

The Democratic Arts of Mourning

Political Theory and Loss

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Chapter Five

Not in My Graveyard

Citizenship, Memory, and Identity in the Wake of the Boston Marathon Bombing

Osman Balkan

On May 6, 2013, a group of protestors gathered outside the Graham, Putnam and Mahoney Funeral Parlors in Worcester, Massachusetts. Inside the funeral home lay the corpse of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who, with his brother Dzhokhar, had orchestrated the bombing of the Boston Marathon three weeks prior. The attacks resulted in three deaths and injured more than 250 people. In the citywide manhunt that ensued, Tamerlan was killed in a shootout with the police. His brother, Dzhokhar was apprehended and taken into custody.

Nobody knew what would happen with Tamerlan Tsarnaev's body, but the protestors were incensed about the possibility that it might be interred in the Boston area. Many brandished American flags and signs with messages like "Bury the garbage in the landfill," and "Boston Strong." A middle-aged man in a red WrestleMania XVI T-shirt held a placard with a graphic image of Tsarnaev's battered corpse that read, "Wrap his body in pigskin and dump it in the ocean—even that is too good for the shithhead." Other protestors carried signs stating, "It's a disgrace to our military," and "Bury this terrorist on U.S. soil and we will unbury him—American Justice."

A smaller group of counter-protestors stood nearby. Among them were several nuns and priests. One man held a large wooden cross. Next to him, a woman prayed silently, clutching a string of rosary beads. Others bore signs that read, "Burying the dead is a work of mercy," and "We need compassion—not hate—in the face of tragedy."¹

Contrary to the wishes of some of the protestors, Tsarnaev was eventually buried in U.S. soil, though not in Massachusetts. After much deliberation, his

body was interred at a Muslim cemetery in Doswell, Virginia, a small town approximately twenty-five miles north of the state's capital, Richmond. As news about his whereabouts spread, another round of protests erupted, this time involving baffled Virginians who were distressed about the fact that the so-called "Boston Bomber" had been surreptitiously buried in their state. Why did the disposal of Tamerlan Tsarnaev's remains cause such a stir?

In this essay I want to consider the relationship between dead bodies and the politics of mourning by examining the public controversies prompted by the burial of Tamerlan Tsarnaev. In what follows, I trace the travels of his corpse, from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office in downtown Boston, to a series of funeral homes across the Greater Boston area, to its final resting place in a privately owned Islamic cemetery in rural Virginia. At each step of its itinerant journey, Tsarnaev's remains generated a flurry of political backlash and activity. To better understand the stakes involved in Tsarnaev's disposal and memorialization, I map out and analyze the perspectives of a range of different actors who shared an interest in the fate of his dead body. In doing so, I aim to show that dead bodies serve as perennial sites of political conflict because the treatment of the dead, including where and how dead bodies are buried, is an important means through which social actors express, enact, and contest the boundaries of national, political, and moral communities.

For scholars who write about the necropolitics of mourning, the assertion that burial practices are political or that dead bodies are sites of political contestation may well be taken for granted. Yet much of this literature tends to overlook the important connections between public mourning and material human remains. In her influential work on mourning and violence for example, Judith Butler offers important insights about how the differential exposure to death and violence faced by certain populations results from and is reinforced by the tendency to see certain lives as more valuable than others. In drawing attention to the conditions under which some human lives are more or less vulnerable than others and by extension, more or less grievable than others, she notes that "if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburiable" (Butler 2004, 34). For Butler, ungrievable life is by its very definition, unburied. Hence, what happens to the dead body is largely inconsequential, since it is prefigured as unburiable.

Yet even unburiable bodies must be buried or otherwise disposed of. And how this occurs is highly consequential for political life. As I aim to demonstrate with particular reference to the case of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the very act of public mourning, grieving, or memorialization is to a large extent, dictated and structured by the actual treatment of material human remains. Of course, as I outline below, mourning can occur in the absence of a physical corpse. Yet when a body (or some other material object that is meant to represent the

body) is present, the manner of its disposal is central to the possibilities and probabilities of political mourning. In developing this claim, my goal is to show that by paying closer attention to what happens to dead bodies, scholars of mourning will be better positioned to delineate the rituals, practices, and mechanisms through which mourning becomes political.² To better understand the place of the corpse in the work of mourning, I first turn to the ways that criminal, terrorist, or other unwanted bodies have functioned as politically charged sites of struggle and sovereign power across a range of historical and contemporary contexts.

