



## *Introduction*

### *Death Out of Place*

The peripatetic nature of migratory life does not end with death. On any given day, the remains of countless deceased migrants travel around the world to be buried or scattered in ancestral lands. These complex cross-border operations involve specialized funeral homes, immigrant associations, municipal and consular agencies, faith-based organizations, and international airlines. Other migrants are laid to rest in the countries where they settled and died, sometimes in cemeteries for ethnic and religious minorities where available. Perennial questions about the meaning of home and homeland take on a particular gravitas in death, especially for immigrants and their descendants. The act of burial confers a final sense of fixity to identities that are more fluid or ambivalent in life. Burial is a means to assert belonging, attachment, and perhaps even loyalty to a particular country, community, or place. When the boundaries of the nation and its members are contested, burial decisions are political acts.

This is a book about the complexities of death, dying, and burial in migratory settings and the role that end-of-life practices play in the negotiation of social, political, and cultural boundaries. My primary focus is on Muslims of Turkish and Kurdish descent in Germany, whose posthumous predicaments resonate with other minoritized populations in Western Europe and beyond. In spite of the great diversity of migratory trajectories, origins, and destinations, I see important commonalities in the experience of what I refer to as “death out of place” that speak to the ambivalent nature of home and belonging in an increasingly globalized world. With this formulation, I am trying to capture something shared by immigrant families confronting difficult end-of-life decisions in countries where they face structural barriers to

political inclusion and equal social standing. The question of what is to be done with their mortal remains takes on added significance when cultural or religious traditions prohibit cremation and mandate burial in perpetuity – in other words, when bodies are expected to remain intact and in one place. How families navigate this complicated terrain offers insight into the stakes of membership in national and religious communities, the scope of sovereign power and authority, and the antinomies of citizenship and identity in contemporary multicultural societies.

Burial in Europe offers a symbolically powerful means for immigrants and their children to assert political membership and foster a sense of belonging. Yet the widespread practice of posthumous repatriation for burial in countries of origin illustrates the continued importance of transnational ties and serves as an indictment of exclusionary sociopolitical orders. In both situations, the corpse is central to grounding political claims for recognition. However, burial decisions unfold within a myriad of overlapping and sometimes conflicting political institutions and cultural value systems. They involve a range of formal actors and informal networks.

*Dying Abroad* starts from the premise that death and the rituals surrounding it provide an important window into the socioeconomic and political orders and hierarchies that structure human life in the twenty-first century. It argues that states, families, and religious communities all have a vested interest in the fate of dead bodies – including where and how they are disposed of and commemorated – and demonstrates that end-of-life decisions and practices are connected to larger political struggles over the boundaries of nation-states and the place of minoritized groups within them. At a time when a growing chorus of politicians lambast the failures of multiculturalism and call for the fortification of territorial borders, this book elucidates how posthumous practices anchor minority claims for political inclusion and challenge hegemonic ideas about the nation. By analyzing the role that end-of-life practices play in the negotiation of social, cultural, and political boundaries, *Dying Abroad* illustrates how the long-term settlement of racial, religious, and ethnic minorities is transforming Europe, and how Europe is in turn transforming the lives – and deaths – of those former migrants who now call it home.

## Migrants, Minorities, and the Foreigners Within

By its very nature, migration is linked to movement across time and space – a litany of comings and goings, farewells and reunions. Anyone who has ever been an immigrant knows the liminal feeling of living between two worlds as well as the difficulty of reconciling different parts of their selves. Identity, as Stuart Hall insisted, is never singular but is multiply constituted across intersecting and antagonistic positions, practices, and discourses. “At the core of the diasporic experience,” he argued, “is a variant of what W. E. B. DuBois called ‘double consciousness’: that of belonging to more than one world, of being both ‘here’ and ‘there’, of thinking about ‘there’ from ‘here’ and vice versa; of being ‘at home’ – but never wholly – in both places; neither fundamentally the same, nor totally different.”<sup>1</sup>

Hall’s ruminations bring to mind those of another itinerant intellectual, Edward Said, who characterized his own life experience as a life lived “out of place.”<sup>2</sup> For Said, the phrase “out of place” conveyed not just a geographical reality but an existential condition. In his eponymous memoir, he wrote that from an early age he had difficulty squaring his two halves. Edward, an English name given to him in honor of the Prince of Wales, always seemed disjointed from the Arabic Said. His loyalties and allegiances – his very sense of self – were confused and contradictory. He felt, as he poignantly put it, “out of place.”

Migrants must reconcile the absences generated by their emigration with reactions to their presence in new societies. Between these two poles, some have found themselves in a position of double absence, both from their countries of origin and arrival. In his discussion of the double absence of North African migrants in France, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that the immigrant is *atopos*. S/he “has no place, and is displaced and unclassifiable ... Displaced, in the sense of being always incongruous and inopportune, he is a source of embarrassment ... Always in the wrong place, and now out of place in his society of origin as he is in the host society, the immigrant obliges us to rethink completely the legitimate foundations of citizenship and of relations

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press 2017), 140.

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

between citizen and state, nation or nationality.”<sup>3</sup> In Europe, heated debates about the legitimate foundations of citizenship and the meaning of nationhood and nationality have only intensified in conjunction with technocratic efforts to create an “ever closer union” through deeper economic and political integration.

Writing in the 1990s, Étienne Balibar had already observed that European conversations about immigration and national identity were structured by a strange logic of “racism without races” – a racism whose “dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism, which at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions; in short ... a *differentialist* racism.”<sup>4</sup> The ongoing militarization of Europe’s internal and external borders, a process that expanded dramatically in the wake of the so-called “migration crisis” from 2015 onwards, belies longer histories of national and cultural chauvinism through which the figure of the immigrant has come to appear as “inopportune” or “out of place,” simultaneously unsettled and unsettling.

In recent decades, a sort of collective amnesia about Europe’s imperial past and multicultural present has taken hold in many parts of the continent in what Paul Gilroy calls “postcolonial melancholia.”<sup>5</sup> Politicians routinely question the appeal and efficacy of multiculturalism, blaming migrants for everything from wage stagnation and unemployment to sexual predation and terrorism.<sup>6</sup> European conversations about collective identity and social cohesion are remarkably confused about histories of empire and circuits of labor migration, a confusion that leaves some people astonished by the presence of racial, religious, and ethnic minorities within Europe’s borders. As Stuart Hall wrote

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Preface” in Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Neeraj Kaushal, *Blaming Immigrants: Nationalism and the Economics of Global Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *Go Back to Where You Came From: The Backlash against Immigration and the Fate of Western Democracy* (New York: Nation Books, 2017).

with reference to the United Kingdom, “there has been a ‘black’ presence in Britain since the sixteenth century, an Asian presence since the eighteenth.”<sup>7</sup> But the scope and scale of migration into Europe from the nonwhite global periphery, which has challenged and destabilized notions of European identity and given rise to “the multicultural question,” is largely a post–World War II and postcolonial phenomenon.<sup>8</sup>

Reflecting on the relationship between empire, amnesia, and the politics of identity, Hall argued that historic relations of dependency and subordination – marked by 400 years of colonization, slavery, and imperial rule – were *reconfigured* when colonizers and formerly colonized populations reconvened on European soil. As he put it, “[I]n the wake of decolonization, and masked by a collective amnesia about, and systematic disavowal of ‘empire,’ this encounter was interpreted as a ‘new beginning.’ Most British people looked at these ‘children of empire’ as if they could not imagine where ‘they’ had come from, why, or what possible connection they could possibly have with Britain.”<sup>9</sup> Extending Hall’s analysis, Fatima El-Tayeb asserts that the complex interactions of race, religion, migration, and colonialism continue to haunt the presence of minorities in Europe today, placing them outside of the imagined postnational community.<sup>10</sup> In her view, the exclusion of communities of color from the European imaginary is a form of “invisible racialization” that manifests in the awkward coexistence of colorblind discourses that deny racial difference alongside regimes that construct nonwhiteness as non-European. In a twist on Balibar’s racism without race, El-Tayeb argues that Europeans possessing visual markers of otherness are not simply out of place but also out of time. They are “eternal newcomers, forever suspended in time, forever ‘just arriving,’ defined by a static foreignness overriding both individual experience and historical facts.”<sup>11</sup> Irrespective of their citizenship status, long-standing

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Hall, “Conclusion: The Multicultural Question,” in B. Hesse, ed., *Unsettled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 209–241.

<sup>8</sup> Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Hall, “Conclusion: The Multi-Cultural Question,” 218.

<sup>10</sup> Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv.

minority populations – be they the descendants of Caribbean and South Asian migrants in Britain, North African migrants in France, or Turkish and Kurdish migrants in Germany – remain outside of dominant national imaginaries.

In Germany, a country with a troubled history of prioritizing blood and ethnicity as the basis of a shared identity and political community, minority populations face considerable challenges in achieving equal social standing as cocitizens.<sup>12</sup> My own usage of the qualified phrase “Muslims of Turkish and Kurdish descent in Germany” to describe my interlocutors is meant to underscore a fundamental tension at the heart of public debates surrounding immigration, race, religion, citizenship, and identity in Europe today. In a political climate marked by rising xenophobia and Islamophobia, such qualifiers are an effect of what many believe to be the incommensurability of categories such as German and Muslim or Muslim and European.<sup>13</sup> Similar to what Lisa Lowe has indexed with reference to Asian Americans in the United States, people of Turkish and Kurdish descent in Germany are seen by many Germans as *perpetual immigrants*, as the “foreigner within.”<sup>14</sup> While it would be misleading to characterize these communities as immigrants, especially since many generational cohorts were born in Germany and

<sup>12</sup> Nonethnic Germans were ineligible for German citizenship until the year 2000. See Marc Morjé Howard, “The Causes and Consequences of Germany’s New Citizenship Law,” *German Politics* 17, no. 1 (2008), 41–62.

<sup>13</sup> Esra Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). See also Jean Beaman, *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); John Bowen, *Can Islam Be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secular State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Paul Silverstein, *Postcolonial France: Race, Islam, and the Future of the Republic* (London: Pluto Press, 2018) for a discussion of these issues in the French context. For debates in the United States, see Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), and Erik Love, *Islamophobia and Racism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

hold German citizenship, this sense of the foreigner within is pervasive in public discourse.<sup>15</sup> It is reflected in banal practices of demographic bookkeeping, like the German Federal Statistics Office's use of the category "persons with a migration background" (*Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund*). First introduced in 2005, this category refers to anyone who did not acquire German citizenship by birth or who has at least one parent who did not acquire German citizenship by birth. In practice, this category includes first-, second-, and parts of third-generation "immigrants." More than half of those whom the German Federal Statistics Office counts as a "person with a migration background" are actually German citizens.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that ethnic and religious minorities in Germany are eternal newcomers, perpetual immigrants, or forever foreigners is also a well-worn trope among far-right politicians like Alexander Gauland, cofounder and honorary chairman of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, whose platform explicitly states that "Islam is not a part of Germany." Gauland has come under fire on several occasions for his inflammatory rhetoric. In one speech, he suggested that Aydan Özoğuz, the Hamburg-born Bundestag member and Commissioner for Immigration, Refugees, and Integration in the third Merkel cabinet, should be "disposed of in Anatolia."<sup>17</sup> AfD members proudly reject what they see as "political correctness." At a speech in a village near Dresden, André Poggenburg, who was at the time the state chairman of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt, told his supporters that "these camel drivers should go back to where they belong, far beyond the Bosphorus to their mud huts and multiple wives."<sup>18</sup> While such blatantly racist statements are a mainstay on the German right, many politicians have expressed concern with the growing diversity of Germany's population, including

<sup>15</sup> In this book, I prefer to use the term "minority" or "minoritized" to describe the successive generations of Turkish and Kurdish origin communities in Germany. Though they are labeled as immigrants by some, and may also be characterized as diasporas (especially by the Turkish government), many are in fact German citizens.

<sup>16</sup> Anne-Kathrin Will, "The German Statistical Category 'Migration Background': Historical Roots, Revisions, and Shortcomings," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 3 (2019), 535–557.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Stone, "German Right-Wing Populists AfD Launch 'Racist' Attack on One of Angela Merkel's Ministers," *The Independent*, August 29, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> "Germany's Turks Plan to Sue over AfD Politician's 'Camel Drivers' Rant," *Deutsche Welle*, February 16, 2018.

former chancellor Angela Merkel, who in a well-known 2010 speech claimed that German multiculturalism had “utterly failed.”<sup>19</sup>

Unlike in Britain or France, the onset of labor migration from Turkey to Germany was not directly connected to histories of colonization. However, South–North migratory flows to Western Europe must be understood as part of a broader set of political and economic processes linking core, peripheral, and semiperipheral regions in the world capitalist system. Between 1955 and 1973, more than 2.5 million foreign workers immigrated to Germany through the Gastarbeiter (Guest Worker) program, a temporary and cyclical labor recruitment initiative established by German policymakers to overcome shortages in domestic labor markets and to ensure the steady rotation of cheap manpower throughout the German economy, particularly in low-skilled and industrial sectors.<sup>20</sup> Similar labor recruitment programs were implemented throughout much of Western Europe, in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “Merkel Says German Multicultural Society Has Failed,” *BBC News*, October 17, 2010. In her speech, Merkel said that at “the beginning of the 1960s our country called the foreign workers to come to Germany and now they live in our country ... We kidded ourselves a while, we said: ‘They won’t stay, sometime they will be gone,’ but this isn’t a reality ... And of course the approach [to build] a multicultural [society] and to live side-by-side and to enjoy each other ... has failed, utterly failed.”

