

IMISCOE Research Series

Avril Maddrell  
Sonja Kmec  
Tanu Priya Uteng  
Mariske Westendorp *Editors*

# Mobilities in Life and Death

Negotiating Room for Migrants and  
Minorities in European Cemeteries

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Avril Maddrell • Sonja Kmec  
Tanu Priya Uteng • Mariske Westendorp  
Editors

# Mobilities in Life and Death

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and Minorities in European Cemeteries

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### *Editors*

Avril Maddrell  
Department of Geography and  
Environmental Science  
University of Reading  
Reading, UK

Sonja Kmec  
Department of Humanities  
University of Luxembourg  
Esch-Belval, Luxembourg

Tanu Priya Uteng  
Regional Planning, Tourism  
and Culture Studies, Department of  
Mobility and Organisation  
Institute of Transport Economics (TØI)  
Oslo, Norway

Mariske Westendorp  
Department of Anthropology  
Utrecht University  
Utrecht, The Netherlands



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*In loving memory of all those we lost, far  
and near, during this work, including:*

*Willemijn*

*Mamode Beebeejaun*

*Chandra Bhushan*

*Hugh Maddrell*

*Teresa Maddrell*

*Helena's father and grandmother*

# Foreword

The nexus of migration and death has become a hugely pressing issue. Through the last years, our TV screens were full of images of people attempting to cross the English Channel. Many of them did not survive the trip across the water from France to the UK.

The deaths of people during migration is, of course, not new. The Mediterranean has become a veritable death trap – a watery cemetery – as mobility has become securitised and criminalised. Ann Singleton, from the School for Policy Studies, Bristol University, once remarked in her opening plenary at a migration conference that when she began research on migration, she never imagined that the day would come when she would be helping to count missing migrants.<sup>1</sup> This unforgettable sentence evokes how mobility is now intricately caught up with death – impending and actual. The work of the *Missing Migrants Project* of the International Organisation of Migration and of many non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations working to save lives shows that even to find the bodies of those who are dead and to account for them is a task. This work becomes even more poignant when we count missing children, lives cut short during, even due to, mobility. As Ann Singleton reminds us ‘even the flawed evidence base is enough to show that policies and harmful practices at borders are causing, instead of preventing, these deaths’ (personal communication, December 10, 2021).

Besides, the higher COVID-19 related mortality rate amongst migrants and racially minoritised groups in many parts of Europe during the last year has also been noticeable. Migrants often work in public-facing sectors where they come into contact with others as they service society. They work as taxi drivers, carers, cleaners and delivery workers, helping to maintain and reproduce everyday life and so were also amongst the first to feel the full impact of COVID-19 at a time when little was known about how to manage the illness. In many parts of Europe, this contributed to a pattern of higher mortality amongst migrants and minorities than in the

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Missing Migrants Project* (<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>) and the *Last Rights Project* (<http://lastrights.net/>). Both these projects emphasise the importance of putting the needs of families and those left behind at the centre of action on deaths during migration.

non-migrant population. Besides, in countries where migrants have little access to health care and where overburdened healthcare systems were often garnered for nationals, migrants had to go from hospital to hospital to get help if they fell ill. I heard a story of a driver who eventually got into a hospital but sadly passed away two or three days later, but the family had no money to pay the hospital and so could not get the body released and flown home. Compound this with the fact that people in the UK working in the healthcare system on work permits are not themselves allowed to freely access health care. They provide care but can't legitimately receive care. These are the everyday violences that lead to migrant deaths.

Yet, these images of migration and death are only ever newsworthy for short periods. Migrants are disposable and so are the images that surround their deaths. The images have, thus far, failed to evoke a sustained ethical response to migration. This volume takes an important step forward in the political work of making migrant deaths matter. It is edited by an international, interdisciplinary team offering perspectives from geography, land use studies, transport and mobility studies, history and cultural memory, anthropology and religious studies, among others. They build on long engagements in the field, insights that have expanded our knowledge of deathscapes and mourning. Others have a history of closely attending to the impact of race, sex and class on mobility. The editors' extensive engagement with the many lenses that death and mobility can make them ideal curators of this collection.

The volume offers a pan-European analysis covering a large span at the intersection of death and mobility such as mobility as the cause of death as well as post-death mobilities. Crucially, the book focuses on the material practices around death and how mobility shapes post-death practices. What should one do with dead bodies? How is death mediated by the infrastructures of grieving and disposal of bodily remains? Who decides what to do with bodies and what are the legislative frameworks that shape the handling of dead bodies? What are the other influences on these decisions? What are the inheritances that shape what is done at the time of death? How are new identities being forged through funerary practices? These are all important questions that the book addresses.

Crucially the authors move away from memorialisation of death, such as for instance of the war dead in distant lands, an important feature of urban landscapes, to everyday struggles over recognition and representation of the cultural practices around death among the living. This is a vital intervention that finds a space between the celebration of death as a tool for and validation of territorial acquisition as in the case of those who die abroad in fighting, and the banal counting of numbers of mass death due to mobility, such as during histories of enslavement. Making place for closely following the practices surrounding the deaths of migrants and minorities is also to validate the lives of those who often did not count for much when they were alive.

Death is a threshold, a moment when the uncertainties of the future materialise. We do not really know what comes afterwards. In my experience, to go back to the past, to reproduce customs and to seek its certainties, is more acute during death rituals than at any other life stage. This is particularly poignant in the case of migrants whose families navigate rituals from their places of origin, from places



they have moved through and those where the bodies of their loved ones rest. Yet, funerary practices also do not stand still. As several chapters in the volume show, land management practices, dominant religious tropes and gendered notions and labour around dying and death all change over time. They intersect to produce contemporary deathscapes which are not static. Historical struggles over identity and memory are played out differently over time over the bodies of the dead.

The volume points to both the specificities of how migrant and minority people's dead bodies are handled in different parts of Europe and the need to recognise that minoritisation continues to haunt them in death, as when alive. It provides a rich analysis of crematoria and funerary spaces – what is required and requested by the communities themselves, how they are currently used and experienced and how to build a dialogue around the funerary needs of racially minoritised people with actors such as civic authorities and urban planners, among others. This intervention into understanding what migrants and minorities may want for their dead, and how to deal with final resting places in honourable ways helps to make space not only for migrant dead but also for migrant lives. It validates the needs of families and urges us to respect their wishes. It brings back our attention to the images surrounding people who died during and after migration that we often dismiss. It forces us to develop an ethical stance towards migration where we stay with the searching questions that those who are dead pose to the living. Thanks to the authors for guiding us on this path!

Department of Geography  
The Open University  
Peterborough, UK  
10 December 2022

Parvati Raghuram

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# About the Editors and Authors

## Editors

**Avril Maddrell** is Professor of Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Reading. She is a feminist geographer, with research interests in spaces, landscapes and practices of death, mourning and remembrance; diversity issues; sacred mobilities; and historiography. She is author/co-author/editor of eight books, including *Sacred Mobilities* (Ashgate, 2015); *Deathscapes. Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance* (Ashgate, 2010); *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss* (Routledge 2019); *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (Rodopi, 2010); *Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion* (Palgrave 2017); and *Complex Locations* (Royal Geographical Society-Wiley). Her research projects include: *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces of Belonging in Europe: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration* (HERA); *Deathscapes and Diversity. Making Space for Death and Remembrance in Multicultural England and Wales* project (AHRC-ESRC); *Economic Migrants' Information Needs* (Bristol City Council).

**Sonja Kmec** is Associate Professor in Luxembourgish Cultural Studies and History at the University of Luxembourg. She has studied history in Paris IV-Sorbonne (Maîtrise), Durham (Master) and Oxford (DPhil). Her research interests include gender studies, memory studies as well as political and cultural history. She has co-directed two interdisciplinary projects on *Strategies of Regionalisations* (ident2.uni.lu) and on *Political Participation* (partizip.uni.lu). She was PI of the project *Material Culture and Spaces of Remembrance in Luxembourg and the Greater Region* (transmortality.uni.lu) and the Luxembourg case study in the HERA-funded CeMi project *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces of Belonging in Europe* (cemi-hera.org). Since she has led a project on *Military History* (co-financed by the Luxembourgish Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs) and launched a project on *Music and Gender* (mugi.lu).

**Tanu Priya Uteng** is Chief Research officer at the Institute of Transport Economics in Oslo, Norway. She has worked extensively across a host of cross-cutting issues in the field of urban and transport planning in the past 18 years. A few of her areas of expertise include: inclusive cities, mobilities, social exclusion, travel behaviour studies and evaluation and gender studies. In CeMi, the HERA-funded project on *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces of Belonging in Europe* (2019–2022), she was as a PI responsible for Norway. She is currently leading several research projects funded by the Norwegian Research Council which are long-term strategic projects looking at topics like first-last mile connectivity, climate and travel behaviour, green-shift in the Nordic region and sharing. In her various research undertakings, she ventures to explore the ‘place vs. space’ dimension and plans to build a nuanced and structured understanding of the topic in designing and creating inclusive cities. She has edited *Gendered Mobilities, Urban Mobilities in the Global South* and *Gendering Smart Mobilities*.