Unwanted Bodies

Determining what to do with Tsarnaev's corpse was no easy matter. Public reactions were passionate and evinced a range of emotions, from indignation to exasperation to sympathy. Such reactions are common in the aftermath of political violence as survivors struggle to decide how to deal with the physical remains of the perpetrators of heinous crimes. Exceptional or unwanted bodies like Tsarnaev's have been subjected to a variety of treatments in different political contexts, but have always served as a potent force. As Richard Ward notes in his study on the global history of capital punishment, the criminal corpse "has been harnessed for the ends of state power, medical science, and criminal justice, amongst other things" (Ward 2013, 1). Violence directed at the criminal body (both dead and alive) was a crucial dimension of the spectacle of state power in Europe between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Foucault's account of the torture and execution of Robert-François Damiens, condemned to death for his attempted assassination of King Louis XV in 1757, remains a stark testament to the gruesome nature of public punishment in the early modern era:

Damiens the regicide . . . was to be "taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt . . . to the Place de Grève, where on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand . . . burnt with sulphur, and on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds." (Foucault 1997, 3)

For political authorities in early modern Europe, the public desecration and disfigurement of living and dead bodies was intended as a form of deterrence and crime control, albeit one which fell out of favor as punishment ceased to be a visible spectacle and gradually became the most "hidden" part of the penal process (Foucault 1977, 9).

The question of what to do with a criminal corpse is a recurrent theme in ancient Greek tragedy, most notably in Sophocles' *Antigone*, written in the fifth century BC. The play's plotline pivots around the burial and unburial of Polynices, a traitorous rebel who dies during his attempt to seize the throne of Thebes. Creon, ruler of Thebes, forbids the burial of Polynices as punishment for his crime. His orders are defied by Antigone, sister of Polynices, who sets about burying her brother and is ultimately sentenced to death for her transgression. Antigone commits suicide, setting into motion a series of other deaths including the suicides of Creon's son and wife. The play has been interpreted in a number of different ways, with various commentators focusing on Antigone's civil disobedience as a democratic act of defiance in the face of excessive sovereign power or alternatively as an elite objection to Athenian democratic ideals (Butler 2002; Honig 2013; Hirsch 2014). Without wading into these debates, it is important to emphasize that *Antigone* successfully dramatizes some of the political stakes involved in the quotidian act of burial by showing how the treatment of corpses has attendant consequences for the community of the living.

In our own time, many states have faced dilemmas about what to do with the bodily remains of individuals that commit violent acts within their borders. In situations where the perpetrator's citizenship, legal status, or history of public service guarantees them the right to burial in a particular place, states have been caught in a contradictory position. On the one hand, they are obliged to adhere to and implement the law. On the other hand, there is a desire to punish the perpetrator posthumously by denying them burial rights. Such was the case with Timothy McVeigh, an army veteran who was awarded a Bronze Star and Combat Infantry Badge for his participation in the Persian Gulf War. On April 19, 1995, McVeigh orchestrated the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, an attack which claimed 168 lives and injured nearly 700 others. Prior to the September 11 attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing was the largest terror attack on U.S. soil and remains the deadliest episode of domestic terrorism in American history.

McVeigh was convicted and sentenced to death for his role in the bombing. His execution took place on June 11, 2001. In the hours before his death, McVeigh asked for a Catholic priest to administer Last Rites, a ritual that normally involves some form of penance and absolution, receiving the Holy Communion, and an apostolic pardon from the priest (Broadway, 2001). Although prison authorities granted his request for religious rites, there was greater public concern over what would happen to his corpse. As an army veteran, McVeigh was entitled to military funeral honors and burial in a federally or state administered veterans' cemetery, such as Arlington National Cemetery. Yet the prospect that he would be buried alongside other servicemen and women angered legislators, including Senator Arlen Specter, a Pennsylvania Republican who, one week after McVeigh's execution, intro-

duced a bill to prevent anyone who had been convicted of a federal capital crime from being buried in a veterans' cemetery.

McVeigh had committed "the most heinous criminal act in the history of the United States of America," noted Specter, and burying him in a national cemetery among veterans would be "unseemly" (Chronis, 2001). The bill's co-sponsor, Senator Robert Toricelli, a New Jersey Democrat, argued that "This is one further statement of national resolve," and warned would-be terrorists that, "we will deny you honor in death" (ibid.). The bill passed with a vote of 98–0 and in the end, McVeigh was not buried anywhere. His body was cremated at the Mattox Ryan Funeral Home in Terre Haute, Indiana, and his ashes were turned over to his lawyer who scattered them in an undisclosed location.

A similar debate took place in the aftermath of a series of terrorist attacks in France in 2015, targeting the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and the kosher supermarket *Hyper Cacher*. The three perpetrators of the attacks, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly, were killed in shootouts with the police. As French citizens, they were entitled to burial in France, but there was a great deal of resistance to local interment. Some politicians called for the mandatory cremation of all terrorists in an effort to prevent their graves from becoming "unhealthy sites of pilgrimage."³ By destroying any trace of their bodies, the state could potentially foreclose the very possibility of mourning or memorialization.