<sup>20</sup> The first bilateral agreement for the recruitment of foreign laborers was signed with Italy in 1955 and served as a model for subsequent treaties with Spain and Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965), and Yugoslavia (1968). It set the legal parameters and procedures for West German businesses hiring non-German workers. Though initial recruitment was slow, the onset of rapid economic growth in the 1950s coupled with demographic bottlenecks following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which cut off a crucial source of cheap labor from the East, resulted in the acceleration of foreign migration to Germany. The number of Turkish workers grew steadily and eventually outstripped other national groups. See Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jennifer Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders 1960s to 1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); and Raymond Rist, *Guestworkers in Germany: The Prospects for Pluralism* (New York: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1978).

<sup>21</sup> As Chin notes in *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, there were important differences between these programs, especially in terms of the role of employers in recruiting laborers (Switzerland, e.g., relied on employing firms to find their own workers and regulated incoming flows of foreigners on



Despite the steady growth of the immigrant labor force, official government rhetoric maintained that “Germany is not a country of immigration,” and successive administrations from the mid-1950s onwards adopted policies that increased the number of foreign laborers in Germany while simultaneously barring pathways to naturalization and integration into Germany society. Convinced by the “myth of return” – the idea that immigrants would stay for a few years, earn some money, and eventually go back home – German policymakers made little effort to integrate foreign workers and were uninterested in creating any sort of pathway to permanent residency or citizenship. As the name of the Guest Worker program implies, policymakers believed that the presence of foreign laborers would be a temporary phenomenon primarily motivated by economic necessity.<sup>22</sup> But labor migration is never merely about economic considerations or cost–benefit calculations. As the Swiss poet and playwright Max Frisch declared during the height of labor recruitment initiatives in Western Europe, “We called for labor, but people came instead.”<sup>23</sup>

The arrival of new migrants from Southern Europe and the Mediterranean into Germany brought different peoples, cultures, ideas, social practices, and ways of life into contact with one another.

an ad hoc basis), and in terms of countries of recruitment (Switzerland relied primarily on its immediate neighbors, especially Italy, whereas Austria and Germany signed bilateral treaties with countries from Europe’s southern and southeastern periphery). Moreover, there were notable differences with respect to host countries’ efforts to integrate newcomers. Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Denmark gave foreign workers and their families the right to vote and stand for local and regional elections as early as 1975. Sweden encouraged immigrants to naturalize.

<sup>22</sup> The term “guest worker” underscores the real tension that migrant laborers faced as non-German residents in a country that was officially opposed to immigration. On a temporal level, “guest” connotes a state of transience or liminality. Furthermore, “guest” implies that the individual lacks a certain degree of autonomy and should abide by the norms and cultures of her host. On a functional level, “worker” defines the individual on the basis of her economic utility. The worker has no history or identity outside of her function as a producer of surplus value for the national economy. *Gastarbeiter*, then, indicates a subaltern status – one enshrined in law via policies of temporary residency and rotation that meant that no commitment beyond a limited contract would be required for employers or the host society at large.

<sup>23</sup> Max Frisch, *Überfremdung: Öffentlichkeit als Partner*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967). For a discussion of this quote in the context of German labor migration, see Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany*, especially Chapter 2.

Unlike postcolonial migrants, who possessed at least a rudimentary knowledge of the languages and cultures of the metropole, most first-generation migrants to Germany had little familiarity with the country. Though the *Gastarbeiter* program facilitated labor migration from Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia, immigrants from the Turkish Republic constituted the largest share of the guest worker population. When the program was officially abolished in 1973, Turkish-origin migrants accounted for 23 percent of the country's immigrant labor force.<sup>24</sup>

In the decades following the termination of the Guest Worker program, German public opinion on immigration was decidedly mixed. Surveys conducted in the early 1980s found that as many as 79 percent of respondents felt that there were “too many immigrants living in Germany.”<sup>25</sup> One 1982 study comparing German attitudes about Turkish- and Italian-origin immigrants in West Germany discovered that 69 percent of survey respondents thought that Turks “behaved totally differently” than Germans (as opposed to 47 percent who thought the same about Italians).<sup>26</sup> As historian Sarah Thomsen Vierra has argued, “[D]ue to their larger numbers and to Germans’ perception of them as particularly ‘foreign’ culturally, Turks became more visible and controversial than any of the other *Gastarbeiter* groups.”<sup>27</sup>

Meeting minutes from a private discussion between newly elected chancellor Helmut Kohl and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher in 1982 confirm that such views were held at the highest levels of government. Unveiling a plan to reduce the number of Turks in West Germany by 50 percent within four years, Kohl told Thatcher that Turks “came from a very distinctive culture and did not integrate well.”<sup>28</sup> Describing

<sup>24</sup> Rist, *Guestworkers in Germany: The Prospects for Pluralism*.

<sup>25</sup> Allensbach Archives, IfD Surveys 3099. Quoted in Oya S Abali, *German Public Opinion on Immigration and Integration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Allensbach Archives. IfD Survey 4005. Quoted in Abali, *German Public Opinion on Immigration and Integration*. The same study found that only 8 percent of respondents believed that Turks made for “good neighbors” while 13 percent thought that Turks were “hardworking people.”

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Thomsen Vierra, *Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Space, and Belonging, 1961–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders, 1960s to 1980s*, 162. See also Claus Hecking, “Secret

what he saw as a “clash of two different cultures,” Kohl spoke of problems such as illegal employment and forced marriages that he believed were endemic to the Turkish community. By way of contrast he noted that “[West] Germany has had no problems with the Portuguese, the Italians, even the Southeast Asians, because these communities integrated well.”<sup>29</sup> In the eyes of elected officials and members of the general public alike, Turkish guest workers appeared incongruous to the established sociocultural order in Germany. They were people who were seemingly out of place.

Almost fifty years after the termination of the Gastarbeiter program, it is not uncommon for individuals whose parents or grandparents immigrated to Germany to express some ambivalence about their social standing in the country. Such feelings are underpinned by considerable social stratification and disparities in life chances and economic opportunities. Numerous studies have highlighted the persistence of discrimination in labor and housing markets as well as significant wage gaps and high unemployment rates among ethnic and racial minorities vis-à-vis “native” Germans.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Germans possessing visual marks of Otherness continue to be defined by a static foreignness that places them outside of dominant national imaginaries. As journalists Alice Bota, Khuê Pham, and Özlem Topçu, argue in their 2012 book *We New Germans: Who We Are and What We Want*:

The fractured histories of our families make it difficult to clearly say where we are from. We look like our parents, but we’re different. We’re also different from the people we work or went to school with. In our case, the

Thatcher Notes: Kohl Wanted Half of Turks Out of Germany,” *Spiegel Online International*, August 1, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany*.

<sup>30</sup> Andreas Klink and Ulrich Wagner, “Discrimination against Ethnic Minorities in Germany: Going Back to the Field,” *Journal of Applied and Social Psychology* 29, no. 2 (1999), 402–423; Renee R. Luhra, “Explaining Ethnic Inequality in the German Labor Market: Labor Market Institutions, Context of Reception, and Boundaries,” *European Sociological Review* 29, no. 5 (2013), 1095–1107; Jan Skrobanek, “Perceived Discrimination, Ethnic Identity and the (Re-) Ethnicisation of Youth with a Turkish Ethnic Background in Germany,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009), 535–554; Lex Thijssen et al., “Discrimination against Turkish minorities in Germany and the Netherlands: Field Experimental Evidence on the Effect of Diagnostic Information on Labour Market Outcomes,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 6 (2019), 1222–1239.

link between biography and geography is broken. We aren't what we look like ... The constant questions about where we come from, being complimented on how well we speak German ... reflect the awkwardness Germans still feel with people who are not like them ... Who would admit that most Germans imagine their compatriots as being light-skinned?<sup>31</sup>

In 2018, the question of origins, which is often a question about loyalties and allegiances, sparked a contentious national debate following football star Mesut Özil's decision to quit the German national team after their disappointing performance in the World Cup. Özil, a third-generation Turkish German and recipient of the Bambi Prize for Integration (given to a public figure who serves as an example of successful integration into German society), came under fire after meeting with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during a state visit to the UK.<sup>32</sup> In a statement posted on Twitter, Özil wrote, "Whilst I grew up in Germany, my family background has its roots firmly based in Turkey. I have two hearts, one German and one Turkish."<sup>33</sup> Özil said that for some members of the German public, it didn't seem to matter that he was born and educated in Germany, paid taxes in Germany, donated sports facilities to German public schools, and helped deliver a World Cup victory to the German national team in 2014. "I am still not accepted into society. I am treated as being 'different,'" he asserted. "I am German when we win but I am an immigrant when we lose."<sup>34</sup>

Such statements capture the difficult position that members of minoritized communities find themselves in as they navigate complex questions about home, belonging, and identity in contemporary Europe. They underscore the sense of in-betweenness felt by those whose circuitous family histories hinder their ability to gain acceptance and recognition as full, equal, and authentic members of the body politic. This condition of liminality may help spur the development of new forms of transnational identifications and local attachments.

<sup>31</sup> Alice Bota, Khuê Pham, and Özlem Topçu, "We New Germans," *Der Spiegel*, September 28, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Donadio, "How a Soccer Star Sparked a Ferocious Debate in Germany," *The Atlantic*, July 25, 2018. The following year, Erdoğan served as the best man at Özil's wedding to former Miss Turkey Amine Gülse at a luxury hotel on the banks of the Bosphorus in Istanbul.

<sup>33</sup> See <<https://twitter.com/MesutOzil1088/status/1020984884431638528>>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

As Ruth Mandell argues in her comprehensive ethnographic study of Turkish origin communities in Germany, “One surprising outcome of the Turkish diasporic existence is that for some, the home land and the host land become mutually constitutive feeding the imaginary attachment to both places, further complicating the idea of a pure teleology of return.”<sup>35</sup> Acknowledging that Turkish Germans are in Germany to stay, she notes that “population statistics reveal that relatively few actually repatriate.”<sup>36</sup>

While this may be increasingly true in life, repatriation is still quite common in death, in what sociologist Besim Can Zirh describes as “a ritualized and spatial practice of community-making beyond national cartographies.”<sup>37</sup> Numerous scholars have highlighted the prevalence of postmortem repatriation for burial across a wide range of minority communities in different national settings, including Sunni and Alevi Muslims in Germany,<sup>38</sup> Belgium,<sup>39</sup> and the Netherlands<sup>40</sup>; Moroccan and Senegalese-origin migrants in Spain<sup>41</sup>; Christians of Middle Eastern origin in Britain, Denmark, and Sweden<sup>42</sup>; Maghrebi and

<sup>35</sup> Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Besim Can Zirh, “Following the Dead beyond the ‘Nation’: A Map for Transnational Alevi Funerary Routes from Europe to Turkey,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 10 (2012), 1771.

<sup>38</sup> Gerdien Jonker, “The Knife’s Edge: Muslim Burial in the Diaspora,” *Mortality* 1, no. 1 (1996), 27–43, and Zirh, “Following the Dead beyond the ‘Nation’: A Map for Transnational Alevi Funerary Routes from Europe to Turkey.”

<sup>39</sup> Chaïma Ahaddour and Bert Broeckaert, “Muslim Burial Practices and Belgian Legislation and Regulations: A Comparative Literature Review,” *Mortality* 22, no. 4 (2017), 356–373; Khadija Kadrouch-Outmany, “Burial Practices and Desires among Muslims in the Netherlands: A Matter of Belonging,” *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* 33, no. 2 (2012), 107–128; Khadija Kadrouch-Outmany, “Religion at the Cemetery: Islamic Burials in the Netherlands and Belgium,” *Contemporary Islam* 10, no. 1 (2016), 87–105.

