

Middle Eastern and North African Studies Colloquium Series

Death Out of Place: Mortuary Practices of Turkish and Kurdish Communities in Germany



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How do immigrant communities grapple with death in a country that they do not necessarily view as their home? In this talk I examine the mortuary practices and burial decisions of Turkish and Kurdish communities in Germany in an effort to elucidate how death structures political membership and identity. Drawing on interviews and participant observation with bereaved families, Muslim undertakers, government officials, religious leaders, and representatives of funeral aid societies, I argue that in contexts where the boundaries of the nation and its demos are contested, burial decisions are political decisions that are linked to broader struggles over the meaning of home and homeland. While burial in Germany offers a symbolically powerful way for migrant families and their children to assert political membership and foster a sense of belonging, 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 an exclusionary socio-political order. In both situations, the corpse is central to localizing and grounding political claims for recognition and inclusion.

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3:00pm, Marshall, Room 490

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