**Mariske Westendorp** is a cultural anthropologist and religious studies scholar, currently working as Assistant Professor at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. She was awarded her Ph.D. at Macquarie University, Sydney, in 2016, with a dissertation entitled *In the eye of the typhoon: Aspirations of Buddhists and Catholics in urban Hong Kong*, examining the religious responses of Buddhists and Catholics living in Hong Kong to the 2014 Umbrella Protests. She participated as Postdoc Researcher in the HERA-funded project on cemeteries and crematoria as public spaces of belonging in Europe (CeMi). Her interests include the study of urban religion, lived religion/spirituality and death studies. She has co-edited *Aspirations of Young Adults in Urban Asia: Values, Family and Identity* (2021) and *New Perspectives on Urban Deathscapes: Continuity, Change and Contestation* (2023).

## Authors

**Yasminah Beebeejaun** is Associate Professor of Urban Politics and Planning at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. She is one of the founding editors of the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City*. Her work focuses on racial and ethnic inequalities in urban planning and the construction of racialised identities; feminist critiques of urban planning; the production of knowledge within public participation. She has held visiting fellowships at the University of Michigan, University of Illinois, Chicago, and University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. She was a PI in the CeMi project *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces as Belonging: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration* (HERA).

**Ida Marie Høeg** is Professor in Sociology of Religion at the University of Agder since 2015 and Guest Professor at Mid Sweden University since 2020. She has been doing research in the field of sociology of religion and ritual studies for more than two decades. Her research focusses primarily on religious changes with a particular interest in how gender, age, ethnicity and religious/worldview identity are negotiated and expressed in space (public and private) and ritual actions. Her interests include religion/worldview and the lifespan, changing culture of death, religion in public institutions, disaster rituals and emotions, generational change, ethnography and qualitative methods. The findings from her research have been published in various articles and edited collections. Her recent publications are 'The flower actions. Interreligious funerals after the Utøya massacre' in *Reassembling Democracy Ritual as Cultural Resource*, 2020 (Bloomsbury Academic); 'Religious Practices in the Framework of Ash Scattering and Contact with the Dead' in *Political Religion, Everyday Religion. Sociological Trends*, 2019 (Brill). Together with Christensen, Lene Kühle & Magdalena Nordin 'Rooms of Silence at Three Universities in Scandinavia' in *Sociology of religion*, 2018, *Youth and Religion*, 2017 (The Norwegian University Press) and together with Olaf Aagedal & Pål Ketil Botvar *22 July 2011 – The Public Grief*, 2013 (The Norwegian University Press). Høeg is currently working on the relationship between religion and ethnicity on the project *Negotiating Jewish Identity: Jewish Life in 21st Century Norway*.

**Danielle House** is an inter-disciplinary researcher working on a range of social issues, often based in creative and craft-based methods and community-academia collaborations. She completed her Ph.D., which explored memory and memorialisation of people disappearing in contemporary Mexico, at the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, in 2019. She worked as a Postdoctoral Researcher on the HERA-funded CeMi project, researching cemeteries and crematoria as public spaces of belonging in Europe, covering the project's case studies in Ireland and Scotland (School of Geography, Archaeology, and Environmental Sciences at the University of Reading). She currently works as a Senior Research Associate in the School of Policy Studies, University of Bristol. Her co-edited volume *New Perspectives on Urban Deathscapes* (Edward Elgar) is forthcoming.

**Alistair Hunter** is Senior Lecturer and Head of Subject for Health and Social Policy at the University of Glasgow, Dumfries Campus. Prior to this role, he held a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Edinburgh, researching contemporary Muslim funerary practices and spaces in the UK and France. Alistair's research interests lie at the intersection of migration, ageing, end-of-life issues and religious diversity. Alistair's publications include a monograph, *Retirement Home? Ageing Migrant Workers in France and the Question of Return* (Springer, 2018), which received an honourable mention for the Khayrallah Prize in Migration Studies 2018. In addition, Alistair co-edited (with Eva Soom Ammann) *Final Journeys: Migrant End-of-life Care and Rituals in Europe* (Routledge, 2017). He is co-editor (with Sandra Torres) of the *Handbook of Migration and Ageing* (Edward Elgar, forthcoming).

**Christoph Jedan** is Professor of Ethics and Comparative Philosophy of Religion at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen. His research interests include the intersections of religion and philosophy (religious aspects of ancient Greco-Roman philosophy, religion and politics, postsecularism); philosophy and theology as therapeutic forms of thinking, aiming at increasing resilience vis-à-vis age, loss and grief; and questions of (distributive) justice relating to public health and marginalised groups. In CeMi, the HERA-funded project on *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces of Belonging in Europe* (2019–22), he was as a PI responsible for the Netherlands and Luxembourg case studies, focusing on equitable funerary provision for migrant and minority groups. Currently, he is co-leader of a project on the ethical, legal and social issues surrounding the use of AI in medical and health care contexts (2022–27). He has (co)authored and (co) edited a dozen books and collections, inter alia (with Arie L. Molendijk and Justin Beaumont) *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* (Brill, 2010) and (with Avril Maddrell and Eric Venbrux) *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss: Grief and Consolation in Space and Time* (Routledge, 2019).

**Marianne Knapskog** received the M.Sc. degree with a major in Human Geography. She works as a Research Planner at the Institute of transport economics in Norway (TØI) and has been doing so for the last 4 years. At TØI she is affiliated with the research group for Sustainable Urban Development and Mobility. From before, she also has more than 10 years of experience in land and transport planning from the town planning offices in Tromsø and Trondheim (Norway). In both municipalities, her main responsibility was with strategic planning, but she has worked on plans at all planning levels, especially in former industrial and regeneration areas. The work as a municipal planner led to taking part in several national projects including *The Cities of the Future* from 2009 to 2011 and participated in networks for urban regeneration. This is reflecting her work at TØI as her research projects to a large extent encompass planning and decision-making processes mainly in a Norwegian or Scandinavian setting, and how land use policies and practices and walkability influence planning in cities. She has participated in projects on climate and environmental impacts, the zero-growth goal and policy making and the effects of Norwegian urban growth agreements. She is especially interested in planning processes, location policies, accessibility and how planning is materialised through agreements, regulations and practices.

**Brenda Mathijssen** is Assistant Professor of Psychology, Culture and Religion at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her training is in religious studies and her research focuses on human experiences, practices and attitudes in relation to dying, death, disposal and bereavement in contemporary Europe. She has a particular interest in meaning-making, ritual, spiritual care, ecology and lived religion(s). Her books include *Funerary Practices in the Netherlands* (2019) and *Making Sense of Death: Ritual Practices and Situational Beliefs of the Recently Bereaved in the Netherlands* (2017).

**Katie McClymont** is Associate Professor and programme leader for the MSc in Urban Planning at UWE, Bristol. She was a PI in the CeMi project *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces as Belonging: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration* (HERA) and the *Deathscapes and Diversity. Making Space for Death and Remembrance in Multicultural England and Wales* project (AHRC-ESRC). Her teaching and research interests focus around planning theory, considering questions about ethics and decision-making in urban policy, with particular attention given to notions of postsecularism, community spaces and participation. She has written about the idea of ‘municipal spirituality’: intangible values that connect people to places in ways which are not formally religious but beyond instrumental use. She works directly with a range of community groups in Bristol – using ‘live’ projects in teaching as well as research to explore and participate in community planning activities. Other recent funded research projects include work that examines health and community-led housing, design quality issues following the granting of planning permission and the unspoken and intangible values community.

**Danny McNally** is Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at Teesside University, UK. His research draws from concepts and practices of aesthetics to think across cultural geography, urban and environmental planning and contemporary art. Central to his research ethos is interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues and practitioners within the academy, as well as research and practice-based collaborations with urban, environmental and arts practitioners, such as curators, artists and policy makers. His work has been published in *Cultural Geographies*, *Social & Cultural Geography*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Qualitative Research, Emotion, Space & Society* and the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. He is also the co-editor of the book *Geographies of Comfort*.

**Helena Nordh** is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Urban and Rural Development, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). She is also contracted as Professor in Landscape Planning at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). For 15 years Nordh has worked with research on people environment interactions. She is a scholar in landscape architecture/planning/management and inspired by methods and theory from environmental psychology. In numerous projects she has explored the green urban landscape, with particular focus on how different target groups (for example, elderly, children, people in need of mental restoration and minorities) use and experience these spaces. One very specific type of green space, which has caught her research interest, is the cemetery. In various articles mostly based on the Scandinavian context, she has explored values and functions ascribed to urban cemeteries, the cemetery as a restorative space and recreational activities at cemeteries. Together with the co-authors of this book chapter, Nordh has been involved as a researcher in the HERA-funded project *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces as Belonging: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration* (CeMi), working on the Swedish case studies.



**Parvati Raghuram** is Professor in Geography and Migration at the Open University. Her research interests focus on the ways in which the mobility of individuals, goods and of ideas is reshaping the world. Much of her more recent work explores the migration of skilled and lesser skilled women, particularly those moving from the Indian subcontinent. She has published widely on gender, migration and development and on postcolonial theory. Her most recent AHRC-funded project is Decolonising Peace Education in Africa where she is looking at care ethics, an abiding interest. She is also part of the project Migration and Inclusive African Growth and Writing International Student Migration in Africa. Her other research includes work on the IT sector and on international students. She has co-authored *Gender, Migration and Social Reproduction* (Palgrave), *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (Sage) and *Gender and International Migration in Europe* (Routledge) and co-edited *South Asian Women in the Diaspora* (Berg) and *Tracing Indian diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations* (Sage). She has written for policy audiences having co-authored research papers for a number of think-tanks such as IPPR, UNRISD, the Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, IPPR and UNRISD and co-edited a special issue of the journal *Diversities* for UNESCO. She is co-editor of *South Asian Diaspora* and *The Geographical Journal* and the Palgrave Pivot series *Mobility and Politics*.

