

# The Transnational Afterlives of European Muslims

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As Sigmund Freud once observed, “everyone owes nature a death.”<sup>1</sup> Most people, except those who commit suicide, have no control over their own death; they do not know when, where, or how they are going to die. However, many have a say over where and how to be buried or otherwise handled after their death. Such decisions are deeply personal, reflecting, among other things, different ideas about the body, the soul, and the after-life. They take on an added political valence in postmigratory settings where racial and religious minorities face systematic barriers to full citizenship and equal social standing. For immigrants and their children, the moment of death is a critical juncture where long-standing questions about the meaning of home and homeland come to the fore. In determining whether to inhumate their loved ones locally or to repatriate their remains to ancestral soils for burial, families with migratory histories wrestle with a complex set of emotional, cultural, and political questions that reflect their ambivalent status in dominant national imaginaries. At a moment when widespread xenophobia and cultural chauvinism has once again revealed the tenuous nature of political community in many European societies, end-of-life practices offer an arresting and underexplored site to examine the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. They illustrate how the elusive quest for belonging can follow individuals to the grave.

This article draws on ethnographic research conducted in Marseilles, France (by Yumna Masarwa), and Berlin, Germany (by Osman Balkan), which included participant observation with Muslim death-care workers (undertakers and corpse washers) and interviews with first- and second-generation immigrant families, consular officials, and representatives of Islamic civil society associations and funeral funds offering postmortem services. Through these interviews as well as close readings of primary source materials like burial laws, insurance contracts, and advertisements for Islamic funerary services, we gained insight into the actors, networks, institutions, and legal structures that determine the movement of dead bodies within and across international borders. We also began to apprehend the significance that individuals from different backgrounds attribute to the location of burial and the different reasons motivating their decisions to repatriate or bury locally.

Although we conducted our fieldwork separately in two distinct urban settings, we discovered significant points of convergence in our interlocutors’ reflections on end-of-life decisions and their sociocultural and political implications. Our findings contribute to a growing body of transdisciplinary scholarship that takes death as a productive, generative starting point and sees in postmortem rituals and practices a useful window into sovereignty,<sup>2</sup> borders,<sup>3</sup> citizenship,<sup>4</sup> gender,<sup>5</sup> and world making.<sup>6</sup> By illustrating what might be understood as the “push” and “pull” factors that determine the afterlives of European Muslims, this article complements existing work on death in (post)migratory settings.<sup>7</sup> Acknowledging the great diversity of migratory trajectories around the world, we see important commonalities in what Yasmin Gunaratnam has called “transnational dying”<sup>8</sup> that shed light on the complexities and contradictions of political membership, identity, and belonging in the twenty-first century.

Our approach to the question of how minoritized communities navigate transnational dying is informed by postcolonial studies of migration and the politics of difference in Europe. As Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and others have argued,

while there is no linear connection between the colonial and the postcolonial, unequal relations of power between colonizers and colonized populations were reconfigured in the wake of mass South-North migrations in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary European debates about immigration, diversity, and social cohesion rely on increasingly culturalized categories of race and religion to enforce distinctions between “Europeans” and “non-Europeans.” As Fatima El-Tayeb has shown, such distinctions are premised on the idea of a “self-contained and homogeneous Europe in which racialized minorities remain outsiders permanently.”<sup>10</sup> In spite of their generation’s long presence or citizenship status, minoritized populations remain perpetual foreigners who “constantly have to prove their presence is legitimate.”<sup>11</sup> This article demonstrates that such distinctions are consequential in both life and in death.

After briefly introducing our research sites and methodologies, we discuss the different reasons that individuals with migratory histories opt for repatriation or local burial and the significance that they attribute to such decisions.<sup>12</sup> Our interviews reveal how end-of-life decisions are informed by ideas about the meaning of home and homeland, feelings of belonging and alienation, a sense of responsibility to ancestors or future generations, hopes for the afterlife, and attachments to particular places. We discuss such considerations both for individuals who wish to have their bodies repatriated to ancestral soils after death and for those who wish to be buried in France and Germany, highlighting some of the continuities and contradictions in these different points of view. In an effort to foreground the voices of our interlocutors, we quote heavily from our interviews, mindful that some statements overlap with one another. In our conclusion, we discuss how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Islamic deathways in Europe and reflect on the public policy challenges facing European Muslims in their efforts to bury their dead.

### Living and Dying in Marseilles and Berlin

Neither France nor Germany compile demographic data about race, ethnicity, or religious belief in their national censuses. According to a 2016 Pew survey, however, France is home to the largest number of Muslims in Western Europe. Approximately 5.7 million Muslims live in France, comprising 8.8 percent of its total population while 4.95 million Muslims live in Germany, accounting for 6.1 percent of its population.<sup>13</sup> Of Muslims in France 75 percent have ancestral connections to Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, while roughly 63 percent

of Muslims in Germany trace their origins to Turkey.<sup>14</sup> There is, of course, a great deal of heterogeneity within Turkish and Algerian-origin Muslim communities in France, according to this Pew survey, with respect to sect (Sunni/Shia/Alevi), ethnicity (Turkish/Kurdish; Algerian/Kabyle/Berber), and of course, level of religiosity. Our use of the term *Muslim* to characterize this diverse population reflects the self-identification of our interlocutors, who described themselves as Muslims, even though some used the term more loosely as a cultural, rather than a religious category.

Despite their numerical minority, Muslims play an outsized role in public debates about social cohesion, integration, and national identity in France and Germany. Their heightened visibility contributes to substantial errors in public perceptions of demographic realities. Survey respondents in both countries vastly overestimate the actual number of Muslims as well as the future projections of Muslim populations. A 2016 Ipsos Mori survey found that respondents in France believed that 31 percent of the country’s population was Muslim and projected that the number would grow to 40 percent in four years’ time.<sup>15</sup> In Germany, respondents believed that 21 percent of the country’s population was Muslim and projected that Muslims would comprise 40 percent of Germany’s population in four years’ time.<sup>16</sup> Such misperceptions may be linked to fears of demographic threat—what some white supremacists in Europe call The Great Replacement.

Furthermore, a sociopolitical climate that is generally hostile to Islam contributes to discrimination and a sense of alienation among many European Muslims. Recent public opinion polls in Germany found that 46 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “there are too many Muslims in Germany,” and 58 percent agreed that “the practice of religion should be severely limited for Muslims.”<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly a study by the Open Society in Berlin revealed that 89 percent of Muslims believe that they are not perceived as German by others.<sup>18</sup> Among these respondents, 79 percent reported that they had been discriminated against because of their race, while 74 percent asserted that they had been discriminated against because of their religion on at least one occasion in the previous year.<sup>19</sup> In addition to everyday forms of racial and religious discrimination, several studies have also highlighted the systematic barriers faced by European Muslims in equal access to education, housing, and employment.<sup>20</sup>

Against this backdrop, we focus on the burial decisions of the two most visible and populous Muslim communities in Marseilles and Berlin—those with ancestral

ties to Algeria and Turkey, respectively. It is estimated that a quarter of Marseilles' population is Muslim, with Algerians and their descendants constituting the largest Muslim population in France in general and in Marseilles in particular, making this Mediterranean city a microcosm for understanding the broader experiences of French Muslims, their relations with the French state, their attitudes toward death and their beliefs about the afterlife.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Berlin is an important hub for Turkish-German life. Often described as the largest Turkish city outside of Turkey owing to its sizable Turkish diaspora, neighborhoods such as Kreuzberg and Neukölln have become iconic sites of transnationalism and cultural syncretism.<sup>22</sup>

Through our interviews, we discovered that repatriation to what they call the *bled* or *memleket* (hometown) was the preferred option for the majority of our respondents, especially among first-generation immigrants and individuals holding burial insurance policies. Based on information provided by Muslim undertakers and data released by funeral funds administered by the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB) and The Islamic Community National Vision (UKBA), whose combined membership is roughly 375,000 across Western Europe, we estimate that between 70 and 85 percent of French Algerians and Turkish Germans are repatriated for burial. Members of DITIB and UKBA's funeral funds are repatriated at an even higher rate—close to 95 percent.<sup>23</sup> While we do not wish to make definitive statements about the exact volume of repatriation because of the limited availability of empirical data, our findings are in line with existing work on the cross-border repatriation of minoritized communities in Europe. These studies, which focus on Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in the Netherlands and Belgium, Moroccan and Senegalese-origin migrants in Spain, Alevi communities in Germany, and Bengali Muslims in London, attest to the widespread practice of posthumous repatriation to countries of birth or origin for burial.<sup>24</sup> In this article, we seek to disentangle the reasons behind such decisions and what they signify for our respondents.

