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Burial and Belonging

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Abstract

This article explores the role that funerary practices and burial decisions play in the construction of national and political identities amongst Muslim immigrants in Germany. Drawing on ethnographic research and interviews with Islamic undertakers, migrant families, and religious leaders in Berlin it argues that the act of burial serves as a powerful means to assert belonging in migratory settings. While local burial laws impact the feasibility of Islamic funerary rites, this article suggests that family ties, ideas about the soil, and feelings of social exclusion play a larger role in shaping burial outcomes than the laws of the dead. By conferring a sense of fixity or permanence to identities that are more fluid or ambivalent in life, determining where a dead body belongs helps demarcate social and communal boundaries.

Introduction

Funerals are highly charged events that reaffirm social ties and communal boundaries. They offer a window into people's understanding of the social order and their place within it. By conveying information about the deceased and their community, funerals also help substantiate the position of the living vis-à-vis the dead and each other. As universally occurring public rituals, they are symbolically powerful moments in the constitution of individual and collective identities.

While the content of mortuary ceremonies varies substantially, every funeral necessarily involves disposal of the dead body. For groups whose religious or cultural traditions stipulate interment, the question of where and how to bury a body is a critical one. It takes on added urgency in migratory contexts where certain groups encounter legal obstacles to the performance of customary funerary

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rites. In such settings, conflicts over the treatment of corpses can lead to emotional anguish as families attempt to balance the competing imperatives of state law and religious obligation.

Death in the diaspora also raises existential questions about the meaning of home and homeland. In situations where migratory processes have introduced spatial discontinuities between the country of birth and death, the act of burial serves as a means to assert belonging, attachment, and perhaps even loyalty to a particular group, nation, or place. It confers a sense of fixity or permanence to identities that are more fluid or ambivalent in life. Consequently, determining the method and location of burial is also connected to broader identitarian concerns over the boundaries of national and political communities and the place of immigrants within them.

This article investigates how Turkish-German Muslims attend to their dead in order to highlight the role that funerary practices and burial decisions play in processes of identity formation. Muslims in Germany face a number of legal restrictions and practical impediments to the performance of customary religious funerals. They are further constrained by the limited availability of Islamic burial grounds and cemeteries. Moreover, Islamic funerals are politicized events that get linked to heated debates over integration and national identity. 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' (*Migazin* 2014). In light of changing demographic patterns and an aging Muslim population, questions about the burial practices of German Muslims are only likely to multiply.

Given the importance of funerary rituals, how do legal regimes affect burial outcomes? Do the laws of the dead shape burial preferences or are non-legal factors more relevant in determining individual choices? And finally, how do experiences of death in migration influence notions of identity and belonging? While legal pluralists have rightly insisted that the law should accommodate different cultural practices surrounding the dead to as great an extent as possible (Renteln 2004), I argue 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. This suggests that it is difficult to generate a sense of belonging through the law alone. Legal protection of different funerary traditions must be combined with greater efforts to address the structural causes of alienation and exclusion that make the repatriation of the dead an attractive option for immigrant communities.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows. I first address some of the important theoretical issues raised by death in migration. I argue that migrant funerals offer a powerful lens into issues of identity because they represent a critical moment where immigrants must reconcile multiple commitments and loyalties. Notions of identity and belonging are underpinned by attachments to places, and I agree with other authors that burial is a particularly effective means of generating place-based

attachments (Johnson 2004; Reimers 1999). However, I claim that the link between burial and belonging is not simply about place. Temporal factors such as ideas about linearity, genealogy, and time are equally paramount in constructing a sense of belonging through burial.

I then turn to a discussion of Berlin's burial laws and outline potential incongruities between the law and Islamic funerary customs. To evaluate whether legal restrictions impinge upon burial decisions, I draw on narratives culled from my ethnographic research on Islamic deathways in Germany. 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) played an important role in structuring claims about the significance of land and territory, while experiences of social exclusion and discrimination served to justify why individuals might prefer repatriation over local burial. I illustrate these points using quotes and anecdotes from my interviews and conclude with a discussion of why legal reforms are insufficient in promoting belonging for minority communities in Germany. By illuminating the different factors that influence burial outcomes for Turkish-German Muslims, this article contributes to a small but growing body of research on death in the context of migration (Gardner 2002; Jonker 1996; Oliver 2004; Zirh 2012). In studying how migrants confront death out of place (Nunez and Wheeler 2012), we can learn much about what they value in life.