**Daniela Stauffacher** (University of Fribourg, Switzerland) M.A., is a scholar of religious studies and is currently working on her dissertation project 'Managing Border Deaths in Southern Italy. Negotiations and Ritual Practices', sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Previously she conducted a field study in the 'Jungle', an unofficial refugee camp in northern France where she investigated the role of religion within the camp.

**Eric Venbrux** is Chair and Professor of Comparative Religion and Director of the Centre for Thanatology at Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He conducted anthropological fieldwork in Australia, Switzerland and the Netherlands. He led the research project *Refiguring Death Rites*, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), on new ritualisations of death and notions of religiosity in the Netherlands. He organised the tenth edition of the international conference of *Death, Dying and Disposal* (DDD10), held for the first time on the continent, which put the comparison of death ways within Europe on the agenda. He has published extensively on mortuary ritual, including a monograph on Australian Aboriginal death rites published with Cambridge University Press. He was a PI in the CeMi project *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces as Belonging: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration* (HERA).

**Carola Wingren** is Professor in Landscape Architecture at the Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. She is orientated towards landscape aesthetics and landscape processes especially related

to climate and cultural changes. Wingren focuses on how society, through the act of design and planning, can adapt to new challenges and at the same time meet citizens' needs for meaning, memory making, cultural heritage and place identification. Wingren's approach is often transdisciplinary, and coming from a practitioner's background, her public and scientific outreach is often using films and exhibitions. Wingren has won several prizes related to landscape architecture, and in 2019 she won the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry's (KSLA) Award for Research Communication. Wingren has a thorough experience in education on memorial sites and cemeteries as public space and has been project leader for a number of research projects: *The Contemporary Cemetery* (Formas), *The sustainable soundscape of the city* (Vinnova), *The role of the green in a Climate Savvy City* (Delegation for Sustainable Cities and Arkus) and *New forms for Urban green in a densified city* (Movium partnership). She has also been part of the Formas project *Designing Places for Memory and Meaning*, the MSB project *Facing the threat of rising sea levels – Planning and designing a changing landscape* and the HERA-project *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces as Belonging: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration* (CeMi), where she has been one of the principal investigators (PI). Currently, she works on the Formas projects *Coastal adaptation through flexible land-use* and *Mobile Necropolis: The potential, effects and meaning of large scale move of human remains in Sweden*.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Migration, Death and Mobilities



Avril Maddrell, Sonja Kmec, Tanu Priya Uteng, and Mariske Westendorp

I have visited the Muslim cemetery in Ilford. I wish to be buried there if I die in London. I was contributing to an insurance scheme for repatriation when I was in Italy because the Muslim funeral service was not convenient there. In London, Muslims are satisfied with the funeral services, and they want to be buried here instead of repatriation. (Anis, Muslim interviewee, cited by Islam, 2022, n.p.)

In contrast to the liveliness conjured by the terms ‘migration’ and ‘mobilities’, death is associated with stillness and immobility. Yet, just as the animated experience of migration and mobilities can be characterised by hiatus, waiting and even death, so too death and funerary-mourning rituals prompt a variety of mobile practices. For example, the dying may *travel* between home and other places of care; the dead body is typically *moved* between the place of death and sites of funerary care and rituals; the corpse or cremated remains may be *transported* over long distances for final disposition; in many beliefs the *spiritual journey* of the deceased continues after death; and mourners variously *travel*, *process* and *perform* religious or secular rites at the time of death and subsequent cyclical acts of remembrance, depending on their customs. Therefore, mobilities are inherently interwoven with death and mourning practices. Further, as the quote above indicates, these already mobile

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A. Maddrell (✉)

Department of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Reading, Reading, UK  
e-mail: [avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk](mailto:avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk)

S. Kmec

Department of Humanities, University of Luxembourg, Esch-Belval, Luxembourg  
e-mail: [sonja.kmec@uni.lu](mailto:sonja.kmec@uni.lu)

T. P. Uteng

Regional Planning, Tourism and Culture Studies, Department of Mobility and Organisation, Institute of Transport Economics (TØI), Oslo, Norway  
e-mail: [tanu.priyauteng@toi.no](mailto:tanu.priyauteng@toi.no)

M. Westendorp

Department of Anthropology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [m.f.westendorp@uu.nl](mailto:m.f.westendorp@uu.nl)

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funerary practices are additionally inflected by the mobilities of migration and can change with time, place and circumstances, including the relative inclusiveness of local cemetery-crematorium services. This volume brings lived migrant mobilities and immobilities into dialogue with the less familiar mobilities and immobilities associated with death, death rituals and the remains of the dead.

Mobilities have become a conceptual lodestone in contemporary studies of everyday and extraordinary movements and journeys, including migration. However, mobility is more than a concept relating to movement, it is a post-disciplinary paradigm that integrates studies of movement and travel with experience, meaning, practice and performance, affording 'new ways of seeing and thinking about these things and the links between them' (Gale et al., 2015, p. 7). In an era characterised by migration (de Haas et al., 2019), mobilities include the movements of domestic and international migrants, as well as other journeys or mobile practices, and the meaning-making associated with these movements. International mobilities are inherently shaped by the push and pull factors of need and desire, negotiated in and through individual people, families and communities, embodied physical and psychological stamina, and/or economic and political privilege and power. Mobilities, especially the ability to be internationally mobile, is unevenly distributed (Salazar & Smart, 2011), as a consequence of varying personal privileges and discriminatory 'regimes of mobility' (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2014). This uneven access to international movement results in immobility and exclusion for many (Tsing, 2004), as is evident in the immobility of those who lack the required passport, skills, financial assets or familial connections which ease international travel, and in the delays of enforced interruption experienced by those waiting for a travel visa or asylum application. These dialogic and sometimes dialectical tensions are brought into sharp relief when comparing the migratory trajectories and experience of borders and 'bordering' regimes (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018) by the privileged, who experience minimal 'border friction', compared to those who risk their lives circumventing official borders which are impermeable to them by any other means. Even when migration journeys are completed, psychological scars may persist as a result of the trauma of the journey; ruptures in personal and professional lives (Przybyszewska, 2020); (post)colonial power relations (Jazeel, 2019); and cultural bereavement as a result of dissonance between the social and cultural life of upbringing and that of the country of arrival (Eisenbruch, 1991). Thus, mobilities both cost and mean 'different things, to different people, in differing social circumstances' and are socially and politically relational (Adey, 2006, p. 83).

Likewise, experiences of loss and grief relating to migration are varied, situated, relational and frequently overlapping: (i) loss of home and country, particularly as a result of war, political exile or environmental disaster/degradation; (ii) pre-migration bereavement (which may act as an impetus for migration); (iii) leaving behind beloved family, friends, animals, property and/or places; (iv) the death of kith-kin and/or other fellow migrants during the migratory journey; (v) broken dreams or aspirations when the experience of migration is incomplete or does not live up to hopes and expectations; (vi) grief associated with loss of status and professional

de-skilling; (vi) cultural bereavement; and (vii) the exclusion or cultural rejection of postcolonial migrants and/or those of a particular race-ethnicity, religion or nationality.

## 1.1 Death, Bereavement and Belonging in a Mobile World

The motivations, means and experiences of migration shape the meanings and psychological-affective legacies associated with migrant journeys, inflecting migrants' relation to places of origin, stopping points *en route* and final destinations. Relationality to place/s is deeply entwined with relations to people, including familial, faith, political and community networks, as well as the ethos of bureaucratic systems, public services, employers/employees and residents in the locality/country of arrival. In turn, these experiences and dynamic relationalities shape migrants' (and subsequent generations') ties to places of origin, heritage or citizenship and those of residence.

Where place attachment is established in the country of arrival, migration commonly produces symbolic *transnational* ties across multiple nation-states, expressed formally in dual citizenship (where permitted) and informally through a sense of attachment and belonging to more than one country. But international attachment may also be experienced through the more everyday entwinements of what are described as *translocal* communities and subjectivities (Conradson & McKay, 2007), i.e. between two localities in different countries, such as British Bengalis who express attachment to and ongoing engagement with both London and Sylhet (see Chap. 5 in this volume; also Gardner, 1998). These connections are grounded in 'translocal field[s] of intimacy' (McKay, 2007, p. 191) expressed through ongoing relations of kith, kin and community (Gilmartin, 2008), reflecting the de- and re-territorialisation of cultural identities and practices beyond nation-states (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002). As Buffel (2015, p. 13) summarises: 'Identities, place attachments and family no longer respect national borders.' These attachments to people and places elsewhere, what have been described as the mobile geographies of home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011), are typically maintained via digital communication (phone, email, social media, video calls, etc.), remittances, post-migration mobilities (Ali & Suleman, 2017) and a persistent sense of diasporic community with those who are deemed socially close even if they may be spatially distant.