As mentioned above, the interviews that we draw on were conducted separately in different places and moments in time. Balkan carried out his fieldwork in Berlin and Istanbul between 2013 and 2017, while Masarwa's ongoing multisited fieldwork commenced in Marseilles in August 2018. Our research included extensive participant observation of the Islamic death-care industry in Berlin and Marseilles. Balkan worked alongside Muslim undertakers in several Islamic funeral homes, accompanying them on trips to hospitals, morgues, municipal

offices, mosques, airports, and cemeteries. He also participated in local funeral ceremonies and helped prepare corpses for international repatriation. Masarwa worked alongside female corpse washers who are tasked with the washing (*ghusl*), shrouding (*kafan*), and entombing of deceased female Muslims. In addition to our ethnographic research, we conducted interviews with numerous actors involved in end-of-life care as well as bereaved families and first- and second-generation immigrants in both Arabic and French (Masarwa) and Turkish (Balkan) languages we speak with native proficiency. Taken together, we interviewed approximately three hundred fifty men and women between the ages of twenty and eighty. These individuals represented a cross-section of the Turkish and Algerian communities in Berlin and Marseilles, comprising members of different socioeconomic classes, levels of education, and citizenship statuses. In addition to members of the public, we also interviewed key informants with expert, firsthand knowledge of Islamic funerals in Germany and France, such as Muslim undertakers and palliative care workers, imams, and representatives of burial insurance providers.

Balkan's interviews took place in funeral homes, mosques, civil society associations, elderly care facilities, youth centers, consulates, and in people's homes. Masarwa has been conducting her interviews in mosques, hospitals, consulates, homes, humanitarian associations, and at an Islamic funeral home in Marseilles's Third District (*3ème arrondissement*), a neighborhood with a high concentration of Muslim residents that is one of the city's poorest areas. Founded in 1991, the funeral home specializes in body repatriation and offers its members an insurance policy called *assurance décès* (burial insurance). Masarwa has been interviewing members who visit the funeral home to renew their insurance policy or to obtain a new one as well as bereaved families with insurance policies and others who seek out funerary services.

Members of the *assurance décès* can choose between two kinds of annual burial insurance—one that covers local burial in France or one that covers posthumous repatriation to the country of origin of the deceased.<sup>25</sup> In both cases, the contract covers the transfer of the dead body to the morgue, the ritual washing (*ghusl*) and shrouding (*kafan*) of the body, the coffin, and the transfer to the cemetery either in France or in Algeria. For repatriations, it covers a plane ticket for a family member to accompany the coffin/body to its final destination in Algeria. These services are nearly identical to those provided by DITIB and UKBA's funeral funds, with one important caveat.

While UKBA's funeral fund will pay for members to be buried in Western Europe, DITIB's will not, thereby creating an economic incentive for repatriation.<sup>26</sup>

With that in mind, it would be misleading to assume that individuals who lead transnational lives are necessarily destined for a particular country in death. While decisions about where and how to be buried are complicated not least because the act of burial confers a sense of fixity to identities that are decidedly more fluid in life, such decisions do not occur in a vacuum.<sup>27</sup> Posthumous practices involve a variety of formal actors and informal networks. They unfold within legal, political, and economic structures that may at times come into conflict with cultural values or religious convictions. As we illustrate in greater detail below, the Muslim corpse embodies a range of overlapping desires, experiences, and expectations connected to histories of migration, settlement, and return, as well as attitudes toward death and beliefs about the afterlife.

### "The Soil Calls You": Making Sense of Repatriation

In this section we analyze the different reasons given by our interview partners to justify their preference to be repatriated for burial in ancestral homelands. A number of themes emerge that speak to different aspects of transnational life and death for European Muslims. These include the religious valence and symbolic value of particular soils, the importance of fulfilling religious obligations and traditions, the desire to be among one's forebears and to serve as reference point for one's descendants, anxieties about what may happen to one's body after death, and feelings of social exclusion and alienation. We distinguish these for analytical purposes but at times our interlocutors' statements overlap or contradict each other, underscoring the complexity of end-of-life considerations and deliberations.

One sentiment expressed by several of Masarwa's respondents in Marseilles was the desire to be buried in a "Muslim country."<sup>28</sup> A French-born, second-generation Algerian nurse who specializes in palliative care and has a good deal of experience with death and dying put it as follows:

I want to be buried in Algeria, a hundred percent in Algeria, in Oran exactly. This is my dearest wish. *My soul will rest better in a Muslim country than in a Christian one.* French cemeteries scare me. I think that I will not sleep in peace in a French cemetery; my soul will be disturbed. I tell my children every day that I will never forgive them if they bury me in France. I was born in Marseilles on October 30, 1960. My sister is sixty-five years old and was

also born in Marseilles. My mother arrived in France at the age of fifteen and my father at the age of seventeen. I did my studies, and I am a nurse specializing in providing palliative care to terminally ill patients. Believe me, I washed and dressed dead people of all races, of all religions, and of all ages. All of my life, I have considered that death is the same for everyone and that death is equal to everyone, but I was mistaken, and with time I realized that race is race and religion is religion. *The way we [Muslims] see death is totally different from the way the French see it; there is a gap.* Christians see death in a totally different way than we [Muslims] do. Death for us, I think, is based on *rahma* (mercy), on *du'a* (praying for the dead) and on the resting in peace of the soul. Here [France], they made business out of death and they make money out of it, which bothers me a lot. We [Muslims] respect death a little more, it is free and there are prayers. There is support even after death, supporting the bereaved families with their pain and acceptance. Thus, we are not the same.<sup>29</sup>

Interviewees of different ages and generations expressed a strong desire to be buried in a Muslim country. A first-generation seventy-seven-year-old man said, "I would still want to be buried in Algeria even if there were an Islamic cemetery in Marseilles."<sup>30</sup> A second-generation thirty-year-old man stated, "My primary wish is not to be buried in France but in a Muslim country."<sup>31</sup> Hassan (forty-eight years old), an imam and corpse washer, believes that "Muslims have to be buried in an Islamic country."<sup>32</sup> In addition, some French-Algerian Muslims believe that "it is forbidden in Islam to be buried among Christians."<sup>33</sup>