<sup>40</sup> Nathal M. Dessing, *Rituals of Birth, Circumcision, Marriage, and Death among Muslims in the Netherlands* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Jordi Moreras and Ariadna Solé Arraràs, “Genealogies of Death: Repatriation among Moroccan and Senegalese in Catalonia,” in Samira Saramo et al., eds., *Transnational Death* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Alistair Hunter, “Staking a Claim to Land, Faith and Family: Burial Location Preferences of Middle Eastern Christian Migrants,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37, no. 2 (2016), 179–194.

sub-Saharan diasporas in France<sup>43</sup>; Mexicans in the United States<sup>44</sup>; and Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Taoist, and Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.<sup>45</sup> In spite of the vast geographical, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences – not to mention disparate histories of migration – posthumous repatriation, as Adrián Félix aptly observes, “appears to be a minoritarian affair.”<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, it would be misleading to assume that migrants’ transnational backgrounds would necessarily result in posthumous repatriation for burial in ancestral lands. This sort of thinking is analogous to the myth of return. Scholars of migration have long examined the so-called push and pull factors that determine why some people cross borders while others stay put.<sup>47</sup> End-of-life practices are likewise informed by a variety of different factors, including economic and religious considerations, feelings of social inclusion or exclusion, and the availability (or lack thereof) of appropriate burial grounds in countries of settlement. Practices such as burial and repatriation unfold within a dynamic sociocultural and political field that is shaped by states, families, and religious communities, all of which share an interest in the fate of dead bodies and where and how they are disposed of and commemorated.

The implications of death out of place and the complexity of the field within which it unfolds became the subject of international headlines

<sup>43</sup> Nada Afouni, “Les carrés musulmans à Southampton et au Havre: Témoignages des Politiques Française et Britannique de la Gestion de la Pluralité,” *Observatoire de la Société Britannique* 13 (2012), 83–100; Claudine Attias-Donfut, François-Charles Wolff, and Catriona Dutreuilh, “The Preferred Burial Location of Persons Born outside France,” *Population (English Edition)*, 2002) 60, no. 5/6 (2005), 699–720; Yassine Chaïb, *L’émigré et la Mort: la Mort Musulmane en France* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> Francoise Lestage, “Political Management of Migrants Suffering: New Practices by the Mexican State(s) with Their Emigrants,” *Migraciones Internacionales* 7, no. 1 (2013), 9–35; Adrián Félix, “Posthumous Transnationalism: Postmortem Repatriation from the United States to Mexico,” *Latin American Research Review* 46, no. 3 (2011), 157–179; Adrián Félix, *Spectres of Belonging: The Political Lifecycle of Mexican Migrants* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Lakhbir K. Jassal, “Necromobilities: The Multi-Sited Geographies of Death and Disposal in a Mobile World,” *Mobilities* 10, no. 3 (2015), 486–509; Katy Gardner, “Death of a Migrant: Transnational Death Rituals and Gender among British Sylhetis,” *Global Networks* 2, no. 3 (2002), 191–204.

<sup>46</sup> Félix, *Spectres of Belonging: The Political Lifecycle of Mexican Migrants*, 105.

<sup>47</sup> See Caroline B. Brettel and James F. Hollifield, *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines* (New York: Routledge Press, 2015) for a comprehensive account of theories of migration across different academic disciplines.

with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic as global news outlets recounted the challenges faced by immigrant and minority families whose loved ones had succumbed to the disease.<sup>48</sup> As governments around the world imposed lockdowns and border closures to mitigate the spread of the virus, numerous countries enacted travel restrictions on both the living and the dead, suspending cross-border travel and cross-border repatriation of corpses and human remains. These decisions left many people in distress, including Mamadou Diagouraga, a French Muslim whose father's dying request was to be buried in a family plot in his home village in Mali. Islamic tradition dictates a speedy burial in a Muslim cemetery (usually within twenty-four to forty-eight hours after death), but according to different estimates, between 60 and 80 percent of French Muslims with migratory histories are repatriated to ancestral homelands for burial in what is an elaborate and at times lengthy logistical undertaking.<sup>49</sup> However, fears of coronavirus infection prevented Mr. Diagouraga from burying his father in Mali. "Not having respected his last wishes," he told reporters in Paris, "it's true, it is heartbreaking."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ceylan Yeginsu, "In U.K., Hard-Hit Minority Communities Struggle to Bury the Dead," *New York Times*, May 10, 2020, <[www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/world/europe/uk-mosque-burials-coronavirus.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/world/europe/uk-mosque-burials-coronavirus.html)>; Constant Méheut, "French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage: Burial Grounds," *New York Times*, May 4, 2020; Kevin Sieff, "Mexican Migrant Deaths in the U.S. Have Surged during the Pandemic: Getting the Bodies Home Is a Challenge," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2021, <[www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/04/11/coronavirus-mexico-migrant-death-repatriate-remains/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/04/11/coronavirus-mexico-migrant-death-repatriate-remains/)>; Rowaida Abdelaziz, "Muslims Struggle to Honor Funeral Rituals during The Coronavirus Crisis," *Huffington Post*, May 13, 2020; Jorge Ramos, "México Lindo y Querido: Should I Die Abroad ...," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2020; Patrick McDonnell, "Coronavirus Has Killed Scores of Mexicans in New York: Their Families Are Fighting to Bring Them Home," *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 2020; Annie Correal, "2 Brothers Died of Covid-19: They're Being Denied Their Last Wish," *New York Times*, April 25, 2020; Danielle Renwick, "Mexicans Dying of Covid-19 in U.S. Face Burial Far from Home and Their Loved Ones," *The Guardian*, July 10, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Attias-Donfut, François-Charles Wolff, and Catriona Dutreuilh, "The Preferred Burial Location of Persons Born outside France," *Population (English Edition)*, 2002, 60, no. 5/6 (2005), 699–720; Cuzol, quoted in Méheut, "French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage: Burial Grounds." See also Yassine Chaïb, *L'émigré et la Mort: la Mort Musulmane en France* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Méheut, "French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage: Burial Grounds." Mexican Americans found themselves in a similar quandary



Muslims who wished to bury their dead in France encountered a different set of problems during the pandemic. Like Germany and many other European countries with sizable Muslim populations, France has a severe and longstanding shortage of cemeteries with sections reserved for Islamic burials.<sup>51</sup> Since French burial law stipulates that individuals must be buried in the municipality where they lived or died, Muslim communities in areas of the country where Islamic

after the government of Mexico issued a moratorium on the cross-border transportation of corpses. In an op-ed published in the *New York Times* in June 2020, Jorge Ramos wrote, “Over 1,000 Mexicans have died from Covid-19 in the United States, and many of them did not want to be buried in America. Most had an unspoken agreement with their friends and families: If I die in the United States, take me back to Mexico.” However, the Mexican government had issued a moratorium on the repatriation of dead bodies, and consular offices in the United States advised families to consider cremation, as cremated remains would not face the same travel restrictions. For practicing Catholics, for whom the integrity of the body is an important requirement, cremation was not a viable option. Stephanie García Morales, a second-generation Mexican American and funeral director at International Funeral Services of New York who has facilitated many transnational funerals, observed that “Mexican families always love to bring their loved ones back home. They want the body there. They don’t want the ashes. They want the physical body. The person there in Mexico.” Quoted in Correal, “2 Brothers Died of Covid-19: They’re Being Denied Their Last Wish.” Similarly, *The Guardian* observed that “for many Mexicans, being buried in native soil is an important rite.” See Renwick, “Mexicans Dying of Covid-19 in U.S. Face Burial Far from Home and Their Loved Ones.”

<sup>51</sup> As I detail in Chapter 4, only 300 of the Germany’s 32,000 public cemeteries – less than 1 percent – have sections reserved for Muslim graves. Around 6 million Muslims live in France, close to 9 percent of the total population. But only 600 of the country’s 35,000 municipal burial grounds – less than 2 percent – have dedicated spaces for Muslim citizens. Because of its commitment to the principle of *laïcité* and its strict regulation of expressions of religious faith in the public sphere, the town councils tasked with managing the country’s cemeteries are not obligated to create or extend religious burial plots in public grounds. See Nur Yasemin Ural, “A Genealogy of Muslims Dying in France,” *Sociology of Islam* 2, no. 1/2 (2014), 1–20, and Assiya Hamza, “En France, les rites funéraires musulmans et juifs bouleversés par le coronavirus,” *France* 24, July 4, 2020. The Napoleonic Decree of 1804 abolished all confessional cemeteries in France, with the exception of some Jewish and Protestant cemeteries. In 1884, separate confessional parcels were prohibited. The 1905 Law on the Separation of Churches and the State forbid the use of religious symbols in the public parts of a cemetery. See Rosemarie Van den Breemer and Marcel Maussen, “On the Viability of State-Church Models: Muslim Burial and Mosque Building in The Netherlands and France,” *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 10, no. 3 (2012), 279–298.



burial plots are in short supply have had to come up with creative solutions. Responding to the growing number of coronavirus deaths in the Muslim community, a group of imams in Lyon issued an unusual fatwa allowing for the temporary burial of Muslims in non-Muslim burial grounds.<sup>52</sup> Kamel Kabtane, rector of the Grand Mosque of Lyon, explained to reporters that families could later exhume and rebury (or repatriate) the bodies as circumstances allowed. He also stressed that the scarcity of Islamic burial grounds was a serious public policy issue.<sup>53</sup> “We must think in the long term and for all those who were born here and consider France their homeland. We must establish genuine high-capacity Muslim cemeteries oriented toward Makkah, and not just small areas for Muslims,” he said.<sup>54</sup> Kabtane’s sentiments were echoed by Chems-Eddine Hafiz, rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris. Noting that the coronavirus has “hit the Muslim community with full force,” Hafiz told reporters 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 said, “and clearly willingness to be buried in France is a type of integration.”<sup>55</sup>

Similar conversations about end-of-life practices, integration, and the stakes of political membership were taking place in Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy in the wake of mounting death tolls caused

<sup>52</sup> Méheut, “French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage: Burial Grounds.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Kabtane was quoted as saying, “We had to find quick solutions to these problems. We had to bury them with non-Muslims and explain to their families that maybe we would be able to move them later. In some cases, many families who want to bury their loved ones in their homelands have put them temporarily in morgues.” See Randa Tekieddine, “Victims of Covid-19 Fill Muslim Cemeteries in France,” *Arab News*, May 19, 2020. A similar pronouncement was made by the European Council of Moroccan Ulema in response to the dearth of appropriate burial grounds for Muslims in Spain. The Council said that if need be, people could state in their wills that after being temporarily buried in European soil, that they would like to be repatriated to their country of birth when the situation allows it. See Fatima Zohra Bouaziz, “Los marroquíes de España se quedan sin tumbas para sus muertos,” *La Vanguardia*, April 3, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Tekieddine, “Victims of Covid-19 Fill Muslim Cemeteries in France.”

<sup>55</sup> Qtd in Méheut, “French Muslims Face a Cruel Coronavirus Shortage: Burial Grounds.”

by the pandemic.<sup>56</sup> “Some old people still want to be buried in their country of origin. But many have children, grandchildren in Italy and now prefer to be buried here” said Gueddouda Boubakeur, president of Milan’s Islamic Centre.<sup>57</sup> “Younger Muslims want to be buried in Italy because they’re Italian,” he declared. Yet across the whole of Italy’s 8,000 municipalities, there are only seventy-six cemeteries with sections reserved for Islamic burials in a country that is home to nearly 2.7 million Muslims. “It is as if Italy forces you to repatriate your loved ones,” said Hira Ibraim, a twenty-three-year old Muslim whose mother died in March 2020 in the northern Italian township of Pisogne. “I was so sorry that many families who live in small municipalities like mine, without Islamic cemetery areas, haven’t been able to give their loved ones a worthy burial.”<sup>58</sup> Reflecting on this situation and its implications for Italy’s Muslim communities, Said El Bourji, who founded the country’s first Islamic funeral home in 2011, asked, “How are we supposed to take roots in Italy if we don’t possess Islamic cemeteries where we can be buried?”<sup>59</sup>

These stories help illustrate how end-of-life decisions and practices are connected to broader political struggles over the boundaries of nations and the place of minoritized groups within them. Posthumous practices anchor minority claims for inclusion and offer a symbolically powerful means to assert political membership and foster a sense of belonging. Yet the desire to be buried in ancestral lands underscores the continued relevance of transnational attachments and demonstrates how the impact of exclusionary sociopolitical orders can follow some people to the grave. Those who experience death out of place, like Muslims of Turkish and Kurdish descent in Germany, may face barriers to belonging in both the countries where they live and

<sup>56</sup> On these debates in Spain and the Netherlands, see Bouaziz, “Los marroquíes de España se quedan sin tumbas para sus muertos,” and Mike Corder, “Muslim Burials in Europe Strained by Virus Lockdowns Abroad,” *AP News*, May 13, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in “Italy’s Muslims Cope with Burial Space Shortage in Pandemic,” *Aljazeera*, June 9, 2020. As in France, Italian law stipulates that municipal cemeteries may provide for special and separate burial sections for non-Catholics, but does not require them to do so. As a result, Islamic burial grounds are few and far between.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Alex Čizmić, “Covid-19 Shows Italy’s Lack of Muslim Burial Spaces,” *New Frame*, August 13, 2020.

those where they are purportedly from. How they attempt to resolve these contradictions, in death and in life, demonstrates both the profound importance and fundamental ambiguity of the location and significance of home for transnational migrants and their kin.

