live here,” he observed, “this place is a part of them. This is a reality. Germany has become like a homeland [vatan]. We [Kurds] feel freer here. We can speak more freely here.”

Corporeal assertions of belonging deploy the body as an anchor. In some cases, the dead are anchored by their children. “Many of the first generation migrants have children and grandchildren here [in Germany]” explained a Turkish undertaker who worked alongside Ismail, quoted above. “So they say to themselves, why should I be buried there [in Turkey]? If I’m buried here, at least my children and grandchildren will be able to visit my grave.” Expressing a similar sentiment, one of the elderly Turkish woman at the retirement home whom I introduced earlier told me, “When I die, I want to be buried here. My children are here.”

Making it easier for future generations to visit and tend their graves was a common reason why individuals wanted to remain in the same country as their children after death. As Francis et al. observe in their study of cemetery-goers in London, the rituals associated with the maintenance of gravesites, like the planting of flowers and the

250 Author interview 07.04 2014, Berlin.
creation of personalized memorials not only help individuals cope with grief, but also keep the identity of the deceased alive and regenerate their relationships after death. The different ways that the location of a grave helped structure relationships between the living and the dead was a theme that came up frequently in my conversations.

A Kurdish man whom I interviewed at the Berlin Dersim Kultur Gemeinde, a cultural center whose efforts are directed to individuals from the south-eastern province of Tunceli (formerly Dersim), Turkey, expressed concern that no one would honor his memory by visiting his grave if he were repatriated for burial. “The villages are empty,” he told me. “If you’re buried in Germany, someone can visit you every week or on holidays. They can leave some flowers on your grave or at the very least, come and look at it.”

Just as future generations anchor the dead, the dead can anchor future generations. Some of my respondents thought that repatriation was desirable because it would encourage the children and grandchildren of the deceased to maintain a connection to their ancestral soil. A retired Turkish nurse who came to Germany as a young child told me that her husband “wants to be buried in his homeland so our children visit him and maintain ties to Turkey.” Although she herself expressed a desire to be buried in Germany, she wondered if she should be buried alongside her husband for their children’s sake. “When you become a mother or a father,” she told me, “you think of your children even after death.”

Francis et al. 2005.
Author interview 07.02.2014, Berlin.
Two Dedes [Alevi religious leaders] whom I interviewed at the Alevitsche Gemeinde Zu Berlin in Kreuzberg also emphasized the importance of maintaining affective connections to ancestral lands. We spoke in their office, located on the second floor of the Cem Evi [house of worship], housed in a converted church building. The main hall featured giant banners of the Caliph Ali standing next to a lion with a curved sword in his hand. The Dedes stressed the importance of the land, soil, and the historical depth that ancestral village cemeteries provide for the community: “Our graves are our genealogical records,” they told me. “I know my grandfather’s grave. For me this is history. I don’t have to ask anyone, I can go there and see two hundred, two hundred and fifty years of history. My child sees it too, and for him the grave is a reference point. For us Alevis, this is very important.”

The village cemeteries thus served as an important referent for the diaspora, since they offered corporeal proof of their history and genealogy. The Dedes believed that it was important for their children and grandchildren to know where their ancestors came from, who they were and what they stood for. Hence, repatriation was a favorable option for the deceased.

A Kurdish activist who has lived in Germany as a political refugee for more than thirty years also thought that repatriation was an important means though which connections to the homeland would be maintained and strengthened over successive generations. “The third generation is losing its connections to the country,” he told me over a cup of tea at Kreuzberg’s Kottbusser Tor, in the heart of Turkish Berlin. His cell phone buzzed continuously throughout our conversation and we were interrupted several
times by well-wishers who stopped to greet him and say hello. The activist supported repatriation as a means “to prevent people from severing their ties to their country and their soil.” “This isn’t nationalism,” he continued, “people say that your homeland is where you are born, but you should be buried in your own soil too.”

What is notable about this account is the way that the activist disassociates his love of the soil with a feeling of nationalism. The desire to be buried in one’s own soil, in one’s own country is portrayed as something beyond mere nationalism, which connects to a deeper, existential sense of belonging. Perhaps it speaks to the dilemmas faced by political exiles, who often remain cut off from but deeply invested in their countries of origin.