Although this suggestion was not followed through, the French government initially sought to export their corpses to Algeria and Mali, countries from which their parents had emigrated to France decades earlier. When that plan also proved untenable, political authorities resigned themselves to burying the bodies in unmarked graves under the cover of darkness. The locations of the gravesites were kept secret and not disclosed to the public. Local officials took great pains to ensure that the entire process was conducted as discreetly as possible (Balkan, 2016).

In other national contexts, states and civil society associations have sought to prevent the extension of religious rites to the perpetrators of terror attacks and other crimes. Following a failed military coup in July 2016, Turkish authorities established a "Cemetery of Traitors," to house the remains of coup-plotters who were killed in their efforts to overthrow the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (the highest official religious body in the country) issued a directive to its imams in which it prohibited the extension of religious rites for coup plotters. "A funeral prayer is intended as an act of exoneration for the faithful," it read. "But these people, with the actions they undertook, have disregarded not just individuals but also the law of an entire nation, and therefore do not deserve exoneration from their faithful brothers and sisters" (*Bir Gün*, 2016).

Following a chain of terrorist attacks carried out by four young Muslim men in London and Manchester in 2017, the Muslim Council of Britain issued a statement denouncing the use of violence in the name of Islam. The Council, an umbrella organization established with the mission of promoting consultation, cooperation, and coordination on Muslim affairs in the United Kingdom, rejected the extension of religious services and funeral prayers for the perpetrators of the attacks. Urging other religious authorities to withhold prayers as well, it noted that, “such indefensible actions are completely at odds with the lofty teachings of Islam” (Muslim Council of Britain, 2016).

In all of these disparate examples, we can observe how the dead body itself becomes a heated site of political conflict over the possibilities and probabilities of public mourning and reconciliation. Neither person, nor thing, the corpse continues to exert a strange sort of agency and power in the world. It generates intense reactions from a broad array of social actors who have different ideas about what ought to be done to the body and why. For some, the severity of the crimes committed merit a form of posthumous violence directed at the corpse itself, either through cremation (a practice that is forbidden in Islam), the threat of unburial, or the withholding of religious rites. Others believe that these bodies should be buried irrespective of the person’s actions, since burial is understood as a duty or act of mercy and charity. In either case, what is important is that the body is put in its “proper” place, though suffice to say, there is considerable disagreement about where that might be.

I return now to Tsarnaev and the controversies surrounding the disposal and memorialization of his politically charged corpse. In what follows, I chart out and analyze the perspectives of different actors and stakeholders who shared an interest in managing his dead body. These include Tsarnaev’s immediate family, local politicians and public officials, concerned citizens, representatives of Muslim communities, and the death-care workers who took on the task of burying his corpse. I aim to show that dead bodies serve as perennial sites of political contestation because the treatment of the dead, including where and how dead bodies are buried, helps both to structure public mourning and memorialization, and is an important means through which social actors express, enact, and contest the boundaries of national, political, and moral communities.

In developing this argument, I am influenced by recent scholarship concerning dead body politics and the politics of mourning. Taken together, these literatures have drawn attention to the manifold ways in which mourning practices and the governance of the dead are consequential for political life. In his magisterial work on the cultural history of human remains, historian Thomas Laqueur observes that:

the dead body matters, everywhere and across time . . . in disparate religious and ideological circumstances . . . in the absence of any particular belief about a soul . . . across all sorts of beliefs about an afterlife or a god . . . [or] in the absence of such beliefs. . . . It matters because the living need the dead far more than the dead need the living . . . because the dead make social worlds. (Laqueur 2016, 1)

In a similar vein Simon Stow has recently argued that the stories that a political community tells about its dead can help shape the political outcomes of the living. “Mourning,” he writes, can serve as “an important mode of critical-theoretical reflection and a rich resource for democratic innovation, education, and resilience” (Stow 2017, 2).

In both accounts, the dead are central actors in the process of world-making. The ways that we treat the dead and how we remember them through rituals of mourning help to define who we are as a political community. According to Bonnie Honig, “mourning practices postulate certain forms of collective life and so how we mourn is a deeply political issue” (Honig 2009, 10). Furthermore, mourning practices can be positively harnessed in the service of democratic ends. David McIvor has called for a democratic mourning, one which is not reducible to rituals of grief or eulogies for the dead, but rather, “an ongoing labor of recognition and repair—of recognizing experiences of social trauma and cultivating civic repertoires of response” (McIvor 2016, xii). In short, democratic mourning has the potential to help reframe and expand inherited notions of political community by attending to social traumas and losses that are not always registered as a loss.