## **An Ethnography of Transnational Deathways**

This book offers an ethnographic account of the transnational deathways of Muslims of Turkish and Kurdish descent in Germany. The majority of my fieldwork took place in Berlin and Istanbul between 2013 and 2017. During my time in Germany, I shadowed Muslim undertakers at several Islamic funeral homes, observing and participating in every aspect of their day-to-day work. I accompanied them on trips to hospitals, morgues, municipal offices, consular agencies, mosques, airports, and cemeteries. I assisted them in funeral ceremonies, helping to transport and bury deceased Muslims in a number of different cemeteries in the city. Together, we also prepared corpses for international repatriation and delivered them to Berlin-area airports for shipment on cargo and commercial flights. In addition to my participant observation of Berlin's Islamic funeral industry, I also conducted semistructured interviews with bereaved families, government officials, religious leaders, medical practitioners, and representatives of Islamic funeral funds, all in an effort to better understand the role that end-of-life practices play in the negotiation of social, political, and cultural boundaries. Alongside these formal interviews, I had countless informal conversations with community members during visits to numerous ethnic and cultural associations, youth centers, mosques, restaurants, and cafés, which ultimately helped shape the direction that my research took.

In 2015, I spent three months conducting fieldwork in Istanbul to learn more about the receiving end of the repatriation process. In Turkey, I was able to interview municipal cemetery administrators and to accompany undertakers to the airport to retrieve corpses that had been shipped from overseas. During my time in Turkey, I attended and observed several funeral ceremonies and visited nearly a dozen municipal cemeteries to better understand differences in funerary rituals and memorialization practices. In the summer of 2017, I returned to Berlin for follow-up interviews and to visit and photograph a new Islamic burial ground that had recently been established to serve the

city's Alevi communities. In total, I spent fifteen discontinuous months conducting fieldwork during a four-year period.

Much of my time in Berlin was spent in the neighborhoods of Neukölln and Kreuzberg, areas with a high concentration of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Kreuzberg is often referred to as "Little Istanbul," though in recent years, some of its long-term residents have been displaced as the neighborhood undergoes gentrification and commercial development. In impromptu conversations and formal interviews alike, I heard many people's stories about their families' history of migration and settlement in Germany, about summer vacations and annual trips taken to Turkey, about their hopes for their children and their future, and about the challenges they faced in their day-to-day lives. Many recounted their personal experiences with discrimination and the difficulties of being fully accepted into German society. The notion of integration came up frequently and was a heated topic of debate.

Social scientists often speak of integration in structural terms, focusing on metrics such as immigrants' socioeconomic status, access to citizenship, level of education, employment, political participation, linguistic abilities, neighborhoods of residence, and whether or not they have nonimmigrant friends.<sup>60</sup> While such studies help clarify macro-level trends, my own interest in issues surrounding integration and identity was not in how states integrate immigrant populations or whether some countries were more successful in incorporating ethno-racial and religious minorities than others, but rather in how the notion of integration was understood and experienced by those who were themselves the targets of state integration policies. For my interlocutors and conversation partners, integration was not a public policy issue that could be discussed in terms of socioeconomic benchmarks. It was an existential question. As one man in his mid-forties who had lived in Germany for most of his life told me over tea and pastries at a café in Neukölln:

<sup>60</sup> There is an enormous body of literature on these different topics. Erik Bleich, "Immigration and Integration Studies in Western Europe and the United States: The Road Less Traveled and a Path Ahead," *World Politics* 60, no. 3 (2008), 509–538, provides a useful overview of the different styles of scholarship on immigrant integration in Western Europe and the United States, while Terri E. Givens, "Immigrant Integration in Europe: Empirical Research," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007), 67–83, offers a comprehensive review of comparative research in political science on immigrant integration in Western Europe.

There's this thing they call integration here. You've probably heard about it. They're trying to integrate us, like we're from outer space! This is all linked to the idea of tolerance. What does tolerance mean? It's something you do because you have to do it, not because you want to. I find integration to be a really ugly concept.

Such reflections bring to mind a question posed by W. E. B. DuBois in a very different context more than a century ago: How does it feel to be a problem? For people with Turkish and Kurdish heritage in Germany, the answer is quite personal.

Almost everyone that I met asked me about my own experiences in the United States. As a second-generation immigrant whose childhood was spent between the United States and Turkey, I found myself in the position of an insider/outsider during my fieldwork. Unlike many of my interview partners in Germany, I did not grow up within a diaspora community. We were the only Turkish family in a small town in upstate New York. Yet frequent travel to Turkey and several years of education in Turkish public schools in Istanbul and Ankara have given me an intimate familiarity with Turkish culture, language, politics, and history. Throughout my life, I've grown accustomed to experiences of liminality and misrecognition. In Turkey, people consider me to be an American. In the United States, many view me as Turkish. Like countless other U.S.-born minorities, I am frequently asked where I am from and have also been told to go back to where I came from. Some people take it upon themselves to praise my English language skills, though as a first-year PhD student, the director of my graduate program inquired about the absence of my TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores, presumably because it was difficult for her to imagine that someone with a name like Osman Balkan could be a native speaker of English. From an early age, I had a good idea about what it felt like to live in a society where others view you as an outsider. These experiences have undoubtedly influenced my scholarly interests and intellectual trajectory. They also helped me connect on a deeper and more personal level with my interview partners in Berlin.

My interlocutors had not encountered many people with Turkish heritage that had grown up outside of Western Europe or Turkey. Inevitably, they asked me questions like "What do Americans think of Turkish people?" Or "What is life like for Turks in the United States?" They were disappointed to learn that Americans don't really think about Turkish people at all and know very little about the

country.<sup>61</sup> The number of Turkish-origin migrants in the United States is relatively small and geographically diffuse. There is no American Kreuzberg.

Nonetheless, people that I spoke to had certain preconceptions about Americans and the United States, a country that they related to in unexpected ways. When they learned that I had lived in New York City, many told me, “You have Harlem, we have Kreuzberg. We are like Blacks in America.” This comparison is striking, not least because of the notable paucity of race in contemporary political debates in Germany, where like many Western European states, discussions about immigration, multiculturalism, diversity, identity, and social cohesion tend to be rooted in categories like ethnicity, religion, and national origin.<sup>62</sup> As other scholars have noted, this sort of self-racialization is a strategy through which some members of minoritized groups in Germany try to make sense of their structurally precarious position in German society.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> As a child, I dreaded the perennial question “Do you celebrate Thanksgiving every day in Turkey?”

<sup>62</sup> Recent scholarship has sought to untangle the connections between race and religion in Europe, opening up new lines of debate about the racialization of Islam and Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism. See Nasar Meer, “Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture, and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013), 385–398, and Steve Garner and Saher Salod, “The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia,” *Critical Sociology* 4, no. 1 (2015), 9–19, which are editors’ introductions to two special issues on “Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture, and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia” and “Islamophobia and the Racialization of Muslims,” respectively. On race and Muslim converts, see Juliette Galonnier, “The Racialization of Muslims in France and the United States: Some Insights from White Converts to Islam,” *Social Compass* 62, no. 4 (2015), 570–583; Leon Moosavi, “The Racialization of Muslim Converts in Britain and Their Experiences of Islamophobia,” *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2014), 41–56; and Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe*. For a masterful overview of the literature on immigrant racialization, see Paul A. Silverstein, “Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot: Race, Migration, and Immigration in the New Europe,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005), 363–384.

<sup>63</sup> Gökçe Yurdakul and Y. Michal Bodemann, “‘We Don’t Want to Be the Jews of Tomorrow’: Jews and Turks in Germany after 9/11,” *German Politics & Society* 24, no. 2(79) (2006), 44–67. See also Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and New Muslim Youth Culture* (New York: Vintage Press, 2014) on Harlem’s centrality in the moral geography of young Muslims in Europe.

The questions that I was asked about my own experiences naturally lent themselves to conversations about the experiences of my interlocutors. As an insider/outsider, I was able to relate to, empathize with, and reflect deeply upon what I saw around me. My own background and experience – my positionality – unquestionably impacted my ability to navigate Turkish Berlin. In one memorable encounter that I chronicle later in this introduction, my affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania created an unexpected atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, but for the most part people were as eager to talk to and learn about me as I was to and about them. Ethnographic studies are never unidirectional. Our interlocutors always study us back and allow us into their lives in calculated ways. Winning trust is critical and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to encouraging people to tell their stories, especially when they involve emotionally difficult subjects like death. As a researcher, I tried to be respectful, honest, and transparent about my intentions with everyone that I spoke with, attempting to put into practice what John Jackson has called “ethnographic sincerity.”<sup>64</sup> The diverse networks of contacts that I developed throughout the course of my fieldwork helped open doors that might have otherwise remained closed to me.

Yael Navaro-Yashin has cautioned against a “colonial” conception of research in which the world is treated as a laboratory where students of anthropology can pick and choose field sites as they please. She writes that “only certain spaces and themes make themselves available for study by certain people.”<sup>65</sup> For Navaro-Yashin:

Anthropology is only fruitful insofar as the anthropologist is able to establish a relationality with the people whom she or he is studying. This is not possible just anywhere, for any one person or with any other person. The world does not wait for us out there to be the object of our science.<sup>66</sup>

I don’t take this to mean that only members of a particular group are qualified to study or to say something meaningful about that group, a position that valorizes the authenticity and epistemic verity

<sup>64</sup> John Jackson, “On Ethnographic Sensibility,” *Current Anthropology* 51, no. 2 (2010), S279–287.

<sup>65</sup> Yael Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2012), xii.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

of individual experience, which can lead to a reactionary and narrow-minded politics typified in the injunction to “stay in your lane.” I do believe, however, that knowledge of unwritten cultural codes, mores, habits, histories, struggles, aspirations, and beliefs helps inform one’s approach and abilities as an observer and analyst of social, cultural, and political phenomenon. As a discipline, anthropology has been well attuned to (some might say obsessed with!) questions of positionality, reflexivity, and power dynamics in ethnographic research. Such discussions are becoming more widespread in my own discipline of political science in tandem with the publication of a growing number of ethnographic accounts of political life.<sup>67</sup> As ethnographer and fellow political scientist Timothy Pachirat has argued, “The role of the ethnographer can be a *productive* and *necessary* source of reflection and analysis, rather than a shortcoming to be silenced or downplayed.”<sup>68</sup>

Just as my personal background may have helped open certain doors, others remained shut. One of the important shortcoming of this book, which I wish to acknowledge at the outset, results from my limited exposure to female spaces and voices. Although several of my interview partners were women, many of the informal venues like the cafés and restaurants where I chatted with strangers for hours at a time were spaces predominantly frequented by men. Furthermore,

<sup>67</sup> For exemplary political ethnographies, see Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Thea Riofrancos, *Resources Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Nicholas Rush Smith, *Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For debates about the role of ethnography and ethnographic research in political science, see Myron Aronoff and Jan Kubik, *Anthropology and Political Science: A Convergent Approach* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Lee Ann Fujii, “Five Stories of Accidental Ethnography: Turning Unplanned Moments in the Field into Data,” *Qualitative Research* 15, no. 4 (2015), 525–539; and Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>68</sup> Timothy Pachirat, “The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor,” in Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 145.



all of the undertakers that I shadowed were men, a trend that reflects broader disparities in the deathcare industry at large.<sup>69</sup> Other studies have focused explicitly on the gendered experiences of men and women with Turkish heritage in Berlin as well as those of German converts to Islam.<sup>70</sup> While I was granted some leeway and credibility as someone that others read as a Turkish-origin Muslim male, I am cognizant of the ways in which this particular subject position limited my access to other spaces, voices, and perspectives.