As Edward Said has argued, “nationalisms are about groups, but in a very acute sense exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation.” Repatriation and burial in one’s natal soil might be understood as a means to overcome the contradictions of exile and to reassert ownership over a particular territory and place. Furthermore, as both the activist and the Alevi Dedes point out, it is a means through which communal continuity is maintained and memories are transmitted. For descendants, the decedent offers silent but powerful proof of who belongs where.

These examples demonstrate how graves and burial sites generate a sense of belonging across time and space. Narratives about the past (ancestors) and the future (ensuing generations) refer not only to the immediate family members in question, but to

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a broader communal identity. Graves, which are central to the construction of place-attachments, are made meaningful through an awareness of genealogy. The ability to trace lineages and draw historical linkages between the past and the present underpins the significance of place attachments.

As we have seen, ideas about the family and communal continuity play a central role in justifying decisions about burial locations, but in contrary ways. In some situations, people wish to preserve their connections to future generations through posthumous proximity. In other cases, being laid to rest among one’s ancestors seems to function as a sign of respect and loyalty for communal history. More generally, there is a recognition that the dead moor the living by conferring historical depth and significance to place. Hence the idea that graves serve as reference points and draw people to ancestral lands.

When my interview partners articulated why it was important that these ties and connections were sustained, the physical landscape played a central role. “The mountains, the soil, the air and water are completely different. You even miss the stones,” a Turkish woman in her fifties who had emigrated to Berlin as a child told me in justifying her decision to be repatriated for burial. Another respondent, an elderly Kurdish man recounted that “the soil is honor and wealth. It means everything.”

In describing why he wanted to be buried in his familial village, he reasoned that: “I was born in that soil and I will return to it. That’s my own view at least. That’s where I was born. Sometimes my wife will tell me, let’s get buried here [in Germany] if that’s
what our kids want. But I say, forget about it, bring us back to the homeland. When I die I want to be brought back to the homeland so that when I rot, when I’m eaten, the bugs and the ants from my village eat me. That’s what I always say.”

The idea of return has been read as a search for “re-grounding.”255 These two accounts highlight how the ground itself—the soil and everything in it—are central to imaginaries of belonging. If migratory processes are understood as cyclical, then the return of the dead body to its natal soil seems to offer some sort of resolution and closure.

“The soil pulls you” is a phrase that I heard repeatedly in my conversations about the significance of repatriation. Imbued with extraordinary qualities, the soil seems to offer an opportunity for redemption. One of my informants, a successful business owner in his early forties who operates a series of restaurants in Berlin, provided an exemplary account in this vein. We spoke at a café near his office in the posh neighborhood of Charlottenburg, an area of Berlin where there are very few immigrants. “Our soil is there [Turkey],” he asserted. “I want to be buried there too. I grew up here [Germany], but that is our soil. We live here, we do everything here, but this place never fully accepted us and it never will. It’s impossible. Really impossible. That’s why we’ll always remain foreigners. So what’s the point of being buried in a foreign country?”

Here the link between social exclusion and the desire for repatriation is made explicit. Stating that it is impossible for him to be fully accepted in German society, he seeks refuge in a soil that he claims ownership of. Social death gives rise to a longing for

254 Author interview 07.07.2014 Berlin.
256 Author interview 08.15.2014 Berlin.
belonging that can only be achieved after physical death and return to the natal soil.

Another informant, a retired Turkish factory worker in his mid-60s put it even more bluntly. “Let me speak very frankly” he began. “I’ve been scorned in Germany. I’ve been despised and disparaged. That’s why I want to be buried where I was born. I have a homeland. Why should I be buried here? Whenever something happens in Germany, they always blame the Turks. My grave should be in Turkey. I’m determined. If my family wants to join me, fine. If not, it doesn’t matter. I was always Ausländer [foreigner]. I don’t want to be Ausländer in my grave!”

These two statements exemplify the potential disconnect that exists between formal, legal membership and symbolic membership in a political community. Experiences with racism, discrimination, or xenophobia generate a feeling of perpetual foreignness, a stigma which follows individuals to the grave. Repatriation here might be read as an act of defiance that signals the rejection of a political community that excludes. On the other hand, the posthumous homecoming imagined in these accounts belies the profound disillusionment that can characterize such journeys—a disillusionment that grows in proportion to the gulf between nostalgia and reality. In either case, the narratives help elucidate how membership and belonging to political communities is signaled and made meaningful through end-of-life rituals and practices.