To date, mobilities studies have highlighted the close relationship between migration and the socioeconomic and cultural mobilities of so-called 'first-generation' migrants, but more work is necessary to explore the legacies and associated spatial and cultural needs of Established Minority communities (those of migrant heritage born in Europe) and indigenous minorities (such as Irish Travellers, Roma and Sami). This includes a need for a better understanding of migrant and minority religious practices and associated spiritual or sacred mobilities (Maddrell et al., 2015), given that religion can be a highly significant aspect of social, cultural and political identities – including funerary practices. While there are notable

exceptions (e.g. Gallagher & Trzebiatowska, 2017; Rytter & Fog Olwig, 2011; Wigley, 2016), outside of pilgrimage and other performative studies, the role of religion in mobilities is relatively under-explored. While some migrants seek distance and separation from the constraints of religious beliefs and regimes embedded in their previous lives and home countries (see for example Gorman-Murray, 2009 on LGBTQ+ migrants), others find continuity in their sense of identity and belonging through the maintenance of religious affiliation and communal practice. Often overlapping networks of kith-kin and religion can provide migrants and indigenous and/or Established Minorities with both concrete and imagined communality, a sense of connection to their ancestors, and sites of belonging (Rytter & Fog Olwig, 2011). Thus, religious identity and practice can be seen as a fixing point or mooring in a space-time otherwise characterised by geographical and social mobilities (see Hannam et al., 2006 on mobilities and moorings).

As is evident in the following chapters, religion is of particular importance to understanding many people's funerary choices and practices (Kadrouch-Outmany, 2014; Rugg & Parsons, 2018), and associated (im)mobilities (see Chaps. 5, 6, 7 and 8 in this volume). Thus, spiritual meaning, however defined, can shed light on the motivations and experiences ascribed to mobilities (Gale et al., 2015), but detailed qualitative research is vital to interrogate these identities, beliefs and world views in order to avoid treating migrants and minorities, and their needs, as homogenous. This requires an ethics of care and sensitivity to personal preferences and intersectional differences, such as the role of place, generation, relationship status, class, gender, sexuality and/or disability, in the experience of mobilities and faith groups (see Ciobanu & Hunter, 2017; Gorman-Murray, 2009; Jensen et al., 2019; Priya Uteng & Cresswell, 2008; Raghuram, 2019). Intersecting gendered roles, responsibilities, norms, values and death rituals provide fertile ground to explore the mobilities of norms, culture and values. Gendered mobilities (Priya Uteng & Cresswell, 2008) have typically been studied in relation to physical movement, but there are other parallel movements in roles and power relations, and the ways in which death rituals are performed can provide new insights to these social-political shifts within families and communities (see Chap. 2, this volume).

Elsewhere, scholars have addressed migrant experiences of bereavement and end of life, including care, beliefs and transnational digital connectivity (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Gunaratnam, 2013; Fahy Bryceson, 2016; Hunter & Soom Ammann, 2016). In this volume, we focus primarily on migrant and minority disposition of the dead, the systems governing the acts of disposition and the influence of migration and other mobilities on mourning practices. High risk and tragic fatal migrant mobilities have rightly been highlighted in recent work by scholars, policy-makers and the media (e.g., BBC, 2021; Brian & Laczko, 2014; Kobelinsky, 2020; see also Chap. 4, this volume). However, other more everyday intersections of mobilities and death also merit academic and policy attention, particularly in the light of increasingly diverse multicultural societies in Europe and elsewhere. In this volume, we argue that migrant and minority death rituals and options for burial, cremation and cremated remains benefit from interrogation through a mobilities perspective and that, in turn, attention to these practices brings new insights to the

wider fields of mobilities and migration studies, not least the emotional, spiritual, economic and political harm wrought on migrants and minorities through inadequate provision for their dead and their death rituals.

Attending to the interrelation of migrant mobilities and the materialities of the built environment of public spaces and services, including cemeteries-crematoria, offers a fresh lens through which to view the ways in which non- or more-than-representational emotional-affective sentiments, such as uncertainty, fear, joy and comfort, are co-produced for migrants (see Bille, 2019). As Jensen (2011, p. 267) writes: ‘Mobility is strongly intertwined with emotions, feelings, and ambiances.’ This emotional-affective lens provides a framework for better understanding the politics of place, architecture and design at different scales and levels, and the affects of these (Jensen et al., 2019), which, in turn, are central to understanding the relationship between migrant and minority life stories, mobilities and trajectories, and minorities’ subsequent choices about the disposition of the dead. A sense of entitlement and status are central to the politics of citizenship and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006); conversely a lack of ‘belonging’, including difficulties in fulfilling religious rituals, can impact on the mental health of migrants (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Belonging and sense of home are connected, and these in turn are intertwined with the remains of the dead. Further, ‘the making and claiming of “home”’ (McClymont et al., 2023, p. 70) relies on the existence of a broader infrastructure that supports the associated community, including specific types of death rituals.

Questions of ‘design justice’ and differential mobilities (Jensen, 2017) reflect mechanisms of power and social exclusion and how these are manifest in and through material design decisions and interventions. In the context of this volume, this is particularly pertinent to the infrastructure and design of cemetery and crematoria and related services. Places of worship are also significant to this discussion, as sites which are central to funerary rituals for many, and where mobile-material items, such as imported religious texts, artefacts and even building materials, can (re)create authentic religious-ritual spaces for migrants and minorities (Tolia-Kelly, 2008). This sense of authenticity via mobile artefacts lends credibility to their use for symbolic lifecycle rituals in situ, which further allow migrants to materially and metaphorically ‘fix’ or anchor themselves *in place*, after lives characterised by mobilities (see Marjavaara, 2017). In such cases, the cemetery or site of the disposition of cremated remains can function as a familial and cultural ‘mooring’ and signifier of ‘home’ for migrants (McClymont et al., 2023; Hunter, 2016; see also Chaps. 6 and 7, this volume). On the other hand, inadequate funerary spaces and infrastructure can be experienced as exclusionary which exacerbates grief, especially when situated in the context of a history of demeaning (post)colonial power relations (see Ansari, 2007; Maddrell et al., 2021; Chap. 5, this volume). Thus, cemeteries-crematoria are dynamic material, functional, sacred-symbolic, textual, more-than-representational, emotional-affective and political sites of inclusion and/or marginalisation.

Centred on an understanding of cemeteries and crematoria as dynamic hubs for both mobilities and immobilities, this book includes findings from a variety of European countries, emphasising that ‘death is a phenomenon that demands a

transnational approach' (Havik et al., 2018, p. 1). Transnational identities can inflect and determine attitudes to death, the disposition of the dead and spiritual wellbeing, and mobilities associated with the afterlife (*ibid.*; Maddrell et al., 2021). We argue further that *translocal* networks and relations, whether that of diasporic or indigenous minority communities, need to be recognised as significant elements of European funerary culture and deathscapes (see Porteous, 1987; Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010). However, just as migratory systems are dynamic and diverse (Kofman & Raghuram, 2012), so too mobilities are varied and interdependent (Sheller & Urry, 2006), rather than uni-directional flows. Likewise, understanding the relational and mutually co-producing expressions and practices of translocalism both allows and requires sensitivity to the mobilities of the dead or their remains, and to the reciprocal influence of funerary practices and mobilities.

Both transnational and translocal connections have long been evident in diasporic and migrants' funerals, including the virtual presence of international mourners via mobile phone or online streaming. Through digital technology, mourners, physically distant, are able to be present and even participate in important lifecycle rituals elsewhere (see Chap. 2), and this practice was widely mainstreamed during governmental restrictions on travel and social interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking these social-cultural, religious and technological virtual mobilities into account is crucial to understanding the mobilities of the dead and mourning rituals.

## 1.2 Post-mortal Mobilities of Bodily Remains and Cremains

While mobilities studies have overwhelmingly focused on the living, the dead have their own mobilities (Marjavaara, 2012; Maddrell, 2013): 'No longer just bodies at rest, the dead are increasingly on the move' (Jassal, 2015, p. 486). Ties of family, place and faith are potent, and beliefs about spiritual mobilities of the deceased may determine – even require – the physical travel of both the deceased and mourners, and particular embodied and symbolic ritual performances on behalf of the wellbeing of the deceased in the afterlife. The material mobilities of the dead include commonplace local micro-mobilities – e.g. movement of the corpse between the place of death, home, funeral home and cemetery or crematoria – but can also include long-distance travel to another area within a country or transnational journeys for funeral rituals and/or the disposition of the dead, including the return of a body or the cremated remains ('cremains') to the deceased's place of birth, citizenship or heritage, commonly referred to as 'repatriation'.

The transnational mobilities of the dead are spectacularly visible in the return of war dead to their home countries, coffins draped symbolically in their nation's flag. More everyday forms of post-death repatriation involve the movement of bodies or cremated remains from the place of death to the desired place of final disposition, which often reflects local as much or more than national attachment, as is evident in a desire for remains to return to a village or suburb associated with family, or a particular sacred place. However, for migrants and minorities faced with unsatisfactory



funerary governance and practice, mobility in the form of repatriation offers an alternative to negotiating local necroregimes (Jassal, 2015; Islam, 2022). Yet, studies of the mobilities of the dead have tended to focus on the necromobilities of corpses rather than the much more portable cremated remains.

Cremation represents a less visible but widely practiced form of the mobility of the dead. Cremation allows for human remains to become highly mobile, facilitating the transport, storage and dispersal of cremains at sites independent of the location of death and/or cremation. However, the level of state regulation of cremains varies enormously across Europe; e.g. Luxembourg requires the interment of ashes at the crematorium or other officially designated areas; the UK and Netherlands allow for cremains collection, storage or disposal as the next of kin see fit; and countries like Norway and France require an application process to gain permission for dispersal elsewhere under certain conditions (see Nordh et al., 2021). Where permitted, these mobilities, which combine the neutralisation of physical barriers to movement and high levels of movement (defining characteristics of *hypermobility* (Sassen, 2002)), can be seen in the case of cremains transported around the world in hand luggage, or by postal or freight services, scattered in sacred rivers or at other natural sites, returned to childhood homes, shared between family members, integrated into jewellery worn by the bereaved, or even rocketed into the atmosphere.