Studying death and bereavement ethnographically poses distinct ethical challenges. Early on in my research, I had to come to terms with a difficult but important set of questions. Was it possible, or even desirable, to study other people's grief and loss in a detached and dispassionate manner? How would the murky lines between participant and observer become even more muddled in moments of collective mourning? For Muslims, communal prayers for the dead are a central part of any funeral ceremony. As an observer of these rituals, I also participated in them, lining up shoulder to shoulder and offering my own prayers to the recently departed. In such moments, my perspective toggled between that of a researcher and that of a member of the Muslim community. Attending and participating in the funerals of

<sup>69</sup> While the number of women in the funeral industry in Germany and other parts of Europe and North America has increased in recent years, the division of labor tends to be highly gendered and women often hold administrative roles, whereas men are tasked with the handling, transportation, and preparation of the corpse for burial. See Brian Parsons, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. The Lifecycle of the UK Funeral Industry," *Mortality* 4, no. 2 (1999), 127–145, and Anna Davidsson Bremborg, "Professionalization without Dead Bodies: The Case of Swedish Funeral Directors," *Mortality* 11, no. 3 (2006), 270–285. For important exceptions, see Caitlin Doughty, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: And Other Lessons from the Crematory* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Kami Fletcher, "Black Female Undertakers in 20th-Century Baltimore," *African American Intellectual History Society*, February 3, 2017; and Rosemary Pringle and Jo Alley, "Gender and the Funeral Industry: The Work of Citizenship," *Journal of Sociology* 31, no. 2 (1995), 107–121.

<sup>70</sup> See Annika Marlen Hinze, *Turkish Berlin: Integration Policy and Urban Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), on the experiences of second-generation Turkish women in Kreuzberg and Neukölln; Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), on the construction and stigmatization of Turkish Muslim masculinity in Berlin; and Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe*, on the gendered and racialized experiences of German converts to Islam.

strangers was emotionally challenging. I experienced a range of feelings, from sorrow and trepidation to curiosity and empathy, acutely aware that some may have characterized my participation in these rituals as voyeuristic. One on occasion where I sensed that my presence at a funeral may have been disturbing some of the mourners, I left mid-ceremony, much to the surprise of the undertakers whom I had accompanied there.

Some of the existing scholarship on death and bereavement includes explicitly self-conscious reflection about the role of the researcher and how personal losses contribute to the making of ethnography.<sup>71</sup> One poignant example is anthropologist Finn Stepputat's description of a moment of intellectual revelation that came after his wife's unexpected death:

When my wife suddenly died some years ago, our home was soon flooded with paramedics and police officers, including a photographer and a social worker-cum-police officer. I asked the criminal investigator who interviewed me about the circumstances of the death if they could postpone taking my wife's body to the hospital morgue ... [This event] made me realize the force with which the state is articulated at the transition from life to death, a realization that related to my previous academic engagement with ethnographies of the state and sovereignty.<sup>72</sup>

In this passage, Stepputat describes how his own personal experience with loss and bereavement gave him insight into broader cultural and political phenomena – namely, the ways in which state power and sovereignty is exercised upon dead bodies. While I had no personal connections to the deceased or to the bereaved in the funeral ceremonies that I participated in, my own ethnographic immersion – though emotionally taxing – generated important insights that influenced the trajectory of my research. I discovered, among other things, that the public and collective rituals accompanying death and burial offer a compelling window into social hierarchies, communal boundaries,

<sup>71</sup> Renato Rosaldo, "Introduction: Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 1–24; Neni Panourgia, *Fragments of Death, Fables of Identity: An Athenian Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Finn Stepputat, "Governing the Dead? Theoretical Approaches," in Finn Stepputat, ed., *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), 4–5.

contested identities, and power relations. I also saw firsthand how dead bodies serve as sites of struggle over signification and meaning.

At the outset of each of the chapters in this book, I offer ethnographic vignettes and moments of intellectual revelation in the form of “field notes.” Drawing from my own personal experiences in the field, these notes and reflections speak to different aspects of the politics of death, burial, migration, and identity, and set the stage for the ensuing discussion. The first set of notes, which illustrates some of the political stakes and risks of conducting ethnographic research in transnational migratory settings, comes towards the end of this chapter. Before I share these field notes, I wish to underscore a few additional points about the politics of dead bodies in an effort to further clarify the political ramifications of death, dying, and burial and to elucidate the ways in which states and other actors are invested in the management of the dead. One of the central claims that this book develops is that states, families, and religious communities all have a substantial interest in the fate of dead bodies. Determining what happens to the dead, including how they are disposed of and commemorated, is an eminently political calculation. To further substantiate these arguments, I turn to the vast transdisciplinary literature on death, burial, and the politics of mourning, which has influenced my own approach and understanding of the contradictions and implications of death out of place. Although I subsume this scholarship under the general heading of what political theorist Achille Mbembe has termed “necropolitics,” my own approach to the necropolitical emphasizes its more quotidian iterations.

### **The Politics of Dead Bodies and Everyday Necropolitics**

Achille Mbembe’s thought-provoking interventions on the nature of sovereign power, violence, and the state’s right over life and death have opened up broad new lines of theoretical and empirical inquiry across a wide range of academic disciplines. Building on the work of Michel Foucault and the proposition that the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in the ability to exercise control over life and death, Mbembe formulated the concept of necropolitics to describe and make sense of “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death.”<sup>73</sup> Drawing on examples such as the slave plantation,

<sup>73</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003), 11–40, 39.

the penal colony, and territories under military occupation such as Palestine, where “new and unique forms of social existence” have appeared, Mbembe tracks the emergence of necropolitical regimes whose function is to create conditions of maximum deprivation.<sup>74</sup> In these so-called death worlds, populations are not killed off en masse in spectacular acts of violence. Instead, they are reduced to conditions of life that confer upon them the status of the “living dead” through willful neglect.<sup>75</sup> In such spaces, the exercise of sovereign power lies in its ability to define which lives matter for the vitality and future existence of the political community. By marking certain lives as valuable and others as expendable, necropolitics is, in Mbembe’s rendering, thoroughly invested in the uneven distribution of life and death across certain populations.

In its focus on the different allocation of death, however, Mbembe’s account of the necropolitical overlooks one of the key sites where necropolitics takes place: the human corpse. While states mete out death, dead bodies themselves are a critical terrain of statecraft, in part because of their materiality, symbolic power, and associations with the sacred.<sup>76</sup> As I’ve argued, contestations over corpses – where and how they should be buried and what they signify – are also contestations over the boundaries of political communities. Corpses are central to processes of world-making, as Katherine Verdery demonstrates in her brilliant study of Eastern Europe’s transitions from socialism. Following the collapse of communist governments in the region, the exhumation and reburial of revolutionary leaders and public figures was central to the reordering of worlds of meaning in postsocialist societies. Verdery’s account underscores the physicality of the corpse, arguing that a (dead) body’s materiality is vital to its symbolic efficacy. Unlike abstract notions such as “patriotism” or “the nation,” dead bodies, she observes, can be “moved around, displayed, and strategically located in specific places.”<sup>77</sup>

Dead bodies are particularly potent as political symbols because of their ambiguity and polysemy. The dead can carry vastly different

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Jessica Aughter, *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 27.

meanings for differently positioned actors, which helps explain why different groups like states, families, and religious communities make claims upon them. During the transitions from socialism, as Verdery shows, the corpses of both famous and infamous public figures served as unexpected loci for struggles over the configuration of national identities, social relations, and the postsocialist moral and political universe. In this period, public rituals of exhumation and reburial were central to the resignification of communal boundaries and collective identities. Such practices also helped justify and legitimate different visions of future sociopolitical, moral, and economic orders.

Dead bodies are curious objects. Philosopher Julia Kristeva sees them as the paradigmatic form of the abject. “Corpses,” she writes, “*show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.”<sup>78</sup> Dead bodies remind us of our own finitude and mortality, realities that most of us try not to dwell on in our daily lives.<sup>79</sup> Though dead, the corpse maintains some qualities of personhood by virtue of the fact that “it” was once a living, breathing, speaking, thinking, and feeling being. Being dead, however, the corpse is no longer a person. At the same time, it is not quite a thing. This curious ontology of the corpse – neither person nor thing – is crucial for understanding why humans go to great lengths to care for corpses (such as repatriating them thousands of miles for burial), and conversely why their mistreatment can cause such great anguish. In a sense, the dead are never quite dead.

What is at stake in how we treat dead bodies? A parable about Diogenes the Cynic, recounted by historian Thomas Laqueur in the opening pages of his magisterial account of the cultural meaning of the dead, lays out the terms of the debate.<sup>80</sup> Diogenes, an ancient philosopher whom his contemporary Plato described as “a Socrates gone mad,” was known for his eccentric behavior and unconventional teachings. He supposedly lived in a barrel near the Athenian Agora and roamed the city with a lantern during daylight in search of an

<sup>78</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>79</sup> This is what psychologist Ernest Becker described as “the denial of death.” In his landmark 1973 study, he argued that the fear of death is one of the most fundamental and important inner drives of human beings. See Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

<sup>80</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

honest man. One day, Diogenes told his followers not to bury him when he died. “Toss my corpse over the city walls and let nature take its course,” he said. Seeing their horrified reactions, Diogenes suggested that they should leave a staff near his corpse so that he could drive away the wild beasts that would inevitably consume it. “But how can you do that,” they asked, “for you will not perceive them?” “How am I then injured by being torn by those animals,” Diogenes replied, “if I have no sensation?”

Reflecting on Diogenes’ terse rebuttal, Laqueur concedes that he was certainly right about one thing – a body stripped of life cannot be injured. But in assuming that the treatment of dead bodies was of little consequence, Diogenes was in Laqueur’s estimation “existentially wrong, wrong in a way that defies all cultural logic.”<sup>81</sup> The dead cannot simply be neglected or abandoned, left as carrion for scavengers and beasts of prey. They “are not refuse like the other debris of life,” writes Laqueur.<sup>82</sup> Though we are compelled to attend to the dead because of processes of decomposition and putrefaction that take hold of the body after death, burial, as Robert Hertz argued, is not simply a matter of hygiene. In his influential 1908 essay “A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death,” Hertz argued that the corpse is an object of “horror and dread,” both because of the abject qualities that Kristeva identified, but also because “when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of its life, in the faith that it has in itself.”<sup>83</sup> Like his teacher Émile Durkheim, Hertz believed that society regenerates itself in and through ritual. He saw in funerary rites a process through which communities move individuals from the world of the living to the world of the dead, what he referred to as the “double” or “second burial.”<sup>84</sup> Through funerary rites, what Arnold van Gennep calls “rites of passage,” the dead are put

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, reissue ed. (London: Routledge, 2006 [1907]), 37–38. For an extended discussion of Hertz and the sociology of burial, see Hans Ruin, *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). For a comprehensive overview of theoretical approaches to death, which has greatly informed my own discussion, see Stepputat, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies*.

<sup>84</sup> Hertz lays out his influential theory through a study of the mortuary practices of South Asian tribal societies, in particular, secondary burial among

in their proper place – out of our world and into the realm of the ancestors.<sup>85</sup> This is one reason why the location of burial is so important for many, something that takes on added salience when people experience death out of place.

There is, of course, enormous variation in the ways that different groups perform transitions from life to death, reflecting – among other things – different beliefs about the body, the soul, and the afterlife. If funerary rites are denied by states or other actors who treat corpses as if they were mere things and not people – either by desecrating them or by leaving them unburied – the consequences can be momentous.<sup>86</sup> Laqueur points out the striking parallels between the story of Achilles dragging Hector’s lifeless body over the fields of Troy in Homer’s *Iliad* and the images of a dead American soldier being pulled through the streets of Mogadishu by followers of General Mohamed Aidid in 1993. During World War II, Nazis dumped the corpses of executed resistance fighters on the streets of Paris for all to see, just as drug cartels in Mexico hang their victims’ bodies from bridges and highway intersections today.

In 2015, Turkish security forces flaunted the desecrated, denuded corpse of Kurdish guerilla fighter Ekin Wan in the southeastern city of Varto, while in 2014, the Ferguson police department left Michael Brown’s dead body in the middle of an intersection for four hours. Readers of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* will likely never forget his cringeworthy description of the gruesome eighteenth-century execution of Damians, who after being publicly tortured and quartered, had his body parts burned at the stake.<sup>87</sup> Nor is it easy to forget Machiavelli’s account of the murder of Remirro de Orco, who Duke Cesare Borgia had “placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces with a

the Dayak of Kalimantan, Indonesia. He shows how social death is not coterminous with the biological death of the individual and that the living ease the dead into the world of the ancestors through a series of phased transitions, each with its own ritual practices.

<sup>85</sup> Arnold van Gennep, Monika B. Vizedon, and Gabrielle L. Caffee, *The Rites of Passage*, reprint ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961 [1908]).

<sup>86</sup> According to James Martel’s *Bodies Unburied: Subversive Corpses and the Authority of the Dead* (Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 2018), the unburied dead pose not only a major threat to sovereign authority and power but can even serve as the catalyst of their undoing.