Death in the Diaspora and the Politics of Belonging

Anthropologists have long been concerned with the social ramifications of death and the ways that mourning and memorialization practices help shape the identities of the living (Bloch and Parry 1982; Hertz 1960 [1907]; Metcalf and Huntington 1991 [1979], Van Gennep 1960). As Metcalf and Huntington (1991:25) argue, '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.' While the social significance of death rituals and burial practices have been analysed across a wide range of national, historical, and cultural contexts (Kaufman and Morgan 2005), the ways that minority communities attend to their dead in migratory settings has received far less attention. The dearth of scholarship is perplexing given that the issues raised by death in the diaspora speak to important questions in the literature on identity and belonging and also resonate with topics that are central to studies of immigration and integration. What links these subjects together is a shared concern with the boundaries of political communities. Rather than attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of these vast literatures, which span numerous disciplines, I shall try to demonstrate how the study of death in the context of migration advances our

understanding of notions of identity and belonging. My core claim is that in confronting death, individuals must reconcile multiple identities that remain fluid in life and that through burial they express a sense of belonging that is both spatial and temporal in nature.

In his endeavour to develop an analytical framework to study belonging, Antonsich (2010:644) argues that 'belonging should be analyzed both as a personal, intimate feeling of being "at home" in a place (place-belongingness) and as a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)'. His account highlights the two dominant approaches in existing scholarship on belonging, which oscillate between affective and ascriptive considerations. In a similar vein, Rogers Brubaker distinguishes between what he calls 'formal' and 'informal' aspects of belonging, which map on to substantive membership or citizenship in a nation-state and everyday membership practices of identification, categorization, and inclusion/exclusion that may be at odds with codified forms of official membership (Brubaker 2010). Geddes and Favell (1999) point out that even when their formal rights are guaranteed, immigrants and minorities face informal and symbolic barriers to recognition as legitimate members of the societies where they have settled. Consequently, the notion of belonging is proposed as an antidote to scholarly approaches that prioritize formal structures of political inclusion/exclusion by emphasizing the affective dimensions of attachment and identity that are not captured by legal categories like citizenship.

The desire to be recognized as an authentic and equal member of a political community is intrinsic to claims for belonging. Some scholars have foregrounded the aspirational elements connoted by the concept of belonging, arguing that the 'longing to belong' is a process driven by the yearning to become other that is performed with the knowledge of the impossibility of ever truly belonging (Probyn 1996). As Probyn puts it, 'if you have to think about belonging, perhaps you are already outside' (ibid.:8). Such approaches take identity not as a given, but as a process that is never complete (Hall 1990). Identity is never treated as stable, static, or fixed but is understood as fluid, dynamic, contextual, relational, embodied, and above all, performative. As Bell (1999:3) has argued, 'the performativity of belonging "cites" the norms that constitute or make present the "community" or group as such. The repetition, sometimes ritualistic repetition, of these normalized codes makes material the belongings they purport to simply describe'. Performing belonging, then, entails identity formation at both the individual and the group level. Practices of group identity construct cultural and historical belongings that delineate 'terrains of commonality' (Fortier 2000) that give meaning and significance to particular forms of representation and inclusion.

Spatial considerations like place-attachments play a central role in conditioning a sense of belonging and constructing terrains of commonality. The act of burial represents a performative practice of place-making *par excellence*. Soil is endowed with extraordinary significance when it receives a dead body. Ordinary land is transformed into hallowed ground. The location of the grave is of great symbolic importance to those left behind because it provides them with a sense of ownership and affinity with a particular place, which in turn can be used to

legitimate their claims to that place. According to Engseng Ho (2006:3), '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.' The peripatetic nature of migratory life comes to rest with death, but questions that haunt migrants in life persist as posthumous predicaments for their kin. Where does a dead body belong? 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. This is why corpses are particularly effective means of localizing political claims (Verdery 1999). For descendants, the decedent provides corporeal proof of who belongs where. This is what I have in mind when I speak of the ways that burial confers a sense of fixity to identities that remain fluid or uncertain in life.