Among the various reasons behind the desire to be buried in a Muslim cemetery in a Muslim country—Algeria in this specific case—are first, to be able "to hear the *'adhan* (call for prayer);" many French Algerians believe that they will be "able to hear the *'adhan* while dead" and that "with every one of the five daily *'dhans*, the *rahma* (mercy) descends on the dead." Second, in Algeria, when people pass by a cemetery, "they say *al-salam 'alaykum* (peace be upon you) greeting everyone interred in the cemetery." Third, when people go to visit the grave of a loved one in Algeria, "they enter the cemetery and say *al-salam 'alaykum* addressing all those buried there. They also recite al-Fatiha (the opening chapter of the Quran) and make *du'a* (prayers to the dead) to all the deceased in the cemetery."<sup>34</sup> In addition to these reasons, French Muslims expressed their desire to be buried according to the Islamic traditions, that is, facing Mecca and in direct soil, as French law requires burial in a coffin.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of a "Muslim" or "Islamic" country finds specific expression in the everyday rituals and practices

that occur in Muslim societies like the broadcasting of the call to prayer or the recitation of collective prayers by visitors to Muslim cemeteries. In discussing such practices, a Muslim undertaker in Berlin observed that some of his customers were disappointed about the lack of burial plots in the city's only mosque-adjacent cemetery, Friedhof Columbiadamm. The cemetery is one of Berlin's four burial grounds that have dedicated space for Muslim graves and its close proximity to the Şehitlik Mosque in northern Neukölln means that it falls within the sonic range of the call to prayer. This undertaker questioned the motivations of those wishing to be buried in this particular cemetery. "They say they want to hear the sound of the call to prayer," he said disparagingly, "but they never bothered to go to the mosque when they were alive! They didn't hear it then, so what does it matter if they hear it when they're dead?"<sup>36</sup>

Mosque attendance notwithstanding, Balkan's interview partners in Berlin emphasized the significance of particular soils, though they were not often discussed in religious terms. "The soil pulls you" [*toprak çekiyor*] is a phrase that many people used to underscore the extraordinary magnetism of natal soils, a point we return to below. One woman in her mid-forties who had emigrated to Germany from Turkey as a child described how different the two countries were, focusing on the emotional significance of her natal village's natural landscape. "The rocks, the soil, the air, the water—it's completely different. I even miss the stones. I want to return to my homeland [*memleket*] when I die."<sup>37</sup>

Another interviewee, who was born in the Eastern Turkish province of Tunceli (Dersim), emphasized the importance of the physical landscape and soil when reflecting on his own burial preferences. "The soil means everything to me," he said. "It is honor, it is wealth. It means everything. I was born in that soil and I will go back to that soil, at least that's my view. Sometimes my wife says to me, we should be buried here [in Germany] if that's what the kids want, but I'm not convinced. Take me back to my homeland [*memleket*] so that at least the bugs and ants from my village can eat me!"<sup>38</sup> His statements reflect a certain sense of pride not only in the soil itself but also of the broader ecosystem within which his village is situated—including its insects—who in his view, are best suited to consume his corpse. In some cases, as we discuss in the next section, soils are explicitly nationalized and assume extraordinary qualities as spatial manifestations of more abstract notions such as home, motherland, or homeland.

### "I Want to Be Buried Where I Was Born": Allegiance to the Homeland and Postmortem Return to the Birthplace

"Algeria is my mother. I was born there. Every time I land in Algeria, I bow down and kiss the soil. Algeria is the land of my parents. It is the land of God and the land of my parents."<sup>39</sup>

Many first-generation Algerians in France have strong attachments and ties to their country of origin, which they call and consider home even though they have been living in France for decades. They have a second house there as well as extended family. They visit Algeria often and try to spend as much time as possible there. Masarwa's interviewees refer to Algeria in Arabic as *bladi* (my country), *watani* (my homeland), *masqat ra'si* (my birthplace), and *balad asli* (my country of origin). In French, they call it *chez moi* (home), *là bas* (over there), *mon pays* (my country), *mon pays d'origine* (my country of origin), and *mon pays natal* (my native country). For first-generation Algerians living in Marseilles, it is a given to be buried in Algeria. Therefore, they were incredibly surprised and had some shocked facial expressions when asked, Why do you want to be buried in Algeria? Several interviewees even replied, "What do you mean by *why*!?"

Some first-generation Algerians wish they could return to Algeria forever. Nevertheless, there are many reasons preventing them from doing so, including financial and social security concerns. Therefore, it is essential for them to be buried in their birthplace. Their myth of going back home permanently is fulfilled when they are dead. Being buried in the country where they were born may symbolize the closing of the "circle" of immigration. Such respondents believe that their soul will rest in peace in their homeland. As one interviewee put it when asked why she wanted to be buried in Algeria, "*on est tranquille là bas, en Algérie*" (we are tranquil there in Algeria).

Yet, despite the aforementioned motives, we must understand body repatriation among first-generation Algerian immigrants within the national and postcolonial contexts. Most of these immigrants arrived in France for work in the 1960s and 1970s. Many do not have French citizenship and do not seek it because, as they explained, they see it as a betrayal to their home country. Moreover, they have tragic memories of France's colonization of Algeria and of the Algerian War of Independence. Therefore, they demonstrate their allegiance and attachment to Algeria by only having an Algerian passport and by being buried there. One inter-

viewee said, “I want to be buried in Algeria because I am faithful (*fidèle*) to my country. I don’t want to be buried in France. I don’t want French citizenship. I swear by God that I will never get nor carry the French passport in my pocket. I hate it.”<sup>40</sup>

The sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad posits that Algerian immigrants discover nationalism in France. He writes, “No immigrant from the colony, and no native who emigrates to the metropolis, can forget that he is first and foremost someone who has been colonized (and not just an immigrant in the sense that any foreigner can be an immigrant). Because he had been a man who had been colonized, or a man whose political and historical national existence had been denied, emigration provided the Algerian emigrant with the opportunity to discover politics and nationalism.”<sup>41</sup> It should also be mentioned here that all of the Franco-Algerian respondents interviewed for this project remember the exact date of their arrival to France. According to Lacan, “Desire is the effect of the lost needs: loss returns and presents itself as desire. Desire is not *the same as need*.”<sup>42</sup> Building on this insight, the desire of first-generation Algerians to return home might be understood as an effect of lost needs, which arose upon their arrival to France. These repressed or lost needs of the Algerian immigrants—homeland, ancestors, family, language, rituals, respect, dignity, and so on—are the cause of their constant desire to go back to Mother Algeria and rest in its womb/soil.

### “Our Graves Are Our Genealogical Records”: Cultivating Intergenerational Attachments

“I want to be buried in Algeria because Algeria is our country, our roots, and our origin. I would still want to be buried in Algeria even if there was a Muslim cemetery in Marseilles. I do not want to be buried in France.”<sup>43</sup>

“From the age of zero until the age of eighteen, we spent all our summer vacations in Algeria. It was there where I got to meet and know my roots (*racines*). My last name is Amer. I have not met anyone in France with the last name Amer, but, when we go to Algeria, I find so many people with the same last name as mine, Amer.”<sup>44</sup>

“I want to be buried in Algeria. My two daughters want to be buried there as well. I created the connection between them and Algeria. We visited Algeria very often and we spent our entire summer vacations there.”<sup>45</sup>

Second-generation French Algerians who were born in France in the 1950s–1970s are attached to their country of origin because of their parents who took them to Algeria every year on their summer vacation. These

French Algerians do the same with their children as their parents did with them. Many of them have a second home in Algeria where they go several times a year to spend the school vacations as a family.<sup>46</sup>

Several second-generation interviewees said that they take these trips in order to create a link between their children and Algeria, to expose their children to Algerian culture, and to make them speak Arabic. They added that because there will be no one to take their children when they die, they want to be buried in Algeria because their tomb will connect their children living in France to the country of origin. The attachment they formed between their children and Algeria will continue after their death. Some even consider their tomb as what brings the family together and what makes their children go to Algeria and gather there. One woman said, “I want to be buried in Algeria to stay in my country of origin and so that my children can come and gather at my grave.”<sup>47</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed by individuals who were born in Turkey and came to Germany as children or adults. Many stated that repatriation was a desirable option because it would encourage their children and grandchildren to visit their graves and maintain some sort of connection to ancestral soils. In one interview, a retired Turkish nurse who emigrated to Germany as a ten-year-old explained that “my husband wants to be buried in his *memleket* (homeland) so that our children visit him there and maintain their ties to Turkey.” While she thought it would be better for her to be buried in Germany, she worried whether this would be the wrong choice for her family. “Maybe I should be buried next to him,” she said, “because this would be easier for my children. When you become a mother or a father, you think of your children even after death.”<sup>48</sup>