<sup>87</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him,” a ferocious spectacle which “left the people at once satisfied and stupefied.”<sup>88</sup> King Creon’s well-known injunction against the burial of Polynices and Antigone’s defiance of his orders offers another example of how different actors are invested in the fate of dead bodies. The horror and awe that the mistreatment of human bodies evokes is timeless. In the face of such practices of corpse degradation, writes Laqueur, the “radically different eschatologies” of the ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary world “seem to melt away.”<sup>89</sup>

The force with which sovereign power is brought to bear on the dead is clearly on display in spectacular examples like the acts of violence directed against corpses, what political theorist Banu Bargu calls “necropolitical violence.”<sup>90</sup> But we must also consider the more quotidian forms of necropolitics that are present in everyday practices of corpse management and memorialization. As Finn Stepputat reminds us, all states establish a range of institutions, laws, and practices to oversee the transitions from life to death, including what happens to dead

<sup>88</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince: Second Edition*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>89</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*. I take the examples of the American soldier, Hector, and the French resistance from Laqueur, who also writes about Antigone, Jamaican slaves denied burial rites for rebellion or for denouncing Christianity, the Spanish conquistadors’ practice of leaving dead Aztecs in the public square, and the English poor’s riots against laws that sanctioned the use of criminal bodies for public dissection. On the politics of slave burial in Jamaica, see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> Banu Bargu, “Another Necropolitics,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 1 (Supplement) (2016). Necropolitical violence, in Bargu’s understanding, refers to acts “that target the dead bodies of those killed in armed conflict by way of their mutilation, dismemberment, denuding, desecration, dragging, and public display, the destruction of local cemeteries and other sacred spaces that are designed for communication with and commemoration of the dead, the delay, interruption, or suspension of the conduct of funerary rituals, the imposition of mass or anonymous internment, the pressure for clandestine internment, and the repression and dispersion of funeral processions for the newly dead.” See also Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), and “Sovereignty as Erasure: Rethinking Enforced Disappearances,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23, no. 1 (2014), 35–75, for important insights about state practices of enforced disappearance and the necropolitical resistance of Turkish death fasters.



bodies.<sup>91</sup> Although states may delegate certain postmortem responsibilities to private, social, and religious entities, they usually claim ultimate authority over the definition and governance of the dead within their jurisdiction, relying on a combination of legislation and institutionalized procedures.<sup>92</sup> This can be a contested process, especially when there are discrepancies between burial laws and religious or cultural expectations about the proper treatment of dead bodies.<sup>93</sup> According to Stepputat, “the death of a person represents an occasion for the performance of sovereignty, not only for territorial states but also for a range of sub-, trans- and supra-national entities that seek to claim or produce autonomous domains of power.”<sup>94</sup> The governance of the dead, then, is a crucial means through which both state and nonstate actors construct and contest the boundaries of political communities.

One of the most widespread and well-known means through which states manage the dead in order to consolidate national communities can be seen in the rituals surrounding unknown soldiers.<sup>95</sup> The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a memorial invented by the governments of Italy, France, and Britain during the final years of World War I.<sup>96</sup> While state memorials to the dead have a very long history (Thucydides writes about the ancient Athenian practice of the empty tomb or Cenotaph), the monuments that governments have built to honor unknown soldiers are a decisively modern phenomenon that is paradigmatic of nationalism. According to Benedict Anderson:

No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedence in earlier times ... Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or

<sup>91</sup> Stepputat, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Alison Dundes Renteln, “The Rights of the Dead: Autopsies and Corpse Mismanagement in Multicultural Societies,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 4 (2001), 1005–1027. I discuss these issues in Chapter 4.

<sup>94</sup> Stepputat, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies*. 4–5.

<sup>95</sup> Sarah Wagner and Thomas Maty, “Monumental Change: The Shifting Politics of Obligation at the Tomb of the Unknowns,” *History & Memory* 30, no. 1 (2018), 40–74.

<sup>96</sup> Laura Wittman, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning, and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body*, 2nd ed. (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2011).

immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings. (This is why so many different nations have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be *but* Germans, Americans, Argentinians ...?)<sup>97</sup>

Soldier dead have long played an important role in efforts to bolster political communities and their professed values. In his funeral oration, Pericles spoke of the bravery of fallen Athenian soldiers while extolling the virtues of the Athenian people and their democracy, much like Abraham Lincoln did centuries later at his famous speech at Gettysburg, where he declared that the deaths of Union soldiers would enable the rebirth of the American nation.<sup>98</sup> Politicians frequently speak of the “ultimate sacrifice” made by soldiers killed in action (“they died for our freedom”), and states go to great lengths to recover their soldier dead to ensure they are brought “home” to their “appropriate” resting place.<sup>99</sup> As I explore in Chapter 1, a similar

<sup>97</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006 [1983]), 9–10, emphasis in original.

<sup>98</sup> See Simon Stow, “Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning,” *American Political Science Review* 2 (2007), 195–208, for a compelling analysis of the two speeches.

<sup>99</sup> Sarah Wagner, *What Remains: Bringing America’s Missing Home from the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). The U.S. government spends approximately \$100 million annually to recover, identify, and repatriate military remains from former theaters of war. The first systematic effort to recover and repatriate American soldier dead took place during the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection of 1898. In the aftermath of World War I, 45,888 soldiers were repatriated at a cost of \$18 million. During World War II, 171,000 soldiers – or 61 percent of those killed in combat – were repatriated at a cost of \$95.5 million. Since the Korean War, the U.S. military has instituted a policy of “concurrent return,” which stipulates that all fallen soldiers be repatriated to the United States as quickly as possible. In contrast, the British employed a policy of “nonrepatriation,” choosing instead to bury their dead soldiers where they fell. The existence of British military cemeteries across the world reflected an imperial logic and lent credence to the notion that there is “a little part of England everywhere.” See Dominiek Dendooven, “‘Bringing the Dead Home’: Repatriation, Illegal Repatriation and Expatriation of British Bodies during and after the First World War,” in Paul Cornish and Nicholas J. Saunders, eds., *Bodies in Conflict: Corporeality, Materiality, and Transformation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 66–79, on British repatriation policies.

impetus is present in government and civil society efforts to repatriate the bodies of former migrants to countries of origin for burial. In both instances, the underlying desire is to bring the body back to its “proper” resting place.

Anderson points out the difficulty of imagining a “Tomb of the Unknown Marxist” or a “Cenotaph for Fallen Liberals,” arguing that nationalism, unlike Marxism or Liberalism, is centrally concerned with death and immortality, lending it a strong affinity with religious imaginaries. This affinity, which for Anderson is by no means coincidental, is what inspires him to begin his canonical study of the cultural roots of nationalism with death, which he characterizes as “the last of a whole gamut of fatalities.”<sup>100</sup> The invocation of the *ghostly* qualities of nationalism and the affinity between death and the nation is also an invitation to consider the spectral dimensions of nation-states. “To study social life,” Avery Gordon asserts, “one must confront the ghostly aspects of it.”<sup>101</sup> This is not a plea for the paranormal but a recognition that ends are not always endings. Endings can have afterlives. Ghosts produce material and observable effects. As Gordon puts it:

The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way of course ... What kind of a case is a case of the ghost? It is a case of haunting, a story about what happens when we admit the ghost – that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present – into the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world.<sup>102</sup>

Scholars heeding Gordon’s call to “admit the ghost” into their analyses of social, cultural, and political life have proliferated alongside a growing transdisciplinary interest in questions concerning haunting and afterlives.<sup>103</sup> These works, which speak to topics as varied as the afterlives of gender, loss, revolution, empire, solitary confinement,

<sup>100</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Auchter, *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations*; Ash Zengin, “The Afterlife of Gender: Sovereignty, Intimacy, and Muslim Funerals of Transgender People in Turkey,” *Cultural Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2019), 78–102.

monuments, area studies, and even punk rock, cohere around a shared interest in exploring how the past extends into, interrupts, or impinges upon the present.<sup>104</sup> While in its colloquial usage the notion of afterlife commonly refers to a realm of consciousness or existence after the biological death of a person, as an analytical concept, “afterlives” is concerned with what remains and what returns. Afterlives “point to what haunts that which might otherwise be celebrated as an unencumbered, fresh start.”<sup>105</sup>

In this vein, my own approach to death out of place and the politics of dead bodies presumes that the biological death of a person is not simply a negation, an erasure of being, or the termination of the individual or the self. Death is a *productive* and *generative* moment that sets into motion a complex chain of meaningful human activity. “The living need the dead far more than the dead need the living,” writes Thomas Laqueur, because “the dead make social worlds.”<sup>106</sup> The human corpse is not an agentic force in the traditional sense of the word but there is, nonetheless, something more to dead bodies than just insentient organic matter.<sup>107</sup> Laqueur sees their presence as enchanting our allegedly disenchanted world. In their afterlives, the dead contribute to public and political life in unpredictable but consequential ways.

Dead bodies serve as concerted sites of political activity over the boundaries of political communities and their foundational values and ideals. Long-buried corpses can acquire new public meaning in times of political turbulence and change. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the corpses of the old sociopolitical order became targets of a peculiar form of political violence. When the National Convention voted to destroy the royal mausoleums of Saint-Denis in 1793, the skeletons of twenty-five kings, seventeen queens, and seventy-one princes were exhumed; thrown into two great ditches; and covered with lime to eradicate them. Revolutionaries with pickaxes removed their lead burial vaults, melted them down, and turned them into bullets. That same year, the body of Cardinal Richelieu was taken

<sup>104</sup> Marlene Schäfers, “#Afterlives: Introduction,” *Allegra Lab*, 2020. <<https://allegralaboratory.net/afterlives-introduction/>>.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, 1.

<sup>107</sup> For a discussion about the agency of the dead, see Ruin, *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness*, especially Chapter 4.

out of its tomb and decapitated with much fanfare.<sup>108</sup> Such examples seem to corroborate Walter Benjamin's assertion in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that "not even the dead will be safe from the enemy if he is victorious."<sup>109</sup>

Following passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 by the U.S. Congress, numerous museums and other cultural institutions have been compelled to return the looted human remains and grave goods of Native Americans to those who can prove their relationship to such items.<sup>110</sup> Policymakers saw the return of these artifacts as a way to come to terms with past injustices by restoring sacred objects that had been pillaged from Native Americans to their rightful owners. One of the central motivations underlying this vision of restorative justice was the idea that the dead and their belongings should be returned to their proper owners and places. Native American communities' demands for repatriation were often expressed as a desire to "bring home" these stolen relics.<sup>111</sup>

Of course, migrants and minorities are different than soldiers, kings and queens, cultural icons, and indigenous remains and objects. One connection that I see between such disparate figures is that the activity surrounding their corpses is intimately tied to processes of place-making. Different actors assert and challenge the boundaries of political, national, religious, and moral communities in and through practices involving dead bodies. To "bring a dead body home" is a

<sup>108</sup> These stories are recounted by Michel Ragon, *Space of Death: Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration and Urbanism*, trans. A. Sheridan (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983).

<sup>109</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

<sup>110</sup> See James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), and Tony Platt, *Grave Matters: Excavating California's Buried Past* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2011), on debates around returns and repatriations. One of the most famous cases of Native American repatriation involves the body of Jim Thorpe, an Olympic gold medalist and member of the Sac and Fox Nation. His third wife sold his corpse to the town of Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania (later re-named Jim Thorpe in his honor), which built a mausoleum to house his remains. Family members sued the town in 2010 to have Thorpe's remains transferred to the Sac and Fox reservation in Oklahoma, but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit declared that the borough of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, is not a "museum" as defined by NAGPRA and therefore was not compelled to return his remains.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

powerful symbolic act that involves both the actual transportation of material remains and the assertion of a particular vision of collective identity and membership. The practice of repatriation (of bodies and of objects) reflects a widely held, commonsensical idea that the dead have their proper place and that denying this would be unjust.

Importantly, places are made meaningful and endowed with a sense of “placeness” by virtue of the dead that inhabit them. The act of burial is a place-making practice par excellence. Giambattista Vico argues that the ancestors of European patrician families laid proprietary claims to their lands by signaling towards the graves of their forefathers. “Thus by the graves of their buried dead,” he writes, “the giants showed dominion over their lands, and Roman law called for burial of the dead in a proper place to make it religious. With truth they could pronounce these heroic phrases: we are sons of this earth, we are born from these oaks.”<sup>112</sup> It was through such gestures that claims of ownership were legitimated.<sup>113</sup>

While graves and the dead bodies that occupy them can provide proof of proprietary rights over land, they can also lend force to symbolic claims of ownership and belonging. Recall the statements made by Muslim religious leaders in Europe during the coronavirus pandemic: “Younger Muslims want to be buried in Italy because they’re Italian” and “The younger generations want to be totally French, and clearly willingness to be buried in France is a type of integration.” One of the core arguments that I develop in this book is that people assert membership in particular groups – be it at the level of the family, religious community, or nation – through postmortem practices such as burial and repatriation. Engseng Ho reminds us that the graves of migrants, while literal endpoints, are also “beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in a land.”<sup>114</sup> As I’ve

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 35. A more contemporary example involves S. M. Otieno, a Kenyan lawyer who became an object of litigation as his widow and his clansmen fought in the courts over the location of his grave and the identification of his real home, a decision that pitted customary law against common law in Kenya. See David W. Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH; London: Heinemann, 1992).