The main dilemma faced by immigrants is whether to inter the body locally or repatriate to the country of origin for burial. In some sense, this quandary is the mirror image of a more familiar problem that can be singled out as the perennial question for migrant families: do we settle or go back home? The myth of return, a powerful and almost universal trope in narratives of migration, influences not only life but also death in the diaspora. Although it is difficult to obtain precise global figures, a significant number of cadavers are transported within and across national borders every year – a phenomenon that one author has termed 'post-mortal mobility' (Marjavaara 2012). The most emblematic example of cross-border transportation of human remains is probably those of soldiers killed in battle, whose flag-draped coffins arouse passionate debate about the true costs of war. However, soldiers comprise only a fraction of the everyday circulation of corpses worldwide.

Lestage (2008) estimates that one in every six Mexican migrants who dies in the United States is repatriated to Mexico for burial, with around ten thousand repatriations annually (quoted in Félix 2011). Rowles and Comeaux (1986), who were the first researchers to systematically study the post-mortal transportation of human remains, showed that nearly 20% of individuals who died in Arizona in 1983 were transported beyond the state. Writing in the 1960s, Jessica Mitford (1963) calculated that on any given day in the United States, roughly 150 corpses were transported by plane for burial elsewhere. In the European context, Dessing (2001) suggests that 99% of Turkish and Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands prefer burial in their county of origin, while Gardner (2002), in her research on the transnational death rituals of British Sylhetis, claims that 60–70% of Sylheti dead are sent to Bangladesh for burial. Amongst Turkish-Germans, the repatriation of corpses has functioned as a cultural and cinematic trope since the 1980s, and has been featured (both tragically and comically) in several of Fatih Akın's films.[1] As the first generation of migrants from Turkey began dying in larger numbers, several funeral funds were established in Germany in the 1990s to help organize transnational funerals (Balkan, forthcoming). The vast majority of fund members are buried outside of Germany, with around 95% repatriated to their country of origin (ibid.; see also Zirh 2012).

Those who are not repatriated are buried locally under varying conditions. As mentioned above, the availability of Islamic cemeteries is still quite limited in Germany. Nonetheless, as other authors have argued, burial in the country of settlement is a means by which migrant communities assert and strengthen their attachments to their adopted homelands. As Francis et al. (2001:42) claim, 'cemeteries act as magnets, drawing, attaching, and rooting the immigrant community to the soil of the new homeland'. According to Ansari (2007), the shift in British Muslims' perceptions of home is reflected in an increase in the number of families who choose to bury their kin in Britain. Chaïb (2000) goes even further in his study of Maghrebi funerary practices in France, arguing that the integration of immigrant communities occurs with the disintegration of their bodies in French soil. These examples point to the ways that burial serves the dual function of legitimating claims for inclusion and strengthening place-based attachments. As such, it is central to belonging.

The question remains, however, whether burial laws shape burial outcomes. How do Muslims in Germany come to terms with laws that impinge on their ability to perform funerary rituals according to their religious beliefs? In such situations, what sort of significance do they attribute to the location of burial? Societies at different times have come to different conclusions regarding the legal rights of the dead. According to Madoff (2010), these laws can tell us much about how societies approach death and what they value for the living. If formal equality is not extended to the dead, then what should we expect for everyone else? In the next section I shall provide a brief overview of the rules and regulations governing the disposal of human remains in Germany and points of discord with Islamic funerary traditions. Despite revisions to burial laws, Islamic funerals are still difficult to implement in practice.

Islamic Funerary Traditions and the Laws of the Dead in Germany

Though regional, ethnic, and sectarian differences are conducive to some variation within 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. Cremation is forbidden. Muslims are to be interred in Islamic cemeteries or sections of cemeteries reserved for Muslims as burial amongst members of different religious faiths is frowned upon. Burial should occur as soon as possible after death because it is believed that the soul cannot leave the body until it is put into the soil. Until that point, the dead body is also thought to experience pain, which is why procedures such as embalming and autopsy are prohibited. After burial, the body should be left undisturbed in perpetuity.[2]

Muslims in Germany face a number of legal and practical impediments to the performance of Islamic funerary rites. These include laws that mandate the use of a coffin, obligatory waiting periods of forty-eight hours between death and burial, time limits on grave plots, and mandatory autopsies when the cause of death

cannot be determined. Other practical obstacles, such as the limited availability of Islamic cemeteries where plots can be confessionally segregated and graves 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 (Initiative Kabir 2014). Owing to Germany's federal system, burial laws are determined on a state-by-state basis. My discussion shall be limited to the burial laws of Berlin, which are 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.[3] With this change, Berlin became one of five states in Germany (the others are Nordrhein-Westfalen, Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, and Hamburg) that permit coffinless burial. However, shroud burial is only possible if municipal cemetery authorities (*Friedhofsverwaltung*) have granted exceptions to allow for burial practices that conform to different religious norms. Consequently, there is a gap between the law and its implementation.