In relating how important it was for younger generations to take pride in and identify with where their forebears came from, an Alevi religious leader described the centrality of communal burial grounds in ancestral villages.<sup>49</sup> “Our graves are our genealogical records,” he said. “I know my great-great-grandfather’s grave and for me this is my history. I don’t have to ask anyone—I can go to the cemetery and see two hundred, two hundred and fifty years of history. My child sees this too, and for him the grave serves as a reference point. This is very important for us Alevis.”<sup>50</sup>

Deathways acquire a specific political significance for Alevis in the diaspora because of a history of conflict with Sunnism in Turkey.<sup>51</sup> One interviewee described how such hostilities carried over in death, creating emotional and logistical challenges for Alevis in Berlin.

“In the 1980s and even until the mid-1990s there were a lot of problems,” he said. “I remember a situation where one of the imams at the Şehitlik Mosque refused to provide funerary services for an Alevi family and told them, “You Alevis don’t come to the mosque when you’re alive. Why do you bring your dead here? You shouldn’t bring them here.”<sup>52</sup> In his study of Alevi communities in Germany, Zirh found that the desire to “rescue” Alevi funerals from Sunni mosques was a strong motivation behind the Alevi revival of the 1990s, which resulted in wider investments in social, political, and cultural institutions. The demand for proper long-distance funerals has encouraged the creation of immigrant associations in a variety of different national settings.<sup>53</sup>

The desire to maintain multigenerational links to ancestral homelands was at times connected to broader national aspirations. A Kurdish activist who received political asylum in Germany in the 1980s was a strong proponent of repatriation, even though he had been living in exile for more than thirty years:

I believe that the bodies should be sent to Turkey. . . . The third generation’s ties to the country are fraying. Why should bodies be repatriated to our soil? So that people don’t lose their connections to the country, to their own soil. This isn’t nationalism. People should visit the grave once or twice a year. It should be there [in Turkey]. People say that your homeland is where you are born but you should be buried in your own soil too. 95 percent of people who maintain their connections with the homeland are repatriated for burial.<sup>54</sup>

Even in the absence of a Kurdish state, this interviewee, now in his sixties, thought it was important for Kurds in Germany to be buried in Turkey. He saw repatriation as a future-oriented practice that would bind younger generations to ancestral soils and create a sense of Kurdish consciousness. While he emphasized that he didn’t think this was nationalistic, he constantly referenced Kurdistan throughout the interview. Like the Alevi religious leader quoted above, he believed that repatriation would cultivate historical awareness and pride in a place that did not have the same resonance or meaning for younger generations.

That said, some of our respondents were skeptical about the feasibility of grave visits. They worried that repatriation could, counterintuitively, result in the abandonment of a family member. Describing the conversations he has had with customers, a Muslim undertaker observed that in many cases families were trying to fulfill the deceased’s last wishes, even if they didn’t

make sense. “You ask the family what they want to do and they say it’s going to a village in Elazığ [a province in Eastern Turkey],” he said,

And then you ask them, “who’s left in the village,” and they tell me, sheepishly, that there’s no one left, that the village is empty. But this was their last wish—that’s what they wanted. OK, fair enough. But you’re going to send this poor guy back and bury him there but when are you going to go visit his grave? And what do they say? We’ll visit him when we go on vacation. You start to wonder, but they don’t want to disrespect the last wishes. I mean, this person has made that their dying wish. Even if it’s illogical, it’s done. And some families see that it’s illogical but they do it anyway because they are fulfilling someone’s last wish.<sup>55</sup>

As we recount below, the feasibility of grave visits is one of the primary reasons given by respondents who wish to be buried in France or Germany. Here too, family connections play an important role. The deceased are anchored by their children rather than the other way around. More specifically, the grave site is envisioned not as a magnet to draw children to ancestral lands but as an anchor to help deepen their sense of belonging in France and Germany.

Nevertheless, some respondents felt pulled by their ancestors and found comfort in the idea that they would be buried among their kin. “I want to be buried next to my parents, next to my ancestors in our familial cemetery in Kabyle,” said a man who arrived in France in 1957 at the age of five.<sup>56</sup> The *chibanis*, first-generation male Maghrebi immigrants who arrived to France in the early 1960s to work, stayed in France upon retirement, and live alone in dormitories, frequently mentioned their extended family in Algeria when explaining their burial preferences. “I have all of my family there,” was a common refrain. French Algerians whose parents are buried in Algeria also spoke of their wish to be buried next to them. This sentiment was especially strong for those who emigrated from the Kabyle region, who noted that families were always buried together in village cemeteries and wished to continue this tradition.

The desire to be among one’s kin in death reflects an effort to reaffirm communal bonds and give them a sense of permanence. It is a family reunion of the dead. As Zirh puts it, “transporting a dead member back to the village is a ritualized and spatial practice of community-making beyond national cartographies.”<sup>57</sup> We would add that it is also a practice of community making that extends beyond individual lifetimes. In certain cases, the dead may have good reason to want to be

among their compatriots. One interviewee recounted a situation where a friend jokingly told his elderly mother that he would bury her in Germany when she died. The mother, a native speaker of the Kurdish Zaza language, said, “Son, what am I going to do if you bury me here? I don’t know their language. Bring me back to my homeland so that I can speak to the dead in my mother tongue!”<sup>58</sup> Reflecting on this exchange he said that “even if it was just a joke, there’s some truth in it. It shows how much longing there is.”<sup>59</sup>

The longing for belonging follows individuals to their graves. In some cases, experiences with racism, discrimination, and exclusion influence individuals’ desire to be buried in Turkey or Algeria. As we describe in the next section, such sentiments are harbored by members of the first generation, their children, and even their grandchildren.

#### “They Do Not Like Us Here”: Identity Redefinition among the Second Generation

Repatriation among the second or third generation—individuals in their twenties and thirties—may be a question of identity redefinition. Masarwa’s interviewees spoke frequently about their impoverished living conditions, experiences with discrimination and social exclusion, and the question of identity. They claim they “do not belong here [France],” and that French society “blocks them everywhere.” Many even say, “I feel Algerian.” This indicates that this generation is in the process of redefining its identity, one that privileges Algeria and Islam over France. Moreover, these interviews reveal that second- and third-generation French Muslims feel and/or identify either as French or Algerian based on the extent to which they feel accepted by French society. Although this is not reducible to class, those in higher socioeconomic positions with stable employment and better educational credentials reported feeling more French than those who were socially and economically marginalized.

Many second-generation French Muslims face structural exclusion in the form of poverty, unemployment, and racism. They are categorized as *strangers*, *Arabs*, and *Muslims*.<sup>60</sup> It seems that the social categorization and negative stereotypes faced by this generation leads them to perceive themselves as the broader French society perceives them—as Arabs and Muslims—despite the fact that they are neither familiar with Islamic culture nor speak Arabic. Thus, wanting to be buried in Algeria makes them feel Algerian and Muslim.

During her research in France and Algeria, Masarwa noticed that second-generation French Algerians are

treated as a homogenous group in both countries. In France, they are often referred to as immigrants (*immigrés*) although they were born in France and have no history of immigration or arrival. In Algeria, they are called emigrants (*émigrés*) even though they were not born in Algeria, and they have no history of emigration or departure. They are neither here nor there.