Public mourning does not require the existence of a dead body, but the absence of one can generate additional grief and anxiety. Recall, for example, the “*Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*,” a group of Argentine mothers whose children were “disappeared” during the years of military dictatorship between 1976–1983, who gathered publicly to demand justice and answers about the whereabouts of their bodies.⁴ As Robert Pogue Harrison notes in his discussion of the “charisma” of the corpse, “the event of death remains unfinished or unrealized until person and remains have been reunified . . . and the latter disposed of ceremonially” (Harrison 2003: 147). In other words, the closure that comes through acts of mourning is forestalled or foreclosed when the corpse remains absent.

When there is a physical body, the terms of mourning are often dictated by what happens to the body. This is because, as Laqueur notes, the dead body is an enchanted object, “powerful, dangerous, preserved, revered, feared, an object of ritual, a thing to be reckoned with” (Laqueur 2015, 4). As anthropologist Katherine Verdery has observed, the materiality of the dead body is crucial for its symbolic efficacy. She argues that dead bodies are significant for politics because of their materiality (they can be moved

around from place to place), their symbolic power (their meaning is ambiguous and polysemic), and because of their association with the sacred (they evoke awe, uncertainty, and fear associated with cosmic concerns) (Verdery, 1999). Dead bodies inspire awe and fear in part because they remind us of the limits of our own mortality. They must be attended to, often through funerary rites, what Arnold van Gennep calls “rites of passage,” through which the dead are put in their proper place (van Gennep 1960). That is—out of our world, the world of the living—and into the realm of ancestors and the dead.

The improper handling of the dead, either through willful desecration of the corpse, the denial of proper funerary rites, or burial in the wrong place, is a problem for the living. This is in part because of beliefs about the dead’s continued ability to exert influence in the world (through haunting or other forms of mischief) but also because such practices upset the given cultural order. As Mary Douglas famously observed, it is unsettling when persons and things do not conform to their ascribed category in the cultural order, an incongruity that she referred to as “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1966).

As we shall see, much of the disagreement around the burial of Tsarnaev hinged upon determining where his “proper” final resting place should be. If authorities made the wrong decision, it would have important consequences for the community of the living. To bury him in Boston, some argued, would not only disturb the dead, their families, and the tranquility of the city but also its ability to overcome and process the trauma generated by his actions. Unlike the disappeared in Argentina, the problem of Tsarnaev’s corpse was not its absence but its excessive presence. Its materiality or “thereness” served as a reminder or residue of his crime. The political anxiety generated by the question of what would happen to his corpse was driven by the worry that he would remain a permanent fixture in Boston, forever reminding the city of his deeds and impeding the process of collective healing. In other words, the way in which Tsarnaev’s body was handled had important implications for public mourning, closure, and reconciliation.

Burying Tsarnaev

On Monday, April 15, 2013, two bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three and injuring 264 people. As authorities worked to identify the perpetrators, members of the public shared images of would-be suspects on websites such as Reddit and 4chan, noting why the individuals in question were suspicious—in some instances, merely stating “brown” (Volpp, 2014). The *New York Post* joined in on the speculation by running a full-page cover story featuring an image that had garnered 2.5 million hits on social media with the headline: “Bag men: Feds seek these two pictured at Boston Marathon.” The photo erroneously identified sixteen-year-old Moroccan American high school runner Salaheddin Barhoum and

his twenty-four-year-old friend Yassine Zaimi as the would-be bombers. Such misidentification is the result of what legal scholar Leti Volpp has described as “a new, technologically enabled vigilantism” in the post-9/11 era wherein “self-appointed avengers of justice . . . finger suspects based on their propensity to commit a crime—in this case, a propensity indicated by the descriptors “brown,” “Muslim,” or “looks Muslim” (Volp 2014, 2211).⁵

Three days after the bombing, the FBI released images of their two primary suspects, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, ethnic Chechens who had immigrated to the United States with their parents from Kyrgyzstan in 2002. That same day the brothers, aged nineteen and twenty-six respectively, shot and killed Sean Collier, an MIT police officer, hijacked a Mercedes-Benz SUV, and engaged in a shoot-out with police in Watertown, six miles northwest of Boston, ultimately resulting in the death of Tamerlan. Dzhokhar, who was wounded in the shoot-out, was captured and taken into custody the next day after a citywide manhunt involving helicopters, SWAT teams, armored vehicles, and hundreds of federal and state officers (Seelye et al., 2013).