Berlin has two cemeteries with Islamic sections: Friedhof Columbiadamm, centrally located in the neighborhood of Neukölln, and Landschaftsfriedhof Gatow, on the western outskirts of the city in the neighborhood of Spandau. Both are mixed in terms of religious affiliation, though Gatow has a dedicated section for Muslims that was established in 1988 where all the graves are aligned towards Mecca. In contrast, the Islamic sections of Columbiadamm are interspersed with Christian graves and not all plots face Mecca. 'Hans is in one grave, and Hassan is in the other' is how one undertaker described the religiously mixed topography of the cemetery.[4] Despite these inconsistencies, the demand for a burial plot at Columbiadamm is so high that there are few remaining spaces for future interments (Haak 2012). This is partially due to the fact that it is more centrally located, but also goes to show that families are willing to bend religious tradition when determining the location of burial, a point that I will address at further length below.

A more consequential aspect of the burial law has to do with mandatory waiting periods between death and burial, and time limitations on the use of a grave plot. The law stipulates that burial is only permitted forty-eight hours after death unless medical authorities demand rapid interment to avoid the spread of infectious diseases (*Bestattungesetz* § 21). Once buried, corpses will remain underground for twenty years, after which the lease on the plot must be renewed. If payments are not made, the remains are exhumed and another corpse is buried in the grave (*Friedhofsgesetz* § 11). These two stipulations of the burial law were a source of concern for some of my interview partners. One elderly woman in her eighties told me she did not want to be buried in Germany because 'they dig you up after ten years and dump someone else in the grave'. Others were worried about situations where the corpse was kept waiting for extended periods of time. Like Judaism, Islam calls for a speedy burial although there are no specific guidelines in the Qu'ran about what speedy entails. In practice, most Muslims have interpreted this as a twenty-four-hour rule. While German law stipulates a minimum forty-eight-hour waiting period after death, burials can take much longer because of lengthy

bureaucratic procedures. According to all of the undertakers with whom I spoke, delays to burial caused considerable distress for their customers and resulted in angry and emotional outbursts directed at them. When asked about the twenty-four-hour rule, one undertaker responded:

> According to our religion, a corpse should be buried as quickly as possible. But when the public prosecutor retains 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 hush up.[5]

According to this account, when confronted with the state, individuals are less likely or willing to raise objections or express concern about providing a speedy burial. From the undertaker's perspective, frustration that should be channelled towards laws that circumscribe the opportunities for burial are taken out on him. While shedding light on the power dynamics at work in citizens' experiences with the state, this anecdote also provides insight about how individuals react to undesirable laws and how they resolve different normative frameworks that are potentially at variance with one another.

Resignation expressed before the law could be understood as a consequence of the marginalized position that immigrant groups in Germany occupy. Although granted formal equality, individuals are still intimidated by state authorities and are hesitant to press their claims. On the other hand, this reaction might indicate that religious traditions are more flexible than conventionally assumed. As Campo (2006:160) argues, '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.' This flexibility also helps explain why families who decide to repatriate their dead see no inconsistencies with the time it takes to transport a dead body across international borders. According to my respondents, getting the body 'back home' was more important than ensuring a rapid burial. People were less concerned with 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 practices, how do German Muslims confront death in the diaspora? Having sketched out the legal and religious landscapes, I now turn to the various factors that influence migrants' 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 and attachments, be they at the level of the family or the nation, to particular ethnic or religious communities, or to territorial spaces. Such attachments are made meaningful by ideas about genealogical continuity and are central to conceptualizing the links between burial and belonging.

Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Few of the existing cross-national surveys on immigrant attitudes and values in Europe consider end-of-life choices and preferences. Those that do paint a limited picture. One such example is the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS 2005/06), a longitudinal survey of eighteen to seventy-nine year olds in nineteen (mostly European) countries.[6] 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 important (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. Teasing out the different elements that influence burial preferences and understanding how funerary practices change in the context of migration requires in-depth ethnographic research and interviews that survey data cannot provide.