<sup>113</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*.

<sup>114</sup> Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1.

asserted, states, families, and religious communities all have a stake in the fate of dead bodies and work in different ways to ensure that they end up in the “right” place. What that right place is and what it signifies for different actors is by no means a foregone conclusion. In an effort to demonstrate how the dead contribute to the construction and reproduction of collective boundaries and communal identities, this book traces the actors, networks, and institutions that determine the movement of dead bodies within and across international borders. By doing so, it helps shed light on the processes through which relations between authority, territory, and populations are managed at a transnational level.

A transnational analysis is attentive to the different types of economic, cultural, political, and familial ties and connections that exist across national borders. Scholars of migration use the term “transnationalism” to talk about the ways in which contemporary migrants are simultaneously embedded in, identify with, and participate in multiple communities that are not just, or even primarily, rooted in a single national collectivity.<sup>115</sup> Writing in the 1990s, Nina Glick-Schiller and her collaborators suggested that the existence of transnational ties points to the emergence of a “new type of migrant experience” and by extension, a new type of immigrant. These “new” immigrants no longer break their ties with their countries of origin or simply stay put and assimilate to the host society. While immigrant communities across the world have historically maintained ties with countries of origin in various domains of life, the time–space compression enabled by improvements in transportation and communications technologies have certainly made cross-border travel and communication much cheaper, easier, and more readily available to ever greater numbers of people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>116</sup>

Studies of transnational migration are attentive to the different types of connections that migrants forge across home and host societies and also to the ways that states become involved in managing their

<sup>115</sup> Patricia Ehrkamp and Helga Leitner, “Rethinking Immigration and Citizenship: New Spaces of Migrant Transnationalism and Belonging,” *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 9 (2006), 1591–1597.

<sup>116</sup> Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York’s Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New Haven; New York: Yale University Press, 2002); Steven Vertovec, “Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999), 447–462.

diasporas abroad. Approximately 4 million people with Turkish heritage live in Germany, making it one of the largest Turkish diasporas in the world. For several decades, the Turkish government has actively worked to maintain connections with Turkish-origin communities in Germany, both because of the large volume of economic remittances sent to Turkey and because many Germans of Turkish descent are still eligible to vote in national elections in Turkey.<sup>117</sup> The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, whose European operations I discuss further in the next chapter, maintains control over hundreds of mosques in Germany (and across Europe) and is an influential actor in the institutionalization of Islam in Germany. At times, various groups with widely divergent visions of the political future of the Turkish republic, including Kurds, Alevis, Islamists, Kemalists, Yezidis, and Gülenists, have come into open political conflict in Germany, a reflection of the transnationalization of Turkish politics. The political stakes of this transnationalization became glaringly evident in the aftermath of what I had expected to be a routine visit to Berlin's Şehitlik Mosque in July 2014. As my field notes in the next section illustrate, domestic disagreements between different Turkish-origin subcommunities in Germany can play out in unusual and consequential ways.

### The Man in Pennsylvania

Berlin's Şehitlik Mosque is one of the city's only buildings with traditional Islamic architectural features like a domed roof and pointy minarets. Centrally located in the neighborhood of Kreuzberg, it is a welcoming and busy hub of activity that attracts worshippers of all ages to its religious services. During my fieldwork, I spent a great deal of time at the mosque, participating in funeral services and weekly Friday prayers. The Şehitlik Mosque hosts cultural events like concerts and art

<sup>117</sup> See Betigül Ercan Argun, *Turkey in Germany: The Transitional Sphere of Deutschkei* (New York: Routledge, 2015), for an account of transnational linkages between Turkey and Germany, and Banu Şenay, *Beyond Turkey's Borders: Long-Distance Kemalism, State Politics and the Turkish Diaspora* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2013), for an analysis of the Turkish state's activities in Australia, what she refers to as "long distance Kemalism." Mandel's *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* offers a rich ethnography of Turkish transnational life in Berlin.



exhibitions and also organizes public outreach programs for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Its courtyard is home to a small bookstore that sells books in both Turkish and German as well as clothes, trinkets, and accessories. Visitors can purchase tea and coffee from the mosque's canteen, which on Fridays also serves excellent sandwiches with grilled *sucuk*, a spicy beef sausage that is popular in Turkey.

On this particular day, the mosque was quiet. When I arrived in the late afternoon, the only other people that I saw were a group of middle-aged and elderly men sitting around a white plastic table in the mosque's courtyard. One of them was the imam of the mosque. He had been in Berlin for about six months, having been sent over by the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey. The Turkish state is an important player in matters concerning Islam in Europe. Through the European branches of its Directorate of Religious Affairs, it subsidizes and manages hundreds of mosques across the continent. It also pays the salaries of Turkish imams in Germany and many other European countries. In addition to its financial support, the Directorate helps staff these mosques by appointing imams trained in Turkish theological institutions to serve for four- or five-year stints abroad. Some public officials in Germany have criticized the policy of importing religious leaders because they see it as giving undue influence over matters concerning Islam in Germany to foreign governments.<sup>118</sup> While the German government has created new institutions to train Islamic religious leaders, such as the Center for Islamic Theology at Münster University, which was established in 2011, the vast majority

<sup>118</sup> During deliberations over the introduction of a "mosque tax" for German Muslims, similar to the church taxes that German Christians pay, Thorsten Frei, a CDU member representing the state of Baden-Württemberg, noted that a mosque tax was "an important step" that would allow "Islam in Germany to emancipate itself from foreign states." Seyren Ateş, founder of a progressive mosque in Berlin, has argued that Islam in Germany "has a huge influence from outside, from foreign countries" and that German Muslims "have to stand up themselves ... and care about their own religion here in Germany." See "Germany Mulls Introducing 'Mosque Tax' for Muslims," *Deutsche Welle*, December 26, 2018. See also Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), and Levent Tezcan, "Governmentality, Pastoral Care, and Integration," in Ala Al-Hamarneh and Jorn Thielmann, eds., *Islam and Muslims in Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 119–132, for discussions of the role of external governments in managing Islam in Germany.

of imams that find employment in mosques affiliated with the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs in Germany are sent from Turkey.

I walked over to the table and introduced myself to the group of men, asking if I could join them. "I'm here doing research for my dissertation," I told them. "I'd like to learn more about Islam in Germany and am especially interested in the burial practices of Muslims here." The imam gestured for me to take a seat next to him and asked me where I was from. I explained that my parents had emigrated from Turkey to the United States. "I was born there but grew up back and forth between the United States and Turkey," I said. "Are you a journalist?" he asked. "No," I said. "I'm a PhD student here to conduct research. My university is in the United States." Reaching into my bag, I pulled out a business card that I had had printed up before starting my fieldwork, thinking that it would lend me some credibility when I made interview requests. I later found out that "PhD student" was a common cover used by German intelligence agents when visiting mosques and Islamic associations in Germany. Consequently, people were understandably wary when approached by outsiders who wanted to ask them questions in the name of research.

The imam, a mustached man in his late fifties, took my business card and examined it. It was a simple white card with the university's crest and name as well as my name and departmental affiliation. Adjusting the white skullcap on his head, he looked up from the card at me and asked, "What's this university?" Without thinking I answered, "It's the University of Pennsylvania." An uncomfortable silence ensued. I looked around the table, noting the puzzled expressions on the faces of the other men. Their eyes had hardened somewhat, but they remained silent. "Hmmm ..." the imam interjected skeptically, inviting me to elaborate. "Yes, it's the University of Pennsylvania," I repeated. "That's where I'm doing my doctorate. I'm a PhD student there. In the political science department."

At this point I was a little confused. I didn't understand what was so perplexing about the situation. I had assumed that most of the people I would talk to had probably never heard of the University of Pennsylvania. I didn't expect that my credentials would be so carefully scrutinized. "Pennsylvania," said the imam, drawing out the word. "Penn-siiil-vehy-nee-ahh."

Then it hit me. The U.S. state of Pennsylvania is home to the reclusive cleric Fetullah Gülen, who has spent more than twenty years

in self-imposed exile at a walled-off compound in the Poconos, a wooded weekend destination a few hours north of Philadelphia. Gülen is the spiritual leader of the Hizmet movement and has focused much of his energies towards establishing science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) schools in Turkey, Central Asia, Africa, Indonesia, and the United States.<sup>119</sup> He has been an active and well-known figure in Turkish domestic politics and was a longtime ally of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan until the two had a falling out. For years, Erdoğan referred to Gülen as “the man in Pennsylvania.” In Turkish public discourse, “Pennsylvania” often serves as a metonym for the Hizmet movement. Individuals sympathetic to Gülen and his organization have been targeted by the Turkish government and in some cases, imprisoned on charges of infiltrating key branches of the state such as the military, police, and judiciary. Many Turks believe that Gülen himself is operating a parallel, deep state structure within the Turkish state.

At the time of my visit to the mosque, the war between Gülen and Erdoğan was, relatively speaking, still in a cold phase. Things would heat up a few years later when, on July 15, 2016, a faction of the Turkish armed forces launched a failed military coup attempt in which more than 300 people were killed and 2,100 injured. President Erdoğan, who saw Gülen’s hand behind the coup attempt, took to the airwaves the morning after it happened and announced, “I have a message for Pennsylvania: You have engaged in enough treason against this nation. If you dare, come back to your country!”<sup>120</sup> Erdoğan’s government has pressed the United States to extradite Gülen to face trial in Turkey, but at the time of this writing, he remains in Pennsylvania.

<sup>119</sup> Some of these, like the charter schools he founded in Texas, have come under indictment for money laundering. See Stephanie Saul, “Charter Schools Tied to Turkey’s Gulen Movement Grow in Texas,” *New York Times*, June 6, 2011. For more on the history of the Hizmet movement, see David Tittensor, *The House of Service: The Gulen Movement and Islam’s Third Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, “Turkey Rounds Up Thousands of Military Personnel,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2016. See Osman Balkan, “The Cemetery of Traitors,” in Banu Bargu, ed., *Turkey’s Necropolitical Laboratory: Democracy, Violence, Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 232–252, for a discussion of the aftermath of the coup attempt.

Even before the military coup attempt, Gülen was widely known and reviled by supporters of the Ak Parti (AKP) and President Erdoğan, both at home and abroad. Until that very moment, I hadn't considered that my affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania could potentially mark me as a Gülenist sympathizer, but as I sat there in the courtyard of the Şehitlik mosque, I quickly understood why the imam had received me with some reservation and skepticism. Laughing nervously, I tried to set the record straight. I explained to him that my university was a longstanding and well-regarded academic institution in the United States. "It's a university that's in the city of Philadelphia, which is in the state of Pennsylvania," I told the imam. "It's been around for more than two hundred years, long before Gülen ever set foot in Pennsylvania. It has nothing to do with him or with his movement."

The imam seemed unconvinced. He agreed to talk with me, but his mood had noticeably soured. He took a few of my questions but our conversation was extremely brief. Offering laconic and perfunctory responses, he told me after three or four minutes that he had other things he needed to do and couldn't talk further. "I'm going to keep your business card, if you don't mind," he told me as I stood up to leave. "Good luck with your research and with all of your work in Penn-siiil-vehy-nee-ahh."

I left the mosque feeling shaken, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. I was truly baffled by the situation, which felt Kafkaesque. Did he really think I was a Gülenist sympathizer because my university had the word "Pennsylvania" in it? Or because I lived in the state of Pennsylvania? Was I guilty by geographical association? A few days later, I recounted this experience to a few acquaintances as we sat drinking tea at an outdoor café. One of them, whom I had met through a fellow doctoral student who was with me that day, worked as the social media coordinator for *Deutsch Türkisches Journal (DTJ)*, an internet news site that describes itself as "The expert portal about Turkey and the German-Turkish community." I told my companions about what had happened at the mosque in jest, thinking that it made for a funny anecdote about the unexpected twists and turns of field-work. I didn't realize at the time that the *DTJ* had had Gülenist leanings, and I was certainly not prepared for what came next.

After we parted ways, the social media coordinator recounted my story to his boss, the editor in chief of the *Deutsch Türkisches Journal*.