As Dzhokhar sat in prison, his brother’s corpse was in limbo. Massachusetts burial law states that “every dead body of a human being dying within the commonwealth, and the remains of anybody after dissection therein, shall be decently buried, entombed in a mausoleum, vault or tomb or cremated within a reasonable time after death” (Commonwealth of Massachusetts n.d.). Normally, the body is to be released “to the person with the proper legal authority to receive it, including the surviving spouse, the next of kin, or any friend of the deceased, who shall have priority in the order named” (ibid.). In Tamerlan’s case, this would have been his widow, Katherine Russell. But Russell waived her right to collect and dispose of the body. Her family issued a statement disavowing Tsarnaev and asked that the media respect their privacy during this difficult time. “In the aftermath of the Patriots’ Day horror, we know that we never really knew Tamerlan Tsarnaev,” the statement read. “Our hearts are sickened by the knowledge of the horror he has inflicted” (Duke, 2013).

After his death, state officials took custody of Tsarnaev’s corpse and brought it to a morgue at the Massachusetts Medical Examiner’s Office, where it would be stored until an autopsy was conducted. In the meantime, Boston-area Muslim leaders publicly denounced his actions and weighed in on whether it was appropriate to conduct a religious funeral. Talal Eid, imam of the Islamic Institute of Boston, an organization that helps organize Islamic burials in the region, told reporters that he would be unwilling to perform religious rites for Tsarnaev. “This is a person who deliberately killed people. There is no room for him as a Muslim,” he said (Kaleem, 2013). For Eid, Tsarnaev’s actions placed him outside of the Islamic community. “He already left the fold of Islam by doing that,” he said. “In the Qu’ran it says those who kill innocent people, they dwell in hellfire” (ibid.).

Suhaib Webb, imam of The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC), which temporarily closed its doors out of fear of reprisals after reports that the Tsarnaev brothers had worshipped at one of its affiliated mosques in Cambridge, argued that Tamerlan would be judged by God. "He should be buried according to the religious tradition that he adheres to. His case is with God. We can judge him as best we can according to the savage and insane actions he has done, but in the end, his soul is going to be brought before God," said Webb. "I don't think I could ethically lead a prayer for him, but I would not stop people from praying upon him" (ibid.).

Webb posted a message on his Facebook page stating, "We are all Bostonians—we mourn with the city." A week later, he coauthored an op-ed in the *New York Times*, entitled "No Room For Radicals in Mosques." In his op-ed, Webb criticized calls for increased surveillance of Islamic communities in the United States in the wake of the attacks. He argued that that "mediating" Islamic institutions across the country, including the ISBCC, were working hard to promote peace and prevent radicalization of "impressionable young Muslims" (Webb and Korb, 2013).

Such statements have become all too common at a moment where political leaders and large sectors of the public across many Western countries view Muslim communities with suspicion. What is striking here is the very banality of Webb's utterances, statements that must be repeated and rehashed ad nauseam by Muslim leaders and ordinary Muslims in the wake of every act of political violence committed in the name of Islam. My point is not that such acts should be condoned. Quite the contrary. Yet as many others have observed, the expectation that all Muslims ought to be effectively on-call to denounce acts of terror helps reinforce the "good Muslim"/"bad Muslim" binary, a binary that constructs the figure of the Muslim as always already in need of disciplinary intervention (Abu Lughod, 2013; Mamdani, 2004). In effect, it presents a false choice for Muslims, one in which social acceptance is predicated upon loyalty to the state and where critique of existing power relations is foreclosed in the interests of security. But back to Tsarnaev.

On May 2nd, several weeks after his death, officials at the state medical examiner's office turned Tsarnaev's body over to his uncle, Ruslan Tsnarni, a resident of Maryland, after conducting an autopsy which determined that the cause of his death was "gunshot wounds of torso and extremities" and "blunt trauma to head and torso" (Bidgood, 2013). The corpse was initially brought to the Dyer-Lake Funeral Home in North Attleborough, but it didn't stay there for long. Having learned about the whereabouts of Tsarnaev's body, a small group of protestors gathered outside of the funeral home to express their discontent. One local man interviewed by the *Boston Globe* said that, "to bring him here is a slap in the face." Elizabeth Poirier, a Republican member of the Massachusetts State Legislature, joined the protestors. When asked whether she was concerned that Tsarnaev was in North Attleborough

she said that "we're a very happy wonderful community, very wonderful families, and this is not the kind of thing that we are used to having happen here, and I know it's very concerning to people who live in the neighborhood" (Anderson, 2013).

Barely four hours after it had arrived in North Attleborough, Tsarnaev's corpse was on the move again, this time to the Graham, Putnam and Mahoney Funeral Parlors in Worcester. The funeral home had agreed to accept the body after Tsarni approached its director, Peter Stefan, and asked if he would help bury his nephew. Stefan was no stranger to burial controversies. During the height of the AIDS panic in the 1980s, he became well known for burying many who had succumbed to the disease and whose bodies had been rejected by other funeral homes (Koczwara, 2013; Bidgood, 2013b). He has, by his own account, buried murderers and others at the margins of society, including indigents who could not afford funeral services (ibid.).