The relatively recent practice of cremation and dispersal outside cemeteries which has become a common practice for the majority population in countries such as the UK (Prendergast et al., 2006), has long been a familiar practice for minorities such as Indian Hindus and Sikhs, and Chinese Buddhist and Taoists (Jassal, 2015). Further, faith-based mobilities are often highly place-focused, exemplified by those Hindus whose post-mortal mobilities are deeply rooted in the significance of sacred place, notably the River Ganges and pilgrimage sites along its course. Translocal filial and place attachments to locations associated with birth, childhood or ancestral heritage also influence funerary mobilities. As noted above, post-mortal local and transnational mobilities closely relate to issues of migrant and minority belonging, integration and inclusive service provision. Indeed, as the quote which opens this chapter illustrates, inclusive infrastructure, migrants' sense of being 'at home', and local disposition of the migrant-minority dead are co-productive. Notwithstanding the potential mobility of the dead, the reported decline in the practice of repatriation for non-European migrants (Gardner, 1998; Jassal, 2015; Kadrouch-Outmany, 2014; Maddrell et al., 2018) points to the need for more cemetery and crematoria provision for migrants and minorities *within* Europe. In addition to these spatial requirements, this necessitates better understanding of the nature and significance of varied funerary ritual practices, religious beliefs and obligations for minority faith and cultural groups, in order to avoid infrastructural harm caused by inadequate or inappropriate cemeteries-crematoria and related services (Maddrell et al., 2021). Equally, sensitivity to difference within migrant and minority groups is vital (see also Chap. 3, this volume).

Local majority cemeteries-crematoria culture, access to separate faith community provision and openness to inclusive and flexible funerary infrastructure and spaces collectively reflect dialogic elements of post-secular multicultural European

societies (e.g. Chap. 10, this volume). This speaks not only to the interface between migrant integration and transnationalism in relation to funerary choices, but also to the extent to which cemeteries-crematoria are minority-inclusive public spaces and services. Cemeteries and crematoria are places of confluence and everyday encounter (Skår et al., 2018), which can show friction (Tsing, 2004) and where mutual understanding can emerge between diverse communities, and between service-providers and users, *or* where conflict can arise over diverse uses and meanings (see for example House et al., 2023). Yet they are understudied as public spaces and spaces of minority inclusion and exclusion, and majority-minority cultural negotiation. In reality, the planning, management and use of cemeteries and crematoria in multicultural societies can tell us much about the everyday lived experiences of majority norms, migration and migrant heritage, urban diversity, access to public spaces and services, and social inclusion and exclusion in Europe; and how these relate to migrant and minority experience of what Kallio et al. (2020) describe as 'lived citizenship', and practices of territoriality and bordering (Yuval-Davis et al., 2018; Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021, 2022), as well as (post)colonial narratives (Brah, 1996; see also Beebeejaun et al., 2021; Hunter, 2016; Jedan et al., 2020). Improving understandings of potential and actual conflicting majority-minority cemetery-crematorium meanings, uses and practices through dialogue, negotiation and co-production of strategies will enhance cross-cultural understanding and engagement within local communities, and inform wider diversity-sensitive management of and planning for public spaces-services in multicultural European societies.

### 1.3 Mobilities of Life and Death

Clearly, attention to the varied mobilities and immobilities of migrants and established minorities, in life and in death, provides a fresh perspective on the nature of mobilities which includes the local and international movement of both the dying and the material remains of the dead in diverse forms; the significance for many of the spiritual needs and trajectories of the deceased; and the embodied and virtual mobilities of mourners. Likewise, a mobilities approach sheds new light on what is often perceived as passive death practices and funerary rituals, and the fixity of death and the immobility of the dead. These insights, particularly the religious significance, and even requirement, of particular ritual spaces and mobilities for minority as well as majority faith groups, are central to ensuring that public cemeteries and crematoria in multicultural societies are inclusive of the needs of all residents. A focus on migrants and minorities underscores, firstly, the wider context of migrant and minority histories (including postcolonial and other power relations); secondly, the significance of migrant status, such as authorized and non-authorized, intra-European and Third Country migrants; thirdly, the importance of recognising difference *within* religious or ethnic groups; and finally, the centrality of cemeteries-crematoria and related services to fulfilling the European values of full and equal citizenship for all, expressed through the recognition of, and active provision for, varied minority needs, religious and secular.

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic has made the study of inequalities in cemeteries and crematoria even more timely and pressing, highlighting the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on minorities in Western Europe (Islam & Netto, 2020), and the widespread imposition of majority-norm-centred government regulation of funerary practices during periods of public health restrictions. Pandemic restrictions imposed by governments further resulted in enforced immobilities, impacting on the living, who wished to travel to visit the dying or to attend the funeral or memorial service of a loved one – locally and internationally – but also limiting the movements of the dead, whose bodies or cremated remains were held in limbo, awaiting appropriate rituals, and/or return to their country of origin or spiritual home. Public services (including cemeteries and crematoria), communities, travel, communication and networks have been challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating attention to newly framed articulations of majority norms, multicultural society, religiosity, difference, place, digital connectivity and indigeneity and how these sit in relation to the presumptions – and wilful blind spots – of what Marotta (2017) has previously described as a neo-liberal and global age. Likewise, the intersections of the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inequalities these lay bare, are a prompt to reimagine, firstly, more inclusive mobilities and spaces and, secondly, to aspire to the positive attributes of chosen *grounded immobility*, when migrants and minorities have a sense of belonging *in situ*, rooted, at least in part, in the confidence that in death diverse citizens can reasonably expect to have their funerary needs fully met where they live, work and pay taxes.

## 1.4 Scope of the Book

For reasons of coherence, and reflecting broadly shared majority cultural heritage, the geographical setting of this volume is limited to Western Europe. This affords an analysis of recent migration patterns, and the negotiation of majority-minority practices in countries which have a broadly similar religious-cultural heritage shaped by largely Christian religious traditions (predominantly Catholic and Reformed Christian practices and heritage), coupled with common social trends such as the dialectic processes of the secularisation of mainstream culture and increased religious diversity, notably in resident migrant and established minority communities (see Nelsen & Guth, 2015). However, what may at first sight appear to be a Eurocentric approach is counterbalanced, firstly, by attention to the wider transnational and translocal mobilities and networks of those living and dying in Western Europe and, secondly, by the transferability of many of the insights to other geographical locations. Appropriate spaces and associated services for burial, cremation and remembrance rites are central to ideas and experience of home, identity, belonging, and political citizenship regardless of place.

The team of authors and editors for this volume are drawn from a wide range of disciplines, including human geography, urban planning, anthropology, history,

religious studies and landscape design. In all of these fields of research, the infrastructure and care given to the dead are attracting increased attention, but the results are often published either in discipline-specific outlets or in journals specialising in death studies. Through this IMISCOE-sponsored volume, we have sought to embed those findings firmly in migration and mobility studies. The research underpinning this volume is grounded in the 2019–2022 HERA-funded CeMi project, *Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces of Belonging in Europe: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration*.<sup>1</sup>

The book opens with a contribution from the preceding 2017–2018 *Deathscapes and Diversity* project in England and Wales, and combines further work from the wider European CeMi project case studies, with additional chapters by other scholars working on related topics in Europe (see Høeg, Hunter, and Stauffacher, this volume, which respectively provide important discussion of Jewish cemeteries, cemetery governance in France, and the death of irregular migrants in the Italian Mediterranean). All chapters draw on extensive primary research with municipalities and other cemetery, crematoria and related service providers, and community interest groups, in order to examine varied local experiences and negotiations of cemeteries-crematoria uses, practices and service provision in relation to diverse needs within multicultural Europe. In addition to an innovative contribution to scholarship on the nature and significance of mobilities of the dead, this volume identifies both the challenges and benefits of providing inclusive cemeteries-crematoria and examples of good practice/creative strategies for fostering public dialogue, engagement and consultation regarding diverse cemeteries-crematoria uses, needs and practices, and the necessary management and policy/planning responses. As such it also calls for a policy shift to more inclusive cemeteries and crematoria spaces, services and governance where these are lacking, not least because of their value in enhancing the range of public spaces and services, the sense of belonging and citizenship for migrants and minorities, and potentially improve cross-cultural understanding for all involved.

Throughout the volume, participant-centred studies investigate ritualised, embodied, gendered, racialised and emotional-affective meaning-centred understandings and approaches to understanding migration and mobilities (Kofman, 2004; Vacchelli, 2018). This includes attention to questions of citizenship, beliefs, integration, residual colonial attitudes and implicit and explicit mechanisms of assimilation. Contributors to this volume show the cultural and religious pluralities that come with mobility, as well as the limits, contingencies and potentialities of these pluralities. The following section outlines subsequent chapters in brief, highlighting key content and contributions to theoretical, empirical and policy debates. Each chapter is framed and informed by its geographical and historical setting, including the legacies of war, genocide and colonial relations, and associated migratory flows and circulations, which in turn intersect with particular religious, secular,

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.cemi-hera.org>

local and national regulations and norms, with varying implications for the funerary spaces and practices, and associated varied (im)mobilities of migrants and those of migrant and minority heritage. Issues addressed include the legacies of colonialism and current geopolitical relations; intra-European and third-country national migrant (im)mobilities; translocal identities, communities and practices, including repatriation; the varied (im)mobilities of international mourners in relation to embodied or virtual participation in funerary rituals; and/or the assertion of home-making through local disposition of the dead; the negotiation of minority cemetery and crematoria needs in the light of local-national regulation, norms and practices; the co-production of inclusive cemetery and crematoria; and evolving practices, including gendered norms. For reasons of confidentiality, research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant, e.g. holders of public office. Similarly, although the municipal/state delegated cemeteries and crematoria studied are public spaces and grave markers are public statements, for reasons of sensitivity, some identifying details from these memorials have been obscured in text or images.