The narratives and stories presented below have been culled from my fieldwork amongst the Turkish communities of Berlin in 2013–14, which included extensive participant-observation of the Islamic funeral industry. In order to better understand how death is experienced and managed in migratory settings, I shadowed Muslim undertakers and observed every aspect of their work. I also attended a dozen funerals of German Muslims and participated in weekly funeral ceremonies held at Berlin's largest mosque – the *Şehitlik Camii* – during Friday prayers. Additionally, I conducted forty semi-structured interviews with Turkish and Kurdish families, Islamic undertakers, cemetery workers, religious leaders, and government officials. In selecting my interview partners, I was guided by contacts at mosques and cultural centres that serve a wide assortment of Berlin's immigrant community, including members of Sunni, Shi'a, and Alevi faiths, and individuals with both Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds. I also visited youth centres and senior citizens' homes in order to capture the perspectives of different generational cohorts.

Through these conversations, I learned that burial laws and religious norms were of secondary importance in 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 position within German society as the most important factors influencing burial outcomes. The laws of the dead had little impact on decisions about where to be buried and the significance attributed to burial location. While 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. For example, families can act as 'push' or 'pull' factors when it comes to determining the proper burial location. Likewise, soil 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, Jonker (1996:31) 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 (ibid.). Twenty years later, the ambivalence is still palpable, though burial in Germany is increasingly commonplace. According to estimates by Islamic undertakers in Berlin, in 2014 around 20–30% of Turkish-Germans were buried locally, while 70–80% were repatriated to Turkey for burial. In assessing this trend, my interview partners suggested that one important reason that the number of local burials was on the rise is the widespread recognition that Turkish families are here to stay. The decision to be buried in Germany is understood as a coming to terms with the decades-long process of settlement. As one of my informants, a Kurdish man who helped organize funerals for the Kurdish community, explained with reference to the third generation, '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.'[7]

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] and they've given up hope of returning to Turkey', explained a Turkish undertaker. 'So they say to themselves, why should I be buried there [in Turkey]? If I'm buried here [in Germany], at least my children and grandchildren will be able to visit my grave.'[8] Expressing a similar sentiment, an elderly Turkish woman at a retirement home that I visited told me, 'When I die, I want to be buried here. My children are here.'[9]

Making it easier for future generations to visit and tend their graves was a common reason why individuals want to remain in the same country as their children after their death. As has been noted in other contexts, the rituals associated with the maintenance of grave sites, like the planting of flowers and the creation of personalized memorials, help individuals cope with grief, keep the identity of the deceased alive, and regenerate their relationships after death (Francis et al. 2001). The ways that the choice of a burial location helps to maintain bonds between the dead and the living is a theme that came up frequently in my interviews. Observing that 'the villages are empty, no one is left', a Kurdish man in his forties expressed concern that, if he were repatriated, no one would honour his memory by visiting his grave. 'If you're buried in Germany, someone can visit you every week or during the holidays. They can leave some flowers on your grave or at the very least, come and look at it.'[10]

Just as future generations anchor the dead, the dead can anchor future generations. Some of my respondents thought repatriation was desirable since 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 child told me that her husband 'wants to be buried in his homeland so our children visit him and maintain their ties to Turkey'. Although she herself expressed a desire to be buried in Germany, she wondered if she should be buried alongside her husband because it might be better for her children. 'When you become a mother or a father', she continued, 'you think of your children even after death.'[11] In relating how important it was for younger generations to identify with and take pride in their ancestral lands, an Alevi *Dede* [religious leader] noted:

> Our graves are our genealogical records. I know my grandfather's 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 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.[12]

A Kurdish activist who has lived in Germany as a political refugee for more than thirty years explained: 'The third generation is losing its connections to the country.' He supported repatriation as a means 'to prevent people from severing their ties to their country and 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.'[13]