257 Author interview 08.09.2014 Berlin.
Conclusion

In illustrating the different reasons that shape decisions about burial location and the significance that the place of burial has for first- and second-generation Turkish and Kurdish migrants in Berlin, this chapter has suggested that burial laws have a limited impact on burial outcomes. Other considerations, such as family and kinship ties, territorial attachments and ideas about the soil, and feelings of social exclusion play a more prominent role in determining where an individual is buried and how the location of burial is interpreted.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that funerary practices and burial decisions offer an important perspective into how membership in national and political communities is negotiated by ethno-religious minorities in migratory settings. My findings suggest that legal reforms alone are insufficient to generate a sense of belonging for marginalized groups. While securing greater access to burial grounds and accommodating the funerary traditions of all religious faiths are undoubtedly positive steps in ensuring equality under the law, these efforts must be combined with initiatives that combat structural discrimination and promote full and equal recognition for all members of German society.

Recent endeavors, such as amendments to Germany’s citizenship law removing descent-based requirements for naturalization, have made it easier for migrants and their children to obtain citizenship rights. Yet the law places restrictions on dual citizenship and demands that Turkish citizens relinquish their Turkish citizenship in order to obtain a
German passport. What is a political question becomes an existential one as second- and third- generation migrants are forced to choose between different parts of themselves. Such questions are mirrored in decisions about where to be buried. While death is undoubtedly a universally shared human experience, it poses distinct challenges for minority communities in migratory settings. Death of out place is a rupture that foregrounds questions that are central to the migratory experience: Who am I and where do I belong?

As such, death is a moment of both crisis and opportunity. In confronting loss, individuals and groups are also presented with an opportunity to assert corporeal and symbolic claims on the nation. Through burial decisions, families can signal what they value and where they belong. By studying the social practices that link the dead to the living, we are thus better positioned to see how the boundaries of political communities are meaningful and consequential in both life and in death.
CONCLUSION: AFTERLIVES

In the days following the failed coup attempt of July 15, Turkish authorities unveiled a new burial ground. Adjacent to an open-air municipal dog shelter in Balıca, a small town in the distant outskirts of Istanbul, lies the “Cemetery of Traitors.”

Established to hold the remains of plotters who died in the attempted coup, the cemetery received its first inhabitant, the body of a 34-year-old military captain, on July 25th. He was buried unceremoniously in an unmarked grave. In advance of his burial, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) had issued a directive instructing imams and other religious functionaries to withhold funeral prayers and services for those who perished while trying to overthrow the government.

“A funeral prayer is intended as an act of exoneration for the faithful,” the Directorate declared. “But these people, with the actions that they undertook, have disregarded not just individuals but also the law of an entire nation and therefore do not deserve exoneration from their faithful brothers and sisters.”

“Those who pass by [the cemetery] will curse them. Everyone should curse them and not let them rest,” the Mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbaş told supporters at a pro-democracy rally that “those who pass by [the cemetery] will curse them. Everyone should curse them and not let them rest.”

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258 The statement is available online at: <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/diyanet-oldurulen-darbecilere-din-hizmeti-verilmeyecektir-120632.html> Accessed August 17, 2016. The rest of the statement reads as follows: “Our office will not provide funerary services to the coup plotters who revolted against our country’s legitimate government and targeted the survival of our state, who dropped bombs on the Turkish Parliament and other public buildings and mercilessly took up arms against the people, and who died while doing so.”
in their tombs. They cannot escape hell but we must also make them suffer in their graves."\(^259\)

Not everyone was happy about the Cemetery of Traitors. Serhun Baturay, a 57-year old who volunteers at the dog shelter adjacent to the cemetery told reporters that “they should have buried them somewhere far from our animals… They shouldn’t be placed near our dogs. They shouldn’t be anywhere in Turkey. They should be cremated and their ashes tossed into the ocean. There shouldn’t be a trace of them anywhere in the country. As a Turkish citizen I don’t want such a thing.”\(^260\)