Another practice that sheds light on questions of identity redefinition is the repatriation of infants and stillborn babies. In 2018, the funeral home where Masarwa has conducted research repatriated twelve infants to Algeria. Seven were stillborn, four were between one and twelve months, and one was five years old. On April 15, 2019, she attended the preparation of a stillborn at the morgue at Hôpital Nord in Marseilles before being repatriated to Algeria. She also had a conversation with the parents, who are in their twenties. Based on these experiences, it is plausible to assume that these young parents project on their own unformed identity when they decide to bury their infants far away from them in Algeria, a country where they do not live. Moreover, parents who repatriate their infants or stillborn babies to Algeria say that they will join their children in Algeria when they die. This practice reflects a reverse genealogy of the relationship between death and belonging.<sup>61</sup>

Visitors to Berlin’s Muslim burial grounds will notice the presence of many infants and stillborn babies among the dead. What is striking about these tombs is the presence of Turkish flags, which parallels the projection of national identity described above. The use of a flag on a baby’s grave says much more about the living than the dead. The idea of a nationalistic baby seems untenable, but the decision to mark their graves with Turkish flags can be read as a strategy of prefigurative identity construction in situations where personhood is not yet developed.

Like their counterparts in France, second- and third-generation adults in Germany also describe how discrimination and social exclusion motivates posthumous repatriation. When asked why individuals might decide to be buried in Turkey, one respondent put it quite bluntly, “Racism. People are still excluded here and xenophobic sentiment is on the rise.” Another interviewee, a successful business owner in his mid-forties who came to Germany as an infant observes that “Our soil is there [Turkey] and I want to be buried there. I grew up here [in Germany], but our soil is there. We live here, we do everything here but this place never fully accepted us and it won’t. It’s impossible. We will

always remain foreigners here, so what's the point of being buried in a foreign country?"<sup>62</sup>

This feeling of being out of place, of being a foreigner in a country where you have lived the majority of your life, is a phenomenon indexed by minority populations across the world, who, because of their migratory histories, remain outside dominant national imaginaries. The experience of social death and discrimination gives rise to a longing for belonging that, for some, is actualized in posthumous repatriation for burial. A retired factory worker who had been living in Germany for more than thirty-five years and had raised both of his children in Berlin put it quite forcefully: "I was always *Ausländer* [foreigner], and I don't want to be *Ausländer* in my grave!"<sup>63</sup>

A Muslim undertaker in Berlin spoke about the "profound homesickness" his customers felt and how their sense of estrangement in Germany motivated their decision to be buried in Turkey. "I'm in *gurbet* here, I'm a foreigner here,' they say to themselves. At least let me go home when I die."<sup>64</sup> Unprompted, the undertaker reflected on his own burial preferences. "Sometimes I think about being buried in the village, too," he said, "but then I ask myself, why? You won't recognize it and it won't recognize you. But you have a memory there, an experience, you think to yourself that this is *your* place, you aren't a stranger there, no one will tell you 'You're not from here, you don't belong here' . . ." He paused for a moment and took a deep breath. "In the end, it doesn't really matter where you're buried, really. What's important is for your spirit to go to the right place, but people still say that they're worried about what will happen to them if they are buried here in Germany. 'My corpse shouldn't be in *gurbet*,' they say. Can you imagine? Open the ground in five years and you won't find anything but bones."<sup>65</sup> As we describe in the next section, some of our respondents were, indeed, quite anxious about what would happen to their bodies if they were buried in France or Germany.

#### "I Want to Be Buried Once and for All": Fear of Exhumation, Cremation, and Unaffordable Burial Plots

"I want to be buried at home (*chez moi* [Algeria]) because there, they bury the dead only once and the corpse does not move anymore. That is all, it is over. There [Algeria], they will bury me just once and they would not touch me anymore while here [France], we must pay, otherwise they will remove our remains. So, no, I do not want to be buried here in France. Once we are dead, we must be

quiet. I want my body to be [buried] there (*là-bas* [Algeria])."<sup>66</sup>

In France and Germany, Islamic burial grounds are located within municipal cemeteries, where available. As such, it would be inaccurate to label them as "Islamic cemeteries," since they are part of a broader, multi-confessional space. This is why they are known as *carrés musulmans* (Muslim sections) in France. There are twenty-one cemeteries in the city of Marseilles,<sup>67</sup> and only two of them have a *carré musulman* (Muslim section) — Saint Pierre and Vaudrans. There is a *carré musulman* for children at the Canet Cemetery.<sup>68</sup> In Berlin, there are 224 cemeteries, 186 of which are active. Among these, only 3 have spaces that are dedicated for Muslims. The largest, with 3.5 hectares reserved for Islamic burials, is Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow, in southwest Berlin. A second burial ground located within the courtyard of Berlin's Şehitlik Mosque has been at full capacity for many years. However, as mentioned above, some members of the city's Muslim communities elect to be buried in Friedhof Columbiadamm, a mixed-faith municipal cemetery directly adjacent to the mosque. The third, and newest Islamic burial ground in Berlin is located in the Friedhof Der St. Thomas-Gemeinde in the neighborhood of Neukölln. Established in 2017, this section of the cemetery is reserved for Alevi burials.<sup>69</sup>

Burial laws in both countries dictate that graves are to be recycled after a certain period of time. In Berlin, graves are leased for a minimum twenty-year period and can be renewed for an additional twenty to forty years. At the cemetery of Saint-Pierre in Marseilles, a French Muslim can purchase a burial plot for fifteen years, for thirty years, for fifty years, or in perpetuity.<sup>70</sup> If there are bodies that have not been claimed by the family or if the family does not have the means to purchase a burial plot, the deceased are buried in the *fosses communes* or *carré des indigents* (section for the needy/poor), which the city makes available. However, burial in the *fosses communes* is for five years only. If nobody claims the body after five years of its burial in the *fosse commune*, the remains are exhumed and transported to the cemetery's ossuary.

Most of our interviewees have incomplete information about cemeteries and burial laws. Some believe that their remains will be cremated after they are exhumed in France or Germany. Masarwa was often told, "I do not want to be buried here in France because they exhume and burn here. I do not want to be burned," "I want to be buried in Algeria because I want to be buried once and

for all. I want a definitive burial.” During a visit to an elderly care home, Balkan was told by a Turkish woman in her eighties that she didn’t want to be buried in Germany because “they dig you up after ten years and dump someone else in your grave.”

In addition to the fear of exhumation and cremation, some of our interlocutors note that the cost of burial plots in Germany and France is prohibitively expensive. As of January 1, 2019, a perpetual plot in the *carré musulman* at the cemetery of Saint-Pierre costs about 5,500€,<sup>71</sup> while repatriating a body to Algeria without burial insurance (*assurance décès*) costs 1,800€. The annual cost of burial insurance is between 25€ and 100€ depending on the age of the insured. Thus, French Algerians find it much cheaper and more assuring to be buried in Algeria. The price of a twenty-year tomb at Berlin’s Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow is between 940€ and 1,960€, plus administrative fees, while the cost of a tombstone is quite variable, ranging from 2,500€ to 7,000€ depending on the size, material, design, and craftsmanship.<sup>72</sup>

Some of our respondents find it hard to accept paying for a burial plot, since funerary services are typically subsumed under welfare state policies in Muslim-majority countries and are provided at reduced costs. However, in places like Istanbul and other urban centers, the cost of a funeral can still exceed €1,000, depending on the location of the cemetery and the cost of the headstone. While some services (mortgage storage, corpse washing, coffin, funeral shroud, transportation within the city limits) are provided free of charge, Turkish citizens still need to pay for their burial plots, which in Istanbul’s most expensive cemeteries can cost up to 6,000TL (630€). By contrast, the city’s cheapest cemeteries charge 100TL (11€) for a burial plot. Outside of urban areas, the costs are lower.