"I can't control the circumstances of someone's death, what they've done or how they died," Stefan told reporters. "If you look back, Lee Harvey Oswald, who buried him? What about Timothy McVeigh? Mr. Jeffrey Dahmer? And how about Mr. Ted Bundy?" he asked.

"[Tsarnaev] as a person doesn't deserve [to be buried], but we're not burying a person. We're burying a body," Stefan said (Koczwara, 2013). Here, Stefan weighs in on the curious ontology of the corpse. For the funeral director, Tsarnaev's corpse was just that—merely a corpse. In his mind, it was important to disassociate Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the person, from his mortal remains. While this position may be read as the detached approach of a professional who has spent a lifetime burying dead bodies, Stefan's arguments belie the concerns raised by protestors for whom the corpse represented much more than a body and served as an impediment for collective mourning and reconciliation. Nonetheless, Stefan tried to justify his actions by appealing to a sense of duty and American exceptionalism. "Somebody has to do it, and that's what it is. Nothing else. In this country we bury our dead regardless of the circumstances. And funeral directors here step up to the plate, and we should not be criticized," he concluded (ibid.).

When news about Tsarnaev's location spread, Stefan and his funeral home came under intense criticism as speculation mounted about where the body would ultimately be interred. The first group of protestors began congregating outside of the funeral home the next morning. They held signs proclaiming "Boston Strong" and "Bury this terrorist on U.S. soil and we will unbury him—American justice." In the ensuing days, the crowd grew larger, attracting more protestors and counter-protestors, who brought placards with the message "Burying the dead is a work of mercy." As the crowd swelled, police officers maintained a round-the-clock presence to keep the peace.

Inside the funeral home, Stefan was working tirelessly to find a cemetery that would accept the body. Tsarnaev's family hoped to bury him in a Muslim cemetery in the Boston area. "He lived in America. He grew up here and for the last 10 years he decided to be in Cambridge," Ruslan Tsarni told reporters. "His home country is Cambridge, Mass. Tamerlan Tsarnaev has no other place to be buried" (Lowery, 2013). "A dead person needs to be buried," he added. "That's what tradition requires, that's what religion requires, that's what morals require" (Seelye and Bidgood, 2013).

Tsarni's appeals to religious duty, tradition, and morality did not sit well with local political representatives. Cambridge City Manager Robert Healy issued a statement vowing to block any attempt to bury Tsarnaev in his city. "I have determined that it is not in the best interests of 'peace within the city' to execute a cemetery deed for a plot within the Cambridge Cemetery for the body of Tamerlan Tsarnaev," said Healy (*ibid.*). "The difficult and stressful efforts of the citizens of the city of Cambridge to return to a peaceful life would be adversely impacted by the turmoil, protests, and media presence at such an interment," he noted (Memmott, 2013).

For Healy, burying Tsarnaev among the citizens of Cambridge was an affront to the dead and their families. He observed that, "the families of loved ones interred in the Cambridge Cemetery also deserve to have their deceased family members rest in peace" (*ibid.*). Other politicians agreed. Representative Ed Markey, a member of the Democratic Party and, as of 2013, the junior United States Senator from Massachusetts, said, "I think that the people of Massachusetts have a right to say that they do not want that terrorist to be buried on the soil of Massachusetts" (Greenblatt, 2013). These statements attest to the idea that the Tsarnaev's corpse posed a threat to both the living and the dead. His proximity to Bostonians (both dead and alive) was understood as an undesirable pollutant that would disturb the public order, the peace of the dead, and the possibilities for public mourning and reconciliation.

Many ordinary citizens shared their representatives' concerns. Community activist William T. Breault, chairman of the Main South Alliance for Public Safety, established the "Body Transportation Fund," with the intent of crowdsourcing enough money to ship Tsarnaev's body to Dagestan. Speaking to reporters outside of the Graham, Putnam and Mahoney Funeral Parlors he took issue with Peter Stefan's insistence that the dead should be buried irrespective of their circumstances, stating that, "Tamerlan Tsarnaev is not a citizen of the United States and doesn't have to be treated as such." When asked what he thought the best course of action was, Breault said that he wanted to see the body repatriated. "I would like him to go back to his original country," he said. "Let the State Department, his parents get involved and take the body back and get rid of this phase of the controversy once and for all" (Koczwara, 2013). Like the political officials quoted above,

Breault wanted the body to be taken to its "proper" place, which for him meant as far away from the United States as possible.