Baturay’s comments echoed those made by French mayor Laurent Vastel in the wake of the attacks on the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and the kosher supermarket *Hyper Cacher* in January 2015. Vastel, mayor of Fontenay-aux-Roses, the last known residence of one of the perpetrators of the attacks, worried about the possibility that a terrorist would be buried in his town. The mayor suggested that the bodies of terrorists should subjected to “mandatory cremation” in order to prevent their graves from becoming “unhealthy shrines.”\(^261\)

Under Article L2223-3 of the *Code Général des Collectivités Territoriales*, French citizens are entitled to burial in the district where they lived or died. The French government initially tried to export the corpses of the terrorists to Mali and Algeria, the countries where their parents had emigrated to France from. Yet ultimately the three men,


\(^{260}\) Quoted in Associated Press 2016.

\(^{261}\) Quoted in Saliceti 2015.
all of whom were French citizens, were buried in France, albeit in unmarked graves under the cover of darkness with no friends or family members present. “I didn’t have a choice,” explained Patrice Leclerc, a member of the French Communist Party (PCF) and mayor of Gennevilliers, where one of the attackers was buried. “Like all mayors, I would prefer to avoid burying a terrorist in my territory, but I applied the law.”

The corpses of terrorists are exceptional in part because they represent a threat to the state. As Mayor Vastel noted, the graves of such figures have the potential to become shrines, an idea that preoccupied other French officials in the wake of the attacks. Policymakers on the other side of the Atlantic expressed similar concerns. In the aftermath of the killing of Osama bin Laden, White House officials announced that they had decided to bury him at sea in order to prevent his grave from becoming a shrine for his followers.

Taking to the airwaves, President Obama proclaimed that the world’s most wanted man was dead and that Navy Seals “took custody of his body,” a point that was echoed by a senior administration official in the press briefing that followed the President’s speech. “We are ensuring that it is handled in accordance with Islamic

263 Mayor Leclerc noted that Chérif Kouachi’s grave would remain anonymous, i.e. unmarked, “to prevent any threat to public order and to preserve the tranquility of the city.” Quoted in “Chérif Kouachi devrait être enterré à Gennevilliers sans son frère Said.” Available online: <http://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/medias/charlie-hebdo/cherif-kouachidevrait-etre-enterre-a-gennevilliers-sans-son-frere-said_799485.html>. Accessed August 17, 2016.
264 Leland and Bumiller 2011.
practice and tradition,” the official noted, adding that “this is something we take very seriously.”

According to official accounts, Bin Laden’s corpse was first taken to an American military airfield in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, and then to the USS Carl Vinson, a supercarrier on patrol in the North Arabian Sea. Asked about Bin Laden’s burial, John Brennan, a top homeland security and counter-terrorism advisor told reporters that “the best way to ensure that his body was given an appropriate Islamic burial was to take those actions that would allow us to do that burial at sea.” Brennan added that “appropriate specialists and experts” had been consulted and that the military performed the burial in a manner that was “consistent with Islamic law.”

Bin Laden’s secret burial at sea was meant to erase any trace of his physical remains. As in the case of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks and the soldiers killed in the failed coup, political actors were committed to controlling the fate of the corpses and, by extension, shaping the conditions of their memorialization. In each case, state authorities utilized different strategies of erasure as a means of regulation.

In the French example, attempts to export the corpses and to obstruct their burial in France were moves that erased the gunmen’s citizenship and legal status, while the decision to bury them in unmarked graves was an erasure of their personhood and

266 Quoted in Hersch 2015. Contrary to the White House’s claims, Seymour Hersch asserts that bin Laden’s body was never actually buried at sea but instead reduced to pieces by rifle fire and tossed over the Hindu Kush mountains by the Navy SEAL team that killed him on their flight to Jalalabad.
267 Ibid.
memory. In the Turkish example, the state denied coup plotters Islamic funerary rites and buried them in unmarked graves in a cemetery that was built specifically to vilify those buried within it by explicitly marking them as traitors. Finally, the burial of Bin Laden was performed in complete secrecy in a manner that would eradicate his body and foreclose the possibility of his having posthumous power and influence.  