These examples demonstrate how graves help generate a sense of belonging across time and space. Narratives about the past (ancestors) and the future (subsequent generations), refer not only to the immediate family members in question, but to a broader communal identity. Graves, which are central to the construction of place-attachments, are made meaningful by an awareness of time and genealogy. The ability to trace lineages and draw historical linkages between the past and the present underpins the power of place attachments. As we have seen, ideas about the family and communal continuity play a central role in justifying preferences about the location of burial, but in contradictory ways. In some situations, people wish to preserve their connections with future generations through posthumous proximity. In other cases, being laid to rest amongst 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 were conserved, the physical landscape played a central role. 'The mountains, the soil, the air, and water are completely different. You even miss the stones', a woman at the Alevi Cultural Centre in Berlin told me in explaining her inclination to be repatriated for burial.[14] Another respondent recounted that 'the soil is honour 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 . . . When I die I want to be brought back to my homeland so that when I rot, when I'm eaten, the bugs and the ants from my village eat me.'[15]

The idea of return has been read as a search for 're-grounding' (Ahmed et al. 2003). 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 the place where it comes from 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 who immigrated to Germany from Turkey as an infant, provided an exemplary account in this vein:

> Our soil is there [Turkey]. 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 not possible. It's impossible. That's why we'll always remain foreigners. So what's the point of being buried in a foreign country?[16]

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 the soil that he claims ownership of. Social death gives rise to a longing for belonging that can only be achieved after physical death and return to the natal soil. 'I was always *Ausländer* [foreigner], I don't want to be *Ausländer* in my grave', a retired factory worker told me in explaining why he did not want to be buried in Germany.[17]

These 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, which follows individuals to the grave. Repatriation here might be read as an act of defiance that signals a rejection of a political community that excludes. On the other hand, the type of 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, these narratives help elucidate how membership and belonging to political communities is signalled through end-of-life rituals and practices.

Conclusion

In illustrating the different reasons that condition choices about burial location and the significance that the place of burial has for first- and second-generation migrants in Berlin, this article has shown 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. I have argued that funerary practices and burial decisions offer a unique perspective into how belonging is negotiated by members of ethnic and religious minorities in migratory settings. My findings suggest that legal reforms alone are insufficient to generate a sense of belonging for marginalized communities. While securing greater access to burial grounds and accommodating

the funerary practices 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 endeavours, 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, for minority communities in migratory settings death is a rupture that foregrounds questions that are central to every 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 the 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 better positioned to see how the boundaries of political communities are meaningful in both life and death.

Notes

[1] Fatih Akın is the most celebrated Turkish-German filmmaker in contemporary German cinema. Although there is a large body of literature dedicated to his work, to my knowledge no one has considered the trope of repatriation that is a recurrent theme in his films.

[2] On the development of funerary rituals in early Islam, see Halevi (2007). For eschatological perspectives on death and the afterlife in Islam, see Smith and Haddad (2002).

[3] Article 10 of the Berlin Burial Law reads as follows: 'Corpses are to be interred in a coffin before transportation to the place of burial and are to be buried in a coffin' (§ 10 *Bestattungsgesetz*). According to the 'Ordinance for the Implementation of the Burial Law' (Verordnung zur Durchführung des Bestattungsgesetzes), 'the coffin must be hermetically sealed so as to prevent the seepage of moisture and to hinder the release of odors outwards' (§§ 14 and 15). In 2010, as part of a broader package of legislation under the rubric 'Law Regulating Participation and Integration in Berlin' (Gesetz zur Regelung von Partizipation und Integration in Berlin), Article 18 of the Berlin Burial Law 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.' With this change in the law, shroud burial became legally permissible, but as I shall elaborate below, its implementation is still rare in practice.

[4] Interview by the author, 15 June 2013, Berlin.

[5] Interview by the author, 4 August 2014, Berlin.

[6] Generations and Gender Programme Survey. Available at: http://www.ggp-i.org/ (accessed 24 November 2014).

[7] Interview by the author, 4 July 2014, Berlin.

[8] Interview by the author, 5 August 2014, Berlin.

[9] Interview by the author, 9 July 2014, Berlin.
[10] Interview by the author, 2 July 2014, Berlin.
[11] Interview by the author, 9 August 2014, Berlin.
[12] Interview by the author, 5 July 2014, Berlin.
[13] Interview by the author, 3 July 2014, Berlin.
[14] Interview by the author, 4 July 2014, Berlin.
[15] Interview by the author, 2 July 2014, Berlin.
[16] Interview by the author, 15 August 2014, Berlin.
[17] Interview by the author, 9 August 2014, Berlin.

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