In the end, Tsarnaev was buried in the United States, not in Massachusetts, but rather, at the privately owned Al-Barzakh Muslim cemetery in Doswell, Virginia. The burial was orchestrated by Martha Mullen, a forty-eight-year-old licensed professional counselor and Virginia resident, who said that she was upset by reports of the protests at the Graham, Putnam and Mahoney Funeral Parlors in Worcester. Mullen, who holds a degree from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, thought that the protests "portrayed America at its worst," adding that "Jesus says love our enemies" (Lowery, 2013b). She coordinated with the Islamic Funeral Services of Virginia and with the Worcester police, whose chief Gary Gemme had days earlier made a public appeal for help in finding a burial site for Tsarnaev, stating that "there is a need to do that right thing. We are not barbarians. We bury the dead" (NBC, 2013).

On the evening of Wednesday, May 8th, after a week of protests outside of the funeral home, Ruslan Tsarni drove his nephew's body to Virginia in an unmarked van (Croteau, 2013). The transfer was carried out in stealth and authorities revealed the whereabouts of Tsarnaev's body only after it had been buried. Public officials in Massachusetts were visibly relieved that the body was no longer in their jurisdiction. "There's a collective relief in the city," explained Konstantina Lukes, a Worcester city councilor-at-large and former mayor. "The trauma of the Patriots Day race was extended to the city of Worcester. It's something we weren't prepared for." (MacQuarrie et al., 2013). Lukes's statement points to the synecdochic qualities of certain corpses. The collective trauma of the terrorist attack is displaced on to the body of the perpetrator itself, which comes to stand for the vile act and thus must be expelled from the community. In doing so, the city achieves a sort of "collective relief," and repairs the wounded boundary that delimits its communal identity.

As the controversy over Tsarnaev began to subside in Massachusetts, a new one erupted in Virginia as news spread about his final resting place. Virginia officials claimed that they were blindsided by the burial in their state. Caroline County Administrator Charles M. Culley Jr. said that, "Caroline County was not consulted or given any input into the decision-making process for determining a burial site for this individual" (Dezenski and Viser, 2013). Culley noted that he had only learned about the burial after hearing it on the news, adding that, "We would much prefer to be associated with positive news reports from the national media, but unfortunately, we had no say in the matter" (*ibid.*).

Another local official, Floyd Thomas, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Caroline County, told reporters that he felt deep sympathy with the people of Boston and was upset that the perpetrator of a terrible crime was

buried in his county. "This was a horrific event in Boston," he said. "We don't want the county to be remembered as the resting place for the remains of someone who committed a terrible crime." Thomas added that he and other officials were investigating into whether any laws were broken during the process of burying Tsarnaev but noted that, "as long as everything was done legally, there's really very little we can do" (Lowery and Viser, 2013).

Community members were equally surprised by Tsarnaev's burial in Doswell. Ammar Amonette, imam of the Islamic Center of Virginia, said that, "the whole Muslim community here is furious." Like the Massachusetts politicians quoted above, Amonette believed that the presence of Tsarnaev's corpse would disturb families whose relatives were buried in the Al-Barzakh Cemetery. "Now everybody who's buried in that cemetery, their loved ones are going to have to go to that place," he observed, adding that "it was all done secretly behind our backs," and that it "makes no sense whatsoever" that Tsarnaev was buried in Virginia (Aljazeera, 2013).

Other local residents expressed their anger more forcefully. James Lafferty, chairman of the Virginia Anti-Shariah (*sic*) Task Force, a group whose self-described mission is "to oppose and assist others in resisting the implementation of the radical, barbaric, and anti-Constitutional Shariah (*sic*) law in Virginia or anywhere in America," ("Mission Statement") was concerned that Tsarnaev's grave would serve as a sort of memorial. "I think it's the first step in establishing a monument to a jihadist," he said, pledging that he would "work within the law and within the political system [to] do everything we can to have this criminal disinterred and disposed of someplace else" (Shulleeta, 2013). The burial of Tsarnaev would have grave repercussions for local residents, he argued, adding that "just as innocent people in Boston were harmed by this man and his accomplices, innocent people in Doswell should not be forced to deal with the fallout of having this terrorist's body dumped in their midst" (*ibid.*). Although Lafferty did not elaborate on the specific threats that would be posed by the presence of Tsarnaev's corpse in Virginia, his outlook echoes the sentiments expressed by some Massachusetts residents. In fact, Lafferty draws a direct connection between the physical harm caused by the bombing and the psychic harm wrought on the people of Doswell because of Tsarnaev's dead body.

Not everyone was as worried about the potential repercussions of his burial in Virginia.

Those who were involved firsthand in the burial claimed that their actions were motivated by a sense of duty. Bukhari Abdel-Alim, vice president of the Islamic Funeral Services in Virginia, the funeral home that carried out Tsarnaev's burial, said in a statement that they opposed Tsarnaev's actions but were obligated to "return his body to the earth." "It's not a political thing. . . . Somebody needed to take responsibility, we were able to do so, and that's what we did," said Alim (Aljazeera, 2013). In a similar vein,

administrators at the Al-Barzakh Muslim Cemetery told reporters that, "What Tsarnaev did is between him and God. We strongly disagree with his violent actions, but that does not release us from our obligation to return his body to the earth" (Lowery, 2013b).