The book is divided into three parts, each containing three chapters. These parts are not mutually exclusive, rather, they are a convenient mechanism for grouping together chapters which particularly highlight and speak to each other in relation to particular sub-themes. Part I investigates the tension between the increased range of contemporary mobilities on the one hand and the (perceived) immobilities of local customs and regulatory systems on the other. This is explored through the lens of Established Minorities, a majority migrant city, and death as a result of high-risk irregular Mediterranean crossings to Italy. In Chap. 2, Avril Maddrell, Brenda Mathijssen, Yasminah Beebeejaun, Katie McClymont and Danny McNally untangle the embodied, gendered, racialised and institutionalised cremation practices of Hindu communities in three case study towns in England and Wales: Northampton, Swindon and Newport. They argue that attending to questions of (in)adequate funerary infrastructure and norms – including prompt cremation; accommodating ritual requirements for witnessing the charging the cremator; appropriate infrastructure; the negotiation of designated sites for the disposition of cremated remains in local rivers; and local bus services – are essential steps to creating and maintaining a sense of inclusiveness, lived citizenship and justice for these communities. Conceptually, the chapter underscores the changing local-national-international mobilities of cremated remains and other evolving practices and beliefs to reflect the role of varied corporeal, material, institutional and religious-emotional (im) mobilities that are instrumental in shaping contemporary Hindu funerary practices and experiences in England and Wales.

While much attention to migration issues in Europe focuses on non-European migrant minorities, Luxembourg City, as discussed in Chap. 3 by Mariske Westendorp and Sonja Kmec, is both a geographical meeting point and a political

hub within the infrastructure of the European Union, and a unique city, as migrants, the majority of these being intra-European migrants, constitute the majority of the city's resident population. This context allows the examination of different forms of translocal identities and practices. Analysis of in-depth interviews with intra-European migrants and third-country nationals shows how migrants from both other European and non-European countries with different cultural practices are at times shocked by Luxembourg's highly regulated cemeteries and crematoria regime, notably compulsory fixed term leases and re-use of graves, and particular grave designs. Based on these experiences, the authors argue for approaching cemetery and crematorium spaces as important potential contact zones.

Chapter 4 by Daniela Stauffacher and Avril Maddrell addresses the pressing contemporary political and social issue of migrant death as a result of dangerous irregular migration routes across the Mediterranean, and local provision for the migrant dead in southern Italy. Drawing on the method of 'following the body' and the concepts of bordering and (non)grievability, it details the evolving local governance and social responses to the border dead at the geographical edge of the state and European Union. It goes on to examine local mortuary and burial practices, contrasting the initial integration of the migrant dead within local cemeteries, which, presented as a charitable response, can also be read as a form of immobilising assimilation; plus dedicated burial grounds which appear to give the border dead status, but which can serve to make them socially and politically invisible when located in peripheral spaces.

The legacies of past mobilities are highlighted in Part II, which seeks to tease out how historical heritage and often traumatic aspects of the past, including the legacies of colonialism, which shape present day migration flows, mediate experience of migration and belonging, *and* funerary spaces and preferences. In Chap. 5, Yasminah Beebeejaun, Danielle House and Avril Maddrell explore this interconnection in the Scottish city of Dundee. The town thrived on jute imports from South Asia and related manufacturing industry from colonial times up until the 1980s. The resulting ties with the Bengal Delta had an impact on labour migration patterns which need to be taken into account when discussing cemetery provisions for minorities. The chapter traces the tradition of mutual support within the Muslim communities to pay for burials as well as the long and winding negotiations with the City Council for appropriate Muslim burial grounds, which led to the creation of a Muslim Cemetery Trust (MCT) and to the opening of a private cemetery in 2014. This example prompts questions about whether the MCT burial ground represents relative success or failure for negotiated minority provision within the city's municipal cemeteries services.

Historical practices are also key to understand French burial practices and the accommodation of religious minorities. Alistair Hunter (Chap. 6) shows that laws and regulations abolishing separate confessional burial grounds in the late nineteenth century were aimed at unifying the body politic and neutralising cemeteries as a site of social conflict, while simultaneously granting mayors sufficient leeway to allow for confessional grouping at cemeteries without any visible markers. This legal framework, it is argued, no longer serves its purpose, due to a political context

which favours an increasingly strict separation of State and religion, which specifically problematises the presence of Islam and Muslim bodies in the public space of the cemetery. Due to legal insecurities and political pressures, many municipalities are unwilling to create new confessional cemetery sections. This intransigence leads to a distressing potential dilemma for Muslim families, which have to choose between involuntary repatriation or a local burial thereby contravening religious beliefs, with adverse effects for the integration of migrant-origin communities.

In Chap. 7, Ida Marie Høeg sheds light on how relationships to the local Jewish cemetery assist in negotiating Jewish identities in the city of Trondheim, Norway. In studying the coupling between migration, identities and the material mobilities of the local Jewish cemetery, the author concludes that for minority and migrant culture, cemeteries facilitate Jewish place-making. Her study reveals that such a place-making exercise in Trondheim has led to the creation of an inclusive Jewish place, including a material marking of their ancestors and those killed in the Holocaust. For many, particularly more recent Jewish migrants, the Jewish cemetery has provided a site at which to fix their sense of belonging to Trondheim and Norway as their new homeplace. Interestingly, in-depth interviews evidence greater freedom in funerary choices on the part of those belonging to longstanding Jewish families in the area, some of whom opt for burial in majority cemeteries.

In Part III, chapters investigate the unstable ground of identity politics with regard to funerary practices and grave-site management, raising questions about the marginalisation of indigenous as well as more recently arrived minorities. Chapter 8 by Katie McClymont and Danielle House is set in contemporary Cork in the Republic of Ireland. It asks how ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ are framed in terms of burial discrimination, focusing on the construction of whiteness. A comparison of burial practices of Polish people in Ireland, one of the most recent migrant communities, and those of a longstanding community, the Irish Travellers, shows that in the case of shared religion, institutional and/or majority culture rejection and disapproval are not linked to the Poles as incoming migrants, but to longstanding stereotypes and perceptions of (white) Traveller identity and class. Discord centres on the mismatch between cemetery governance based on majority norms and Traveller funerary culture and grave markers, as a type of aesthetic Othering.

Helena Nordh, Marianne Knapskog, Tanu Priya Uteng and Carola Wingren build on preceding discussions of co-creation and co-production of minority-inclusive cemeteries and crematoria (Chap. 9). They examine what this means and requires in the context of relatively strict Norwegian and Swedish national regulatory frameworks for cemeteries and crematoria, and migrant and minority communities’ needs. In both countries, the Church oversees cemeteries and crematoria, acting as proxy for the state, but take different approaches to provision for those belonging to minority faiths or none. The chapter reflects on whether this accommodation, especially when derived from a negotiated form of co-creation, is adequate to meet migrant and minority needs and the specific inputs that are needed for facilitating a multicultural approach in designing, planning and managing cemeteries and crematoria.

Dedicated funerary provision for migrant and (established) minority groups hinges on a number of factors including economic, political, social, historical, cultural and local conditions. In Chap. 10, Christoph Jedan examines different local definitions of and provision for ‘inclusive’ cemeteries in provincial Dutch towns. Focusing on recommendations for service providers, he goes on to suggest an ‘Eight-Factor Framework’ for evaluating local-specific funerary provision demand for minority and migrant groups. This is offered as a potential heuristic tool for municipal cemetery administrators and planners when reviewing diverse funerary facility needs. Drawing on different typologies of municipalities in the Netherlands, the chapter concludes that dedicated minority burial grounds, trans-municipal regional minority burial grounds and ‘free-field’ areas provide potential alternative approaches for providing inclusive funerary space and facilities for migrant and minority groups. He also highlights the potential income stream for cemeteries from meeting minority burial needs, especially in areas where majority disposition practice has shifted to cremation.

The insights from this volume are explored further in the Afterword by Eric Venbrux, who calls on death studies scholars to pay greater attention to mobilities as a concept and practice. Indeed, it is the hope of the editors and contributors to this volume that this work will inspire further research on the intersections of mobilities and death, and that, in the words of Parvati Raghuram’s Foreword, migrants and minorities in Europe will be treated with honour in life *and* death, and that European cemetery and crematoria spaces and services embody that principle.

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**Part I**  
**Hypermobilities and Immobilities:**  
**Local-Global Relations in European**  
**Cemeteries**

# Chapter 2

## Hindu Mobilities and Cremation: Minority, Migrant and Gendered Dialogues and Dialectics in English and Welsh Towns



Avril Maddrell, Brenda Mathijssen, Yasminah Beebeejaun,  
Katie McClymont, and Danny McNally

### 2.1 Introduction

We had a priest come. Catering, all that sort of stuff. But everything else was kind of left to the funeral directors, they knew what they were doing. When we arrived at the crematorium that day, I hadn't even thought about anything. But they had a CD playing [...] the *aum nama shiva* [...] They had the Hindu Ohm at the front. And one of the big things, they have got a Shiva *murti*, the god statue, which is all in place there. [...] It is near the back, where it is meant to be. When everybody comes out of the crematorium, they are kind of meant to go and pray at the statue. [...] But I think you don't get that everywhere [...] In a lot of places, you have to take your own [statue], and again, that is not something that would have occurred to me, just like the mantra bit didn't occur. Just when I heard it when we arrived, I thought: 'Oh, good.' [...] On the funeral day in terms of the religious stuff, it is normally a male who does all the bits, but we asked whether I could do the funeral ceremony parts, the speeches, and at home, putting things in the mouth, putting things in the coffin, and prayers.