This editor found the story so compelling that he decided to use it as part of an op-ed (without my consent). The first two paragraphs of the op-ed read as follows:

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

*Before the candidate presents his questions, he briefly introduces his university, himself, and his research topic. When the imam hears “Pennsylvania,” he freezes. He does not address the questions of the young scientist and behaves aloof and unfriendly. As Ali realizes that he won’t be getting any answers to his questions, he gives the imam a business card and says goodbye, and asks if he can contact him in the future for help. The imam replies to the guest with a cold and harsh, “I wish you good work in Pennsylvania.”<sup>121</sup>*

The op-ed goes on to criticize the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) for its monopoly over the interpretation and practice of Islam in Turkey. The author laments the connection between Gülen and the U.S. state of Pennsylvania, arguing that the German branch of the Diyanet fosters a hostile and polarized climate among German Turks. He asserts that the Diyanet has become an overtly and unnecessarily politicized institution and insists that its activities should be relegated to the realm of religion, not politics.

I became aware of this article, which all but outed me by name, after I had returned to the United States. The imam that I had met at the mosque sent me a livid email, taking issue with the ways that the events had been portrayed by the *DTJ*. In his email, he asked me why I had fabricated such a story and why I had misrepresented his actions to make him look like a bad guy. He ended his email with the following sentence, written in all capital letters for added emphasis: “YOU

<sup>121</sup> Süleyman Bağ, “Die Rolle der Diyanet im politischen System der Türkei,” *Deutsch Türkisches Journal*, September 11, 2014.

SAID YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE COMMUNITY IN PENNSYLVANIA.”

I was horrified when I read his message. Although I wrote him back several times, offering a good faith explanation of what had happened in an effort to reach some resolution and mutual understanding, I never heard back. To this day, I wonder whether this encounter and its aftermath jeopardized my intellectual or political credibility in the eyes of Turkish authorities. I have no way of knowing whether the imam spoke to anyone about our meeting or shared the op-ed with people in positions of power. Even if he had, I don't know whether they would care. Would they read this encounter as something insidious or threatening? Or see it as a simple misunderstanding?

While these questions linger in my mind, this incident taught me valuable lessons that have informed my understanding of fieldwork and its intersection with surveillance, power, and transnational politics. By forcefully demonstrating how different worlds could collide in unexpected and consequential ways, it helped illuminate the political stakes of my field site and compelled me to reflect upon my own blind spots as a Turkish American working in a different national setting. As a researcher conducting extended fieldwork for the first time, I became cognizant of the limitations of my perspective as an insider/outsider. Irrespective of my preexisting cultural knowledge or linguistic abilities, I was not fully equipped to appreciate the complex micropolitics of my field site and the antagonisms, hierarchies, and social divisions that segmented members of the broader diasporic space I had entered into.<sup>122</sup> A politics preceded me. Subsequently, I learned to be both open and cautious. Open about my intentions and objectives, yet cautious about sharing stories about my own experiences in the field. I took seriously the task of establishing relationships with others while recognizing that I should not presume anything about their political commitments, perspectives, or beliefs.

<sup>122</sup> Another revelatory incident occurred during a protest march organized by members of Berlin's Turkish and Kurdish Alevi communities. I had been invited to the demonstration by a well-known and well-respected educator with longstanding and deep connections to the community. When introducing me to others, she said, "His name is Osman, but don't worry, he's okay," in an effort to assuage them of any doubts they may have had about someone with a distinctly Sunni name, given the history of animosity between the Sunni majority and Alevi minority in Turkey. This politics of names, with its sectarian undertones, is all the more fascinating when juxtaposed with the *DTJ* op-ed, where the author dubbed me "Ali," an unmistakably Alevi name. Coincidence?

## Overview of Chapters

The chapters that follow analyze different aspects of what I have called “death out of place.” With this formulation, I am referring to the experience of death in situations where individuals have multiple and sometimes conflicting allegiances, attachments, and loyalties to different places and political communities. Such people may face barriers to political inclusion and belonging in both the countries where they reside and those they are purportedly from. The question of what is to be done with their mortal remains takes on added existential urgency when these remains can be in only one place.

In Chapter 1, I examine an important set of institutions that provide logistical and financial support for the cross-border transportation of Muslim corpses: Islamic funeral funds. These institutions emerged in tandem with the aging of first-generation Muslim immigrants in Western Europe in the 1990s and the growing need for culturally and religiously appropriate funerary services. In some ways, they are similar to burial assistance funds founded by mutual aid societies and fraternal organizations in England and the United States in the nineteenth century. Unlike their historical predecessors, whose *raison d’être* was to provide their members with a “decent” local burial, contemporary Islamic funeral funds are motivated by a different set of imperatives: returning corpses to their “proper” resting places.

Although the funds emphasize their charitable functions and employ notions of mutual aid and religious duty when describing their work, their services have important political implications. I argue that by incentivizing cross-border repatriation, they affirm the symbolic connection between the dead body and the nation and help legitimize the idea that the dead belong in a particular place. In doing so, they engage in a form of *necropatriotism*. In developing this argument, this chapter focuses on two of the largest and most important Islamic funeral funds in Europe, whose combined membership is nearly 400,000. These funds are administered by longstanding and well established Turkish Islamic associations, *Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği* (The Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs or DİTİB), which is connected to the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, and *Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş* (Islamic Community National Vision or IGMG), a prominent Turkish diaspora organization established by followers of Necmettin Erbakan, an influential Islamist politician and

former prime minister of Turkey (1996–1997).<sup>123</sup> Alongside their funeral funds, both DITIB and IGMG offer a wide range of religious, educational, and cultural services, such as the organization of *hajj* pilgrimages and Eid celebrations as well as Qur'an courses, language training, and professional education.

This chapter situates these two organizations both within the broader universe of Islamic civil society associations in Europe and within the wider world of immigrant associations that focus on the provision of transnational funerals for diaspora communities with ties to countries such as Mexico, Algeria, Zimbabwe, and Guinea-Bissau. Drawing on interviews with fund administrators and close readings of primary sources such as promotional literature and membership contracts, the chapter elucidates the strategies and practices through which DITIB's and IGMG's funeral funds institutionalize, incentivize, and justify posthumous repatriation for burial.

In Chapter 2, I turn to another set of actors that are central to the provision of Islamic funerary services in Europe: Muslim undertakers. The creation of a European Islamic funeral industry is itself a novel consequence of migration from Muslim-majority countries. The private market for funerary services in many Muslim countries, including Turkey, is quite limited. Burials are usually performed by public sector employees (undertakers and religious authorities) at minimal cost to citizens as part of the welfare state. While most European governments offer subsidized or no-cost burials to indigent citizens, they have largely outsourced funerary services to private entities. The first Islamic funeral home in Berlin – one of the first in Germany – was founded in 1983 in response to the growing need for culturally competent and religiously appropriate funerals for the city's Muslim communities. In the intervening decades, several Islamic funeral companies have been established by Muslim entrepreneurs, many of whom are first- and second-generation immigrants themselves.

This chapter is based on immersive and extensive participant observation across six Islamic funeral homes in Berlin. As part of my research, I worked as an apprentice to Muslim undertakers, assisting

<sup>123</sup> Erdogan was forced to resign by the Turkish military in what has been described as a “postmodern coup.” See Haldun Gülalp, “Political Islam in Turkey: The Rise and Fall of the Refah Party,” *The Muslim World* 89, no. 1 (1999), 22–41.



them in every aspect of their day-to-day tasks. My focus in this chapter is on the mediating role that these undertakers play between immigrant families and the German state. Drawing on interviews and ethnographic observations, I argue that the undertakers' ability to navigate both the regulatory structures of the German bureaucracy and the cultural expectations of their customers is a principal source of their professional authority and occupational identity. As intermediaries, these undertakers guide families through the cultural, religious, political, and legal landscapes structuring the transitions from life to death. In reconciling competing sets of administrative and cultural norms, they preside not only over end-of-life decisions and their theological implications, but also over pedagogical moments of sociocultural integration in contemporary Germany. Importantly, the work of mediation is a two-way street. Undertakers teach lessons *about* the state to minoritized citizens but also offer lessons *to* the state about its own citizenry, often by countering negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in Germany.

While the first two chapters cohere around the legal, institutional, and economic aspects of death out of place, or what might be understood as the material conditions of death, burial, and end-of-life care in migratory settings, the second part of *Dying Abroad* examines the symbolic and cultural dimensions of death and dying among Muslims of Turkish and Kurdish descent in Germany. Scholars of transnationalism have emphasized how the multiple and permanent ties sustained across "home" and "host" countries are often accompanied by the social and symbolic construction of places and spaces of belonging. In the context of transnational migration, such processes are produced through the sending and utilization of remittances (in the form of both cash and goods), and also in the performance of certain rituals and ceremonies.<sup>124</sup> In Chapters 3 and 4, I am particularly interested in processes of place-making and identity construction evident in the rituals and ceremonies accompanying acts of burial and memorialization.

Chapter 3 offers a visual ethnography of Muslim burial grounds in Europe, focusing on representations of religious, ethnic, and national identities on the tombstones of Muslim graves. The Greek word for sign, *sêma*, is also the word for grave. For the ancient Greeks, the grave

<sup>124</sup> Karen Fog Olwig, *Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2007).

marker was not viewed as an ordinary sign but as “a sign that signified the source of signification itself, since it ‘stood for’ what it ‘stood in’ – the ground of burial as such.”<sup>125</sup> In this chapter, I illustrate the central role that burial grounds play in the construction of diasporic memory and collective identity by analyzing tombstones located in several Islamic cemeteries in Germany and other Western European countries. In spite of the long-term settlement of Muslims in Europe, Islamic cemeteries are still extremely rare. In Germany, less than 1 percent of the country’s approximately 32,000 public burial grounds have dedicated space for Muslims. Though uncommon, such spaces are suffused with deep cultural meaning. As places where the physical landscape is symbolically inscribed and (re)signified, Islamic burial grounds offer insight into the changing contours of political membership and identity in increasingly multicultural European societies. They are places where ethno-religious minorities assert their long-term presence and in doing so, help normalize symbols of national, religious, and linguistic diversity in contemporary Europe.

In this chapter I argue that expressions of posthumous personhood reflect efforts to confer stability to identities that are more fluid or ambivalent in life. Displays of belonging through epitaphs, images, and grave design offer a symbolically powerful way for ethnic and religious minorities to demonstrate membership in various collectivities. By examining the range of semiotic strategies in the iconization of the dead, this chapter also demonstrates how identity formation extends beyond the limits of biological life.

In Chapter 4, I shift from symbolic representations of posthumous identities to the different meanings attributed to burial decisions and practices. Drawing on interviews with a wide range of individuals with migratory histories, this chapter investigates the reasons families choose to inter their loved ones locally in Germany or to repatriate them to Turkey for burial and analyzes the significance that they ascribe to these choices. It underscores how the seemingly quotidian decisions attending the interment of corpses are structured by broader political and existential questions about the meaning of home and homeland. While local burial laws and the limited number of Islamic cemeteries may impact the practical feasibility of performing Islamic funerary

<sup>125</sup> Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead*, 20.

rites, this chapter argues that family ties, ideas about the meaning of national soils, and feelings of social exclusion play a greater role in determining burial outcomes and their social significance than the laws circumscribing Islamic burial practices in Germany.

In developing this argument, this chapter asserts that migrant funerals offer a powerful moment to interrogate political membership and belonging because they represent a critical juncture where members of diasporas and minoritized communities attempt to reconcile multiple allegiances and affinities. As I argued above, ideas about identity and belonging are often underpinned by attachments to places, and the act of burial is a performative practice of place-making par excellence. The location of a grave is of great symbolic importance to those left behind because it provides them with a sense of ownership and connection with a specific place, which in turn can be used to legitimate their claims to that place. For descendants, the decedent offers corporeal proof of belonging. In this reading, burial serves the dual function of legitimating claims for inclusion and strengthening place-based attachments.

While this chapter disentangles them for analytical purposes, narratives about family ties, the significance of soil, and the importance of social position often overlap, complement, and at times contradict each other. Families can act as “push” or “pull” factors when it comes to determining the “proper” location of burial. Likewise, soil is endowed with a multiplicity of meanings. Furthermore, feelings of social exclusion can translate into a stronger desire for repatriation; conversely, burial in Europe can serve as a means by which to assert one’s full membership in the body politic.

Determining the method and location of burial of immigrants is connected to broader identitarian concerns over the boundaries of national and political communities and the place of minorities within them. As Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) member and integration minister for the state of Baden-Württemberg Bilkay Öney argued during deliberations over Islamic burial in Germany, “Integration must cover the whole span of life – from the birth to the death of a person.”<sup>126</sup> In light of changing demographic patterns and an aging Muslim population, questions about the end-of-life practices of German and European Muslims are only likely to multiply.

<sup>126</sup> *Migazin.de*, “Sargpflicht aufgehoben,” March 31, 2014, <[www.migazin.de/2014/03/31/baden-wuerttemberg-sargpflicht-aufgehoben/](http://www.migazin.de/2014/03/31/baden-wuerttemberg-sargpflicht-aufgehoben/)>.