As the preceding discussion has shown, there are a host of factors that motivate posthumous repatriation for burial. Individuals speak of the desire to be buried in a Muslim country or the place that they consider to be their homeland. Some wish to be among their ancestors in death while others see their graves serving as magnets for subsequent generations. Some of our respondents imagine grave visits as a practice that cultivates historical and cultural consciousness while maintaining intergenerational lines of familial continuity. Still others speak of social exclusion and feeling alienated, noting that the everyday racism and discrimination they face as second-class citizens is reason enough not to be buried in countries where they have lived most of

their lives. Furthermore, some interviewees describe the prohibitive cost of burial in Western Europe while others worry about what might happen to their corpses because of grave recycling.

Having discussed the reasons motivating repatriation, we now turn to individuals who wish to be buried in France and Germany. In analyzing their reflections on burial preferences, it becomes evident that there is significant overlap vis-à-vis those who prefer repatriation. Individuals who want to be buried locally also foreground the importance of maintaining intergenerational continuity and family connections, of cultivating a sense of belonging and attachment to particular soils, and of staking a claim to membership in specific national communities. However, though they reference similar factors, their perspectives on these considerations lead them to the opposite conclusion compared to those who repatriate.

#### “My Children Are Here”: Family and the Desire for Belonging

In one of the earliest studies of Islamic funerary rituals in Germany, Gerdien Jonker notes that “Islamic burials are still a very rare sight in Berlin. . . . Until the recent past, only 2% of Muslim migrants have actually been buried here.”<sup>73</sup> Her ethnographic research into Islamic deathways in the mid-1990s highlighted the ambivalence her interview partners felt between countries of origin and settlement and showed how they attempted to overcome such feelings through innovations in mortuary ritual. Nearly thirty years after Jonker’s pioneering research, the number of Muslim burials in France and Germany is on the rise, though it is still a minority practice.

The most common refrain that we heard from people who wished to be buried locally was, “My children are here.” We discovered that there was a gendered dimension to this sentiment. Masarwa’s interviews reveal a striking pattern in this regard. While those who expressed a desire to be buried in France were a small minority, comprising only 5 percent of the total number of interviewees, every single one was a female and 75 percent of them mentioned that their children were a primary factor motivating their decision to be buried in France. While we cannot generalize from this observation alone, it should be noted that this finding aligns with a large body of feminist scholarship focused on the role of the family under capitalism and the unequal burdens placed on women in social reproduction, such as childcare and household chores. That women feel more

inclined to think about their children's well-being after their own death may be symptomatic of the broader sensibilities promoted by this gendered division of labor.

One recurrent theme in our conversations about children and burial was the idea that family unity would be maintained if parents were buried in the country where their children would be living in the future. Just as grave visits to ancestral soils connected generations, grave visits in local cemeteries keep emotional bonds alive. "I want to be buried in France to be close to my children," a sixty-two-year-old woman who was born in Algeria and emigrated to France in 1990 told Masarwa.<sup>74</sup> Another woman, aged forty-five, said, "I want to be buried in France for my children," while a different respondent observed that "my children are here and they will never leave France," when explaining why she wanted to be buried locally.<sup>75</sup>

Some interviewees acknowledge the challenges of visiting graves in ancestral soils. "The villages are empty, there's nobody left," explained a Kurdish man in Berlin. "People wonder whether anyone will go back to visit them. That's why some people say, 'well, if I'm buried here [in Germany] at least someone will stop by my gravesite and leave some flowers once in a while or just look at it and remember me.' This is a big deal," he said.<sup>76</sup> The rituals associated with grave visits—placing flowers near tombstones, creating personalized memorials, leaving mementos, or cleaning up the area around the grave—are all strategies that help individuals cope with grief, keep the identity of the deceased alive, and, importantly, regenerate their relationships after death.<sup>77</sup> Acknowledging that their children and grandchildren may be less inclined to spend their vacations in Turkey or Algeria, some respondents sought to facilitate posthumous bonding by placing their bodies in local soils. "I do not go to Algeria often," a thirty-four-year-old woman who was born in Marseilles explained. "I think of my kids who do not go to Algeria. I am afraid that I will be forgotten if I'm buried in Algeria."<sup>78</sup>

For some of our interviewees, the practice of local burial was an explicit acknowledgment of their long-term settlement. In his study of the Hadrami Yemeni diaspora, Engseng Ho notes that "tombstones abroad acknowledge the shift in allegiance—from origins to destinations—that migrants take whole lifetimes or more to come to terms with. . . . Graves, while they are endpoints for migrants, are beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in a land."<sup>79</sup> Similarly, in his study of the burial customs of

British Muslims, Humayun Ansari asserts that Islamic cemeteries in Britain "offer visual pointers to the presence of Muslims and can be viewed as spatial expressions of community identity, solidarity, and 'collective effervescence.'"<sup>80</sup> Some of our respondents speak about how local burial evinces their permanent presence.

A Kurdish man who organizes funerals for Berlin's Kurdish community made this point quite explicitly during a conversation about political conditions in Germany and Turkey. Reflecting on the challenges faced by Kurds in Turkey he said, "For those of us who live here [in Germany], we consider ourselves a part of this society. This is a truth . . . we feel freer here, we can speak more freely." When asked how such feelings translated into burial decisions, he observed with particular reference to younger generations that "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."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, a fifty-three-year-old woman who arrived in France at age twenty-three said that she preferred to be buried in France because "I feel well here. It is my country and my children are here."<sup>82</sup>

The recognition that "we are not immigrants," and that "we are here to stay," was what motivated the consecration of the first Alevi burial ground in Berlin. As mentioned above, the Alevi community has faced challenges around end-of-life care because of histories of communitarian conflict between themselves and Sunni Muslims. Speaking to reporters about the significance of a burial ground for Alevis in Berlin, Halit Büyükgöl, an Alevi leader and then president of the nonprofit organization The Alevi Community in Berlin, explained that it is a big victory for groups who are othered to be able to have a place to bury their dead. "This is proof that we have put down roots in a country where we were once migrants," he said. "It proves that we are here to stay." Noting past disagreements with Sunni Muslims in Berlin, Büyükgöl added that "our door is always open for democratic Sunnis who would like to bury their dead in this cemetery in line with Alevi traditions."<sup>83</sup>

The preceding discussion helps shed light on how burial practices can help advance claims for political inclusion and foster connections between the living and the dead. By opting to be buried in France or Germany, minoritized communities simultaneously claim their place in the body politic and create a reference point for future generations. The desire to be close to one's kin after death may result in either local burial or repatriation, but for those who imagine their children's

future in France and Germany, foregoing repatriation is simultaneously an affirmation of belonging. Even in situations where such belonging may not align with the deceased's lived experience, Muslim burial grounds anchor the wider community by visibly inscribing its presence in the physical landscape. The existence of Islamic graves in France and Germany's multiconfessional public cemeteries may in the long run help normalize and naturalize the long-term presence of Muslims in these countries.

### Conclusion: COVID-19 and the Future of Islamic Burial in Europe

"There are so many death cases. The situation is hard. I have been an undertaker for years, but I have never seen so much death. There are so many death cases, hard ones; bodies are laying in the morgues for weeks, even for months."<sup>84</sup>

Addressing the nation on March 16, 2020, French president Emmanuel Macron announced the beginning of a total lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown lasted until May 11, 2020. Like many countries around the world, France closed its borders in an effort to contain the virus. Germany followed suit, imposing border closures with France, Austria, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Switzerland on March 16. International travel came to a standstill as governments everywhere put into place sweeping travel restrictions, including the grounding of flights.