Death workers like Bukhari Abdel-Alim and Peter Stefan sidestep the moral questions surrounding the burial of unwanted bodies by deferring to a different set of considerations and values. Stefan, like Bukhari, claimed that somebody has to bury the body. "In this country," he said, "we bury our dead regardless of the circumstances." Here, much like Worcester police chief Gary Gemme who observed that "we are not barbarians, we bury the dead," Stefan implicitly marks a civilizational difference between the United States and other nations, who might not be as attentive or friendly to the corpses of their enemies. Bukhari, on the other hand, defers to the authority and judgment of God. He himself is in no position to make a moral evaluation of Tsarnaev's deeds. That task will be left to those who have sovereign authority to judge in the afterlife. Consequently, Bukhari sees no problem with burying Tsarnaev, an act that he characterizes as an obligation.

Others would sidestep the difficult normative questions surrounding Tsarnaev's burial by appealing to the law. Asked about the burial, Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell, a Republican, said that he would have preferred otherwise but noted that no laws were broken in the process. "That wouldn't have been my choice," he said, "but it's a private cemetery—it's a religious cemetery. My understanding is we don't regulate those and it's really a matter of private property, and so that property owner made that choice" (Shulleeta, 2013). In spite of fears that the grave would become an attraction for would-be sympathizers and create a public disturbance, no incidents have been reported in the intervening years since Tsarnaev was buried in 2013 (Nelson, 2014).

CONCLUSION

So what should we make about the debates, protests, and emotions surrounding the burial of Tamerlan Tsarnaev? By way of conclusion, I'd like to circle back to where I started—the scene outside of the Graham, Putnam and Mahoney Funeral Parlors in Worcester, Massachusetts. The sign that I find most remarkable reads "Bury this terrorist on U.S. soil and we will unbury him—American justice." What kind of justice is at work in the exhumation of a corpse?

The Tsarnaev saga illuminates how competing notions of rights and justice are projected on to human bodies. For some, justice is akin to vengeance. The idea of unburying a corpse is meant as a form of posthumous punishment directed at a lifeless body. Historically, there have been numerous

examples of violence directed at corpses, from the dragging of Hector's corpse by Achilles, to the desecration of Mussolini's dead body at the hands of a mob in a public square in Milan. For those who seek vengeance, the defiling of a corpse is meant to restore honor and repair social wounds. The treatment of the dead body helps structure collective mourning by sending a message about the values, ideals, and beliefs of a political community.

Such values are, of course, intensely contested. As we have seen, a model of justice as vengeance was countered by the notion of justice as mercy. Those who sought to bury Tsarnaev clung to a different understanding of human dignity, in which the body remains sacrosanct and should be treated with respect. The notion that burying the dead is a work of mercy and compassion alludes to the idea of restorative justice, wherein the task of public mourning is to overcome a given trauma not through redoubled violence, but through reflection and understanding. Here too, the physical treatment of a dead body is meant to send an unambiguous message about the shared values of a given community.

In a world where violence is imbued in the fabric of everyday life, political communities will have to make difficult choices regarding the disposal of unwanted bodies. As Tsarnaev's case demonstrates, the micropolitics of burial offers a rich lens to understand the rituals and practices through which social actors enact the boundaries of moral and political communities. It also shows how the possibilities and probabilities of collective mourning and healing are directly linked to the treatment and disposal of dead bodies. By following the corpse and the complex negotiations around it, we can better understand how our own self-understandings are intimately tied to the dead.

NOTES

1. For images of the protest see "Slideshow: The scene at Graham, Putnam & Mahoney Funeral Parlors," available online: <http://www.telegram.com/photogallery/WT/20130509/NEWS/505009998/PH/1&Profile=11116?start=2> Accessed July 26, 2017.
2. Jessica Auchter has recently made a similar plea with regards to the field of international relations. See Auchter, 2016.
3. A similar logic was at work in the sea burial of Osama Bin Laden. According to U.S. officials, Bin Laden was buried at sea in order to prevent his grave from becoming a shrine for his followers. See Hersh, 2016.
4. Comparable actions have been undertaken by grieving mothers of the disappeared in Turkey and Peru. See Bargu, 2014 and Rojas-Perez, 2017. After the September 11 attacks, a great deal of effort was made to recover the remains of the victims (now reduced to ash) and to separate them from those of the perpetrators. See Aronson, 2017.
5. Barhoum and Zaimi later successfully sued the *New York Post* for defamation.

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