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A. Maddrell (✉)

Department of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Reading, Reading, UK  
e-mail: [avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk](mailto:avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk)

B. Mathijssen

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen,  
Groningen, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [brenda.mathijssen@rug.nl](mailto:brenda.mathijssen@rug.nl)

Y. Beebeejaun

Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, London, UK  
e-mail: [y.beebeejaun@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:y.beebeejaun@ucl.ac.uk)

K. McClymont

Department of Geography and Environmental Management, University of the West  
of England, Bristol, UK  
e-mail: [katie.mcclymont@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:katie.mcclymont@uwe.ac.uk)

D. McNally

School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Law, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK  
e-mail: [d.mcnally@tees.ac.uk](mailto:d.mcnally@tees.ac.uk)

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So we did it with the three of us. Me, my sister and my cousin. [...] But there are some parts that only one person can do, and I did those bits. And I know that has been talked about. (Interview with Chetana, Northampton)<sup>1</sup>

This opening account, drawn from an interview with Chetana, a British-born Hindu woman describing her uncle's funeral at a municipal crematorium in Northamptonshire, sets the scene for some of the intersections between minority Hindu and majority cremation practices in England and Wales which we have researched as part of a broader project on the 'deathscape' needs and wishes of minority ethnic/faith and migrant communities.<sup>2</sup> Chetana's account, which threads through the chapter, exemplifies religious and cultural sensitivity on the part of majority funeral director and crematoria service providers, as well as the limitations of crematoria infrastructure. It also signals shifts in, and resistance to, change in gendered ritual roles within migrant or migrant-heritage Hindu faith communities. This meshing of changing ritual practices and conservative attitudes *within* Hindu communities, and tension *between* Hindu funerary needs and infrastructure shaped by majority cultural norms, provides a Hindu-centred perspective to research on the wider dialogues and dialectics within and between majority funerary infrastructure and services and multifaceted minority cultural groups.

This chapter outlines Hindu funerary practices and presents fine-grained research on evolving practices and the experience of crematoria and related provisions for migrant or migrant-heritage Hindu funerary practices in England and Wales. These practices are shaped by geographical mobility (Firth, 2001) and we deploy the concepts of mobilities and immobilities (Hannam et al., 2006), and diasporic (Brah, 1996) and post-diasporic (Scafe, 2019) identities as a framework to explore the movement of Hindu bodies, cremated remains and mourners; trends towards local disposition of the dead by established Hindu communities; associated negotiation of (post)diasporic Hindu identities; and the relationship between traditional and evolving cultural practices. The post-diasporic perspective emphasises not only the held-in-tension characteristics of dispersal and connectivity of diaspora, but also the hypermobility (Sassen, 2002) of some migrants/migrant-heritage networks, and the often complex, multifaceted and fluid nature of international and intranational communities and identities (Scafe & Dunn, 2020). The focus here is primarily on the intersecting mobilities of the deceased and their mourners: the meaningful movement of the material remains of the deceased, and the ability to fulfil varied required Hindu rituals in order to ensure favourable spiritual mobilities for the dead. These mobilities are highly emotional and are inscribed by religious and secular meaning-making as a form of "sacred mobilities" (Maddrell et al., 2015), as well as reflecting, and being shaped by, colonial legacies, transnational diasporic networks, sense of identity and heritage.

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<sup>1</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant.

<sup>2</sup>*Deathscapes and Diversity*, Research Councils UK, Arts and Humanities Research Council and Research Councils UK, Economic and Social Research Council (AH/N010205/1).

Hinduism constitutes the third largest religion in England and Wales, representing circa one million citizens, 1.7% of the population (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2022). Hindu communities in Britain primarily originated in South Asia (Gujarat, Punjab and Sri Lanka), East Africa (Uganda and Kenya) and the Caribbean, with transnational migration being rooted in British colonial networks, economies and power relations, such as migration by Indian Hindus to East Africa to work on imperial infrastructure projects in the late nineteenth and to work in British textile industries in the twentieth century (see Beebeejaun et al. on Dundee, this volume). Colonial mindsets have also shaped attitudes to Hinduism (Zavos, 2012). Chain migration and the reunification of migrant families is reflected in regional and kinship networks and values being reconstituted in particular localities in Britain (ibid.). In common with other migrant and established minority groups, today, Hindus in Britain are overwhelmingly concentrated in large urban areas, primarily in London (e.g., Harrow: 25.8% Hindu) and the South East of England, with notable exceptions such as Leicester in the East Midlands where 17.9% of the population are Hindu (ONS, 2022). However, Hindus and other minority populations are increasingly present in smaller urban settlements, hence our choice of case studies.

In our study we examine the intersection of mobilities and British Hindu practices of cremation and the disposition of cremated remains, through the experience of those living in three case study towns in England and Wales: Newport, Northampton, and Swindon. These towns each have circa 8–15% of their populations identified as ethnic and/or religious minorities (ONS, 2012); and empirical material discussed here is drawn from field observations, fourteen focus groups with a total of 108 participants representing varied local faith communities, and 33 anonymised interviews with municipal cemetery-crematoria and funerary service users and providers, local government planners and other related stakeholders (all data gathered in 2017–2018). The focus groups and interviews with the public focused on experiences of funerals; visits to cemeteries or crematoria; particular ritual needs, customs or provisions; and specific religious-cultural issues; all set within the context of personal biographies and family migratory trajectories.

After giving an outline of *varied* Hindu beliefs, cremation, and other funerary-mourning practices, we will discuss our findings in relation to four themes that emerged during the analysis of the empirical material. These four themes are ritual practices, funerary infrastructure, the dispersal of cremated remains, and fixity and change in religious mobilities.

## 2.2 Hindu Funerary Practices

Hindu funerary practices are shaped by beliefs about the journey and the wellbeing of the dead, as well as reflecting social status, persistent elements of the caste system, and local culture. As Priya Uteng explains:

The concept of death in Hinduism is fluid and meanders between the multiple lives assigned to a soul. Hindus firmly believe in a separate existence of the body and the soul where the body is *nashwar* (destructible) but the soul is beyond the realm of creation and destruction. (2021, n.p.)

While practices vary by region, social group, and allegiance to particular religious teachers, key funerary practices typically include a series of ritual stages, the associated mourning status of the bereaved, and cremation, commonly followed by the disposition of remains in water which runs to the sea, notably in the sacred river Ganges.

Hindu cremation practices are understood as a form of ritual purification, and for both spiritual and hygienic reasons ideally take place during daylight and within 24 hours after death (Firth, 2003; Laungani, 1996; Rugg & Parsons, 2018): “Expediting the process ensures lessening of pain for the deceased and for mourners” (Priya Uteng, 2021, n.p). Purification by fire is not deemed necessary for young children and religious ascetics (*sadhus* or *sanyasis*), who may be buried. Other rituals include washing the deceased, wearing white for mourning, processing to the cremation ground, prayers, gifting, and rice balls (*pindas*) offered to the planets in order to ensure the deceased is united with ancestors and ultimately attains the end of the rebirth cycle (*moksha*). Funerary and mourning rituals can constitute a nine-stage process over twelve days (which symbolise a year). These stages begin with preparation for death, followed by a series of ritualised practices for the corpse, during which time the status of the deceased *preta* is considered to be liminal and fluid (as are the mourners who are deemed to be polluted by association with death); ending with post-cremation *shraddha* rituals, including gift-giving to Brahmins as surrogates for the deceased, the scattering of remains in a river flowing to the sea, and feasting. This culminates in *sapinda karana*, the soul’s newly embodied destination and elevated status (Firth, 2003) in *pitriloka*, the land of the ancestors.

Within Hinduism, cremation can be understood as a fire-sacrifice, a sacrificial offering of the body and self to the gods, including Agni the god of fire, through which the world and the deceased are reborn. Thus, cremation is an act of *creation* rather than destruction (Caixeiro, 2005; Firth, 2005). It is a spiritual transformation which is important for the living to oversee and to witness, which involves attending to the pyre or witnessing the charge of the cremator. Cremation practices represent a returning of the body and a payment of debt to the deities (Elmore, 2006), which serve “to free the soul of the deceased from the corpse, remove impurities to ensure auspicious rebirth, heed religious and social duties, such as that of the son towards his father, and duty towards ancestors” (Hadders, 2021, p. 33). After cremation in India, remaining bone fragments and ashes are collected from the pyre or crematorium, and the bones are commonly ‘picked out’ by family members in the presence of a priest, in order to look for signs of the fate of the deceased, a process called the “picking of the flowers” (Rani, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton). The disposal of cremated remains in moving water represents the most obvious and familiar image of post-mortal Hindu mobilities, particularly through ash dispersal in the sacred River Ganges. The Ganges is widely understood as the ideal site for Hindu disposition, but cremated remains may be divided and dispersed on the river



at the three sacred sites of Varanasi, Allahabad and Haridwar, or scattered in the nearest river (Firth, 2003). In India, these rites are generally performed by family members and priests, rather than professional funeral directors. Hindu cremation services are usually open events, both permitting and expecting anyone who is in any way associated with the deceased or the deceased's family to attend (Laungani, 1996; Rugg & Parsons, 2018). Community members also typically support the family of the deceased with food during their period of mourning when cooking is forbidden, and in preparing the feast which is held at the end of the *shraddha*, which completes the funerary rites (Firth, 2003).