These announcements created some confusion about the feasibility of cross-border corpse repatriation that was further amplified by news outlets, such as *Arab News*, which reported that Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia would not accept human remains because of the pandemic.<sup>85</sup> Behind the scenes however, things looked a little different. While Morocco had in fact issued a moratorium on all cross-border repatriations, irrespective of the cause of death, other countries were more lenient. Tunisia, Algeria, and Turkey continued to allow for the posthumous repatriation of bodies so long as the individual in question had not died from the coronavirus.

In a statement released on March 21, 2020, UKBA funeral fund's president, Dr. Mustafa Uyanık described how his organization had adjusted in light of the travel restrictions. "When the airports shut down, we began transporting our dead on cargo planes," he explained, noting that they had partnered with the cargo division of Turkish Airlines to ensure smooth transfers.<sup>86</sup> Under

this arrangement, even those who died from COVID-19 could be repatriated to Turkey for burial, although family members were not allowed to accompany the corpse. In his statement Uyanık made clear that the airlines were taking the strictest precautions to prevent the spread of disease.

The Tunisian state covers the repatriation cost of its citizens. The Tunisian consulate in Marseilles works with the Clary Funeral Home (Pompe funèbre Clary), which repatriates the bodies of deceased Tunisians to Tunisia. Paul, a Tunisian-born undertaker and director of the Clary Funeral Home notes, "the repatriation of dead bodies to Tunisia has not stopped during the lockdown. It continued as usual from Marseilles airport."<sup>87</sup> Mr. Bedra, undertaker and director of the Al-Amame Funeral Home in Marseilles, told Marsawa in April 2020 that "the repatriation of dead bodies from Marseilles airport to Algeria has stopped. However, since the beginning of the month, the repatriation takes place twice a week from Lyon and Paris airports via cargo flights."<sup>88</sup> In November 2020, Mr. Bedra said, "Nowadays, there are three cargo flights from Lyon to Algiers and one flight to Oran per week. We repatriate bodies with these flights. Now we even repatriate the bodies of those who died of Covid-19. I repatriated three of those from Lyon this week."<sup>89</sup> Mr. Khouss, undertaker and director of the Solidarité familiale de France Funeral Home, said, "We started to repatriate the bodies of those who died of Covid-19 to Algeria in August 2020. Also, since October 2020, we send bodies to Morocco from Marseilles airport. I sent a body to Morocco last week from Marseilles with a passengers' flight."<sup>90</sup>

The coronavirus has had a disproportionate impact on European Muslims. A report by the European Network Against Racism explains that Muslims, especially women, are "often overexposed to the disease (and therefore to death) because they are disproportionately represented in essential but undervalued work areas, including cleaning, care, and security sectors (with precarious working conditions)."<sup>91</sup> The growing number of Muslim dead exposed a long-standing problem in Europe—the scarcity of Islamic burial grounds.

This issue was picked up by several major news outlets, including the *New York Times*, which ran a story describing it as a "cruel coronavirus shortage" faced by French Muslims.<sup>92</sup> The *Associated Press* reported that "according to the President of the French Council for Muslim Religion (CFCM),<sup>93</sup> Mohammed Moussaoui, 'In normal times, around 80% of the deceased are buried in their country of origin.' And, among the 35,000 French

cemeteries, only ‘about 600 have dedicated places to Muslims.’”<sup>94</sup> Responding to this issue, Chems-Eddine Hafiz, rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris said that the shortage of Islamic burial grounds “has been going on for years, and we are now paying a high price for it. . . . The younger generations want to be totally French,” he observed, “and clearly willingness to be buried in France is a type of integration.”<sup>95</sup>

Hafiz’s statement raises a very important question. Would the establishment of more spaces for European Muslims to bury their dead change the patterns that we have described above? If burial is a type of integration as both Hafiz and some of our interlocutors suggest, would the creation of Islamic burial grounds encourage local burial over repatriation? We agree with Hafiz that the shortage of religiously appropriate burial sections for Muslims in municipal cemeteries is a serious public policy issue with long-term implications. It was something discussed at the German Islam Conference in 2008, which, while nonbinding, issued a statement that federal states and municipal authorities should work to reform existing laws to accommodate Islamic burial traditions. This would certainly be a welcome development, as would the establishment of more burial grounds for Muslims. Yet, as our interviews have illustrated, the mere existence of Islamic cemeteries may not be sufficient to address the underlying issues that motivate individuals to undertake posthumous repatriations. So long as French and German Muslims feel excluded from their societies, their corpses will continue crossing borders.

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## Notes

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1. Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” 289.
2. Bargu, “Sovereignty as Erasure”; Stepputat, *Governing the Dead*.
3. De León, *Land of Open Graves*; Kovras and Robins, “Death as the Border”; Squire, *Europe’s Migration Crisis*.
4. Rygiel, “Dying to Live”; Stierl, “Contestations in Death.”
5. Zengin, “Afterlife of Gender.”
6. Laqueur, *Work of the Dead*; Verdery, *Political Lives of Dead Bodies*.
7. Ahaddour, Broeckaert, and Van den Branden, “Every Soul Shall Taste Death”; Akkaymak and Belkhdja, “Does Place Matter?”; Félix, *Specters of Belonging*; Hunter, “Deathscapes in Diaspora”; Jassal, “Necromobilities”; Zirh, “Following the Dead.” Many of these studies find that an overwhelming majority of deceased minorities are repatriated to countries of origin for burial. See also Zwilling, “France”; and Braig, Linke, and Nowar, “Germany.”
8. Gunaratnam, *Death and the Migrant*.
9. Hall, “Conclusion”; Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.
10. El-Tayeb, *European Others*.
11. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxii–xxxiii.
12. The repatriation of deceased North African Muslims in France has received scant academic attention. Yassine Chaïb’s rare study of the subject focuses on the experiences of Tunisians, associates the choice of burial place with the level of integration in French society, and explains repatriation among first-generation Tunisians as a postmortem return. Valérie Cuzol’s ongoing dissertation research focuses on funeral practices among immigrant families of North-African origin in Chalon-sur-Saône, a French town of around 45,000 inhabitants. See Chaïb, “Le rapatriement des corps,” 41–44; Chaïb, “La construction identitaire et la mort,” 261–78; Chaïb, *L’émigré et la mort*; Chaïb, “Le rapatriement de la dépouille mortelle,” 399–411; Cuzol, “Mort et migration,” 115–30; Cuzol, “Sépulture et appartenances,” 109–23.
13. Pew Research Center, “Europe’s Growing Muslim Population.”
14. It is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of cross-national survey data, since these figures tend to flatten the diversity and heterogeneity of Europe’s Muslim communities. The Pew Survey, which we draw from, states that their goal is “to measure identity sociologically rather than theologically,” and that “individuals who identify as Muslims are classified as such, regardless of their level of adherence to what might be considered orthodox belief or practice.” Pew Research Center, “Europe’s Growing Muslim Population,” 38.
15. Duncan, “Europeans Greatly Overestimate Muslim Population.”
16. Duncan, “Europeans Greatly Overestimate Muslim Population.”
17. Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim*.

18. Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim*.
19. Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim*.
20. Connor and Koening, "Explaining the Muslim Employment Gap"; Leibert, Siddiqui, and Goerzig, "Integration of Muslim Immigrants."
21. French law does not allow any official census based on religion or ethnicity. Therefore, an exact number of Muslims in Marseilles, whose inhabitants count to one million, does not exist. Research suggests that between 25 and 40 percent of Marseilles's population is Muslim. The number of Algerians living in Marseille is estimated at 80,000 based on those registered at the Algerian Consulate in Marseilles.
22. Argun, *Turkey in Germany*; Kaya, *Sicher in Kreuzberg*.
23. Balkan, "Until Death Do Us Depart."
24. Kadrouch-Outmany, "Burial Practices and Desires among Muslims in the Netherlands"; Kadrouch-Outmany, "Religion at the Cemetery"; Moreras and Arraràs, "Genealogies of Death"; Zirh, "Following the Dead beyond the 'Nation'"; Gardner, "Death, Burial, and Bereavement amongst Bengali Muslims." See also Hunter, "Staking a Claim to Land, Faith, and Family," for a discussion of local burial.
25. Unlike Tunisia, the Algerian state does not normally cover the costs associated with repatriating Algerian citizens to Algeria for burial. However, between April and December 2020, the Algerian state paid for the posthumous repatriation of its citizens for burial in Algeria. When asked about this issue, Mrs. Rima Chennouf (thirty-four years old), undertaker and director of the El-Imane funeral home in Marseilles, told Masarwa in July 2021 that "this issue is above all political. During the presidential elections campaign in Algeria, Mr. Tebboune promised to cover the costs of the repatriation if he wins the elections. He was elected in December 2019 and the Algerian state covered the repatriation cost from April to December 2020. The state stopped paying because of financial reasons. They realized that it costs the country too much." Interview by Yumna Masarwa, July 7, 2021, Marseilles. Mr. Khouss, undertaker and director of the Solidarité Familiale de France funeral home in Marseilles, provided Masarwa with a similar answer as Mrs. Chennouf, adding that "the state of Algeria does not have the money to pay for the repatriation; the Algerian Consulate in Marseilles still owes me some money from last year. The state mismanaged the issue, I wish that the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had consulted the Algerian undertakers in France on the issue of covering the cost of body repatriation." Interview by Yumna Masarwa, July 7, 2021, Marseilles. Therefore, unlike the burial insurance provided by DITIB (which is connected to the Turkish state), the *assurance décès* is a private initiative that is not organized by the Algerian state.
26. Balkan, "Until Death Do Us Depart."
27. Balkan, "Burial and Belonging."
28. In French, the term *musulman* (Muslim), not *islamique* (Islamic), is used as an adjective to the nouns of country, cemetery, and religion.
29. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, January 10, 2019, Marseilles.
30. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, October 8, 2018, Marseilles.
31. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, October 1, 2018, Marseilles.
32. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, December 3, 2018, Marseilles.
33. Interview by Yumna Masarwa with a sixty-eight-year-old man in Marseilles on December 3, 2018.
34. These reasons are based on interviews conducted in Marseilles by Yumna Masarwa between August 2018 and October 2020.
35. Ural, "Genealogy of Muslims Dying."
36. Interview by Osman Balkan, June 15, 2013, Berlin.
37. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 4, 2014, Berlin.
38. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 2, 2014, Berlin.
39. Muhammad Amrouche, born in Algeria in 1939, arrived in France in 1963. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, September 24, 2018, Marseilles.
40. A seventy-three-year-old man who arrived in France on April 18, 1961. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, January 17, 2019.
41. Sayad, *Suffering of the Immigrant*, 89.
42. Lacan quoted in Belsey, "Desire in Theory," 396.
43. Mme Lariche, born in France in 1957. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, September 17, 2018, Marseilles.
44. Kamel Amer, born in France in 1962. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, June 24, 2019, Marseilles.
45. Aïcha, born in France in 1955. Interview by Yumna Masarwa. January 17, 2019, Marseilles.
46. There are five school vacations in France: two weeks at the end of October (Toussaint), two weeks for Christmas, two weeks in February, two weeks for Easter and the summer vacation for July and August.
47. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, February 1, 2019, Marseilles, with a forty-nine-year-old woman: "*Je veux être enterrer en Algérie pour rester dans mon pays d'origine et pour que mes enfants puissent venir se recueillir sur ma tombe.*"
48. Interview by Osman Balkan, August 9, 2014, Berlin.
49. Alevis are the largest religious minority in Turkey. They fall under the Shi'a denomination of Islam but follow a different interpretation than Shi'a communities in other countries. Their relationship with the Sunni majority in Turkey has historically been quite contentious. See Zirh, "Following the Dead beyond the Nation."
50. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 5, 2014, Berlin.
51. Zirh, "Following the Dead beyond the Nation."
52. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 2, 2014, Berlin.
53. Zirh, "Following the Dead beyond the Nation," 1768; Ablon, "Samoan Funeral in Urban America"; Dessing, *Rituals of Birth*; Félix, *Specters of Belonging*.
54. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 3, 2014, Berlin.
55. Interview by Osman Balkan, August 13, 2014, Berlin.
56. Mr. Zeidan, born in Algeria in 1952 and arrived in France in 1957. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, September 15, 2020, Marseilles.
57. Zirh, "Following the Dead beyond the Nation," 1771.
58. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 2, 2014, Berlin.
59. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 2, 2014, Berlin.
60. Hashmi, "Immigrant Children in Europe," 163–73.
61. Thank you to Asli Zengin for this insight.
62. Interview by Osman Balkan, August 15, 2014, Berlin.
63. Interview by Osman Balkan, August 4, 2014, Berlin.
64. *Gurbet* is a term not easily translated into English. While not quite as strong as "exile," it refers to a state of displacement and is

used colloquially among the Turkish diaspora to describe a condition of longing for the homeland while living abroad.

65. Interview by Osman Balkan, June 15, 2013, Berlin.
66. Mr. Amroune, born in France in 1961. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, September 17, 2018, Marseilles.
67. A list of cemeteries in Marseille is found at the city's website at [www.marseille.fr/sites/default/files/content/decouvrir-marseille/PDF/cimetieres-2017.pdf](http://www.marseille.fr/sites/default/files/content/decouvrir-marseille/PDF/cimetieres-2017.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2021).
68. See Zwilling, "France," for further data about Muslim burial sections in France.
69. See Braig, Linke, and Nowar, "Germany," for further data about Muslim burial grounds in Germany.
70. The burial plots of fifteen years are not available anymore at the cemetery of Saint Pierre (*Carré Quinzenaires*) as they were all sold out by 2018.
71. Masarawa obtained the rates from the office at the cemetery of Saint Pierre.
72. See Bestattung-Information.DE (accessed January 21, 2021).
73. Jonker, "Muslim Burial in the Diaspora," 31.
74. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, January 27, 2019.
75. Interviews by Yumna Masarwa, March 9, 2019, and February 18, 2019, Marseilles.
76. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 2, 2014, Berlin.
77. Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytu, *Secret Cemetery*.
78. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, January 1, 2019, Marseilles.
79. Ho, *Graves of Tarim*, 3.
80. Ansari, "Making Muslim Space in Britain," 549.
81. Interview by Osman Balkan, July 4, 2014, Berlin.
82. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, May 2, 2019, Marseilles.
83. Ates, "Dunyada bir ilk."
84. Interview by Yumna Masarwa, November 17, 2020, Marseilles, with undertaker and corpse washer M. Khou, the director of the Solidarité Familiale de France funeral home.
85. Takieddine, "Victims of COVID-19."
86. "Koronadan vefat edelerin."
87. Interviews by Yumna Masarwa, April 2020, September 7 and 8, 2020, Marseilles.
88. Interviews by Yumna Masarwa, April 14, 2020, Marseilles.
89. Interviews by Yumna Masarwa, November 6, 2020, Marseilles.
90. Interviews by Yumna Masarwa, November 17, 2020, Marseilles.
91. European Network Against Racism, "Addressing Islamophobia."
92. Mehuet, "French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage."
93. CFCM: Conseil français du culte musulman was founded in 2003 by Nicolas Sarkozy, who was the minister of the interior at the time. It was dissolved by Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin in December 2021.
94. "Coronavirus: Un manque." See also Hamza, "En France, les rites."
95. Mehuet, "French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage."

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