These examples help illustrate the political stakes of burial practices. They demonstrate the degree to which states and other political actors are invested in corpse management. More broadly, they show how the handling of the dead helps shape the contours of political communities. The burials of terrorists, criminals, and other enemies of the state are perhaps, exceptional moments in the exercise of sovereign power. What such moments show however, is the symbolic power of the corpse.

In this dissertation, I have examined a variety of actors and institutions that regulate the movement of dead bodies within and across international borders. I began with the premise that a death in migration constitutes a death out of place and argued that through burial practices individuals assert their membership in different political and religious communities. The rites and rituals associated with death and burial are place-making practices par excellence. Dead bodies imbue symbolic and emotional meaning to

268 What is noteworthy about the burial of bin Laden and the three perpetrators of the Paris attacks is that both the French and U.S. governments went to great lengths to declare publicly that they had provided full Islamic funerary rites and had handled the bodies in a manner that was congruent with Islamic law. While there is no way to verify the accuracy of such declarations, the fact that both governments found it necessary to make such claims in the first place demonstrates their recognition of the captivating power of the corpse and the public outrage that its mistreatment might provoke. Providing a proper burial to one’s enemy is also a way of declaring moral superiority. In contrast, the Turkish government actively sought to de-humanize their enemies by denying them proper burial rites.
the soils in which they are buried and confer extraordinary qualities to otherwise ordinary places.

One way to resolve the dilemmas caused by death out of place is to put the body in its proper place. Yet there is no natural place for a dead body to go. In situations where one’s status in a particular community is ambiguous or contested, burial decisions become politicized. Because the corpse is charged with symbolic power, people have strong opinions about where it should or should not go. Just as death can be experienced out of place, a dead body can also be viewed as out of place, depending on the circumstances of an individual’s biography. As the examples I have cited above show, the corpses of terrorists are unwanted bodies, precisely because state authorities and others view them as symbolically polluting. The corpse of a terrorist sullies the soil that it is buried in. It is, by extension, a blemish on the nation.

This study has focused on the burial of the ordinary dead. However, even the burial of ordinary citizens can be politically fraught. We saw how transnational funeral funds used moral and economic incentives to encourage the repatriation of Turkish corpses to Turkey for burial. I also described how death becomes politicized as a litmus test of immigrant integration and cultural competence. Efforts to place the dead in a particular ethnic, national, and religious community were central to the construction and articulation of posthumous identities on the tombstones of immigrant graves. Finally, negotiations over where and how to be buried revealed the different ways in which experiences of social exclusion carried over in death and how Turkish and Kurdish
communities in Germany expressed their ties to land, soil, and family through their burial decisions.

With the long-term settlement of Muslim citizens in Europe, questions over the viability of Islamic burial rites are only likely to multiply. The burial of Muslims is a subtle but important sign of their belonging in Europe. In recent years however, a number of political and economic developments have created a climate of suspicion around European Muslims and Islam in Europe more generally. These developments include acts of political violence perpetrated by self-professed Muslims, the arrival of more than one million refugees fleeing ongoing violence in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, a global economic downturn and an increase in levels of unemployment in advanced industrial countries, and the rise of right-wing xenophobic parties that believe in the fundamental incompatibility of Islam and the West. A hostile political atmosphere where fears of homegrown terrorism have reached fever pitch, has created a situation where the figures of the migrant and refugee are conflated with the terrorist and immigration policies are increasingly securitized.

The migrant, refugee, and terrorist occupy a spectrum of unwanted bodies. While these categories might be read as symptomatic of a Manichean vision of the world where the existential basis of a political community rests on the distinction between citizens and foreigners, insiders and outsiders, or friends and enemies, the categories themselves are unstable and subject to change. One way to understand how such categories function in political life is to analyze the different strategies that states employ in their efforts to
govern the bodies of both the living and the dead. Jesus advised his followers to “let the
dead bury their own dead,” but rarely are the dead left to their own devices.

This dissertation has shown that many different groups have a vested interest in
the fate of dead bodies and has highlighted the ways in which the corpse functions as a
political object by structuring claims about citizenship, belonging, and collective identity.
While I have largely focused on the funerals and burial practices of immigrants and
ordinary citizens in one time and place, these experiences are an important part of the
larger and richer story of the political afterlives of dead bodies.


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