While key elements of Hindu practice can be outlined, it is important to note that Hindu communities originating in different regions of India and from East Africa, as well as belonging to different sects and castes, hold different beliefs and vary in ritual requirements, i.e., there is "internal diversity" within Hinduism (Zavos, 2012, p. 124). Burial, which was common in pre-Vedic times is still practiced by some Hindus, such as the Virashaiva community of South India, who are buried in the *Dhyana mudra* yogic pose with the *Ishta linga* (symbol of Lord Shiva) in their left hand; and in Andhra Pradesh, rather than in moving water, Hindus place the cremated remains of family members in shrines at their homes (Priya Uteng, 2021). Orthodox Hindus believe the Vedic rite of outdoor cremation, known as *anthyesthi sankhara*, is vital to the successful cycle of birth and rebirth, but indoor electric cremators have been developed in urban areas in India since the 1980s (Caixeiro, 2005; Hadders, 2021). Traditionally there are strict gendered roles in Hindu funerary rituals (Firth, 2005): it is the eldest son's duty to initiate the cremation fire, and in some traditions to break the skull (*kapalakrya*) or turn the body in the fire to ensure full cremation and the release of the soul. Women's status as ritually polluted during menstruation is a barrier to ritual participation (see interview with Chetana below), hence, traditionally, women did not attend the *ghats*. However, as funerary practices evolve there are regional differences in gendered practices, for example, it is more common for Punjabi women to attend the cremation relative to more conservative Gujarati women (Firth, 2005).

Hindu funerary practices of cremation and the dispersal of cremated remains on water appear to mesh well with majority UK practices, given that 77% of funerary dispositions are cremations (Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2017) and the next of kin are legally permitted to collect the remains from the crematorium and to store, inter or scatter them as they choose. However, despite deep roots in Britain and its colonial past, it has been argued that twentieth century Hindu migrants to Britain experienced stark limitations to their traditional ways of dealing with death and bereavement, often necessitating significant compromises of ritual practices (Firth, 2003). The next section outlines some of the challenges identified in previous studies of Hindu practices in the UK, followed by a discussion of insights from this study.

### 2.3 Hindu Cremation and Funerary Practices in England, Wales and the Wider UK

Research on Hindu practices in Britain has identified a number of barriers to fulfilling ideal Hindu rituals in the context of the governance and practices of the funerary sector, such as an inability to hold cremation within 24 hours or to witness the cremation (Firth, 2003; Laungani, 1996). The compact and dispersible nature of cremated remains have the potential to be highly mobile, allowing dispersal at sites independent of the location of death or cremation, including the ‘repatriation’ of remains to the deceased’s country of origin or heritage. Repatriation of the dead represents an important mobility of many deceased migrants or those of migrant heritage; and the repatriation of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim dead was the norm for South Asian migrant families living in the UK during the second half the twentieth century, facilitating religious practice and the renewal of place and kinship bonds (Firth, 1997; Hunter, 2016) and embodying the so-called “myth of return” (Anwar, 1979) through post-mortem funerary ritual choices.

Further, it has been argued that repatriation was *necessitated* by inadequate funerary services in the UK; and in these circumstances “mobility is a spatial tactic for negotiating dominant British necroregimes and attaining a culturally satisfactory funeral and disposal” (Jassal, 2015, p. 487). However, some Hindus believe it unnecessary to scatter the ashes in India *per se*, and that it is acceptable for ashes to be scattered in the ocean, on any large body of water, or in running water, such as a river or estuary which runs to the sea (Firth, 2003; Maddrell, 2011; Rugg & Parsons, 2018). Some think it is important to sanctify local rivers for this purpose (Firth, 1997). Rivers have been designated in the Netherlands (Swhajor et al., 2010) and in the UK (Maddrell, 2011), where the government Environment Agency, working with Hindu and Sikh groups, agreed on part of the River Soar in Leicestershire for Hindu and Sikh ash scattering in 2004 when the river was sanctified with water from the Ganges. Mourners expressed appreciation for the opportunity to fulfil their life-cycle rituals locally, and for the tranquil setting for this sacred ritual. Further, although these new arrangements were not without some local opposition, mourners from beyond the Hindu and Sikh faith communities started to use the local boat service established for the mobile practice of ash scattering rituals on the river (Maddrell, 2011). These innovations, and the resistance to them, are indicative of ‘movements,’ hybridity and fixity in evolving minority and majority funerary practices.

In recent decades, many European countries, including the UK, have witnessed a shift towards individualised funerary practices, whereby funeral preparations and rituals are no longer overseen solely by funeral professionals, but increasingly by the bereaved themselves. The combination of this widespread process of individualisation and the emergence of the DIY funeral (Holloway et al., 2013) within majority cultural practice, together with increased sensitivity to minority religious and cultural needs among local funeral directors and cemeteries-crematoria providers (including municipalities), means that there is some understanding of the wishes and needs of Hindu communities in Britain, such as close family members viewing

the charging of the cremator. A growing assertion of minority funerary rights is also evident in the campaign to legalise open air pyres in the UK, which can be seen as representing a sense of entitlement to ideal Hindu lifecycle rituals – “rights to rites” (Cumper & Lewis, 2010) – combined with a sense of an established religious minority being ‘at home’ in Britain (see Hunter, 2016; Maddrell et al., 2022). In 2010 the Court of Appeal found in favour of Hindu Davinder Ghai and against Newcastle City Council, shifting British cremation law to permit outdoor funeral pyres in agreed areas, and within a walled enclosure to avoid impact on non-participants. In contrast, some Hindus in Norway are opting for the interment of cremated remains, known as ‘urn burials,’ in designated areas of selected cemeteries (Hadders, 2021), echoing practices in the southern parts of the Indian subcontinent where a significant proportion of Norwegian Hindus have their ancestral roots.

The next section evaluates the adequacy of municipal crematoria service provision and governance and associated funeral services in England and Wales for Hindus, through a participant-centred examination of contemporary Hindu funerary-mourning practices and the associated mobilities of the living and the dead. This analysis is organised around four themes: (i) ritual practices; (ii) funerary infrastructure; (iii) the dispersal of cremated remains; and (iv) fixity and change.

## 2.4 Hindu Funerary Practices and Associated Mobilities

In common with other migrant and established minority groups in the wider study, Hindu participants spoke of facing challenges to completing their full death rituals in Britain, including pre-death rituals. Dying is a process, and Chetana recounted how a hospital consultant, highly insensitive to Hindu rituals, was reluctant to allow her uncle his wish to go home to die. The doctor also questioned her translations of his information to other family members, thereby causing offence and hurt at an already traumatic time for the family.

The ritual washing of the deceased or *milana*, immediately after death, is also an important aspect of personal and spiritual care for the deceased:

[O]ne of the big things from the Hindu community is the washing facility. [...] I only witnessed it for the first time last year, when my father passed away [in India] [...] for the three of us it was the first time that we witnessed that as close family and were part of the whole ritual ceremony. So it was very humbling, how the dead were treated with so much respect and dignity. (Interview with Rani, Northampton)

In Northampton, Rani reported that hospitals accommodated Hindu families’ desire to perform washing rites for the dead, but for the families this was a compromise given the lack of suitable alternative venues for this ritual practice. While previous research reports that in the 1990s it was common to “bring the body of the deceased to the family home, where the lid of the coffin is opened, so that all the mourners can file past the body, have a last glimpse of the deceased and offer their individual prayers” (Laungani, 1996, p. 197), some participants in this study considered

community halls to be more suitable venues for paying respects to the dead and the mourning family (see discussion of gender below).

## 2.5 Funerary Infrastructure and Hindu Requirements

The issue of *timely* funerals was widely reported by Hindu participants in this study, including a lack of cultural awareness within the majority population that the Hindu ideal is for same day cremation. This was experienced as in stark contrast relative to widespread awareness of, and efforts to facilitate, Muslim requirements for prompt burial. In the UK, a two-week hiatus between death and funeral is common, and Hindu funerals seldom take place within 24 hours. Participants highlighted issues with crematoria services:

Ideally, we would like to be cremated within 24 hours of the death. But it never happens like that. Partly because of the [process] involved in release [of] the body from the hospital and postmortem and finding a slot in the crematorium which is very difficult. (Interview with Raj, Swindon)

One of the things which doesn't seem to be understood within the hierarchy is, that the Hindu funeral to happen on the same day is equally important [as prompt burial for Muslims]. (Rani, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

While these delays may be deemed unavoidable by service providers (e.g., in busy winter periods), deferred rituals can cause acute distress to the bereaved, especially if this breaks religious requirements (Laungani, 1996, p. 197; Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021).

The duration of funerals at crematoria was also an issue: "Hindu funerals [...] are not organised around a rigid time-schedule. They are spontaneous, chaotic, and even quite flexible" (Laungani, 1996, p. 198). While some participants identified a 45 minutes allocation as acceptable for limited rituals done at the crematorium (interview with Raj, Swindon), the standard UK crematorium time allocation of thirty minutes, including entry and departure, was widely reported as problematic for religious practices, social customs and the large numbers of mourners typically attending Hindu funerals. This prompted familiar comments about crematorium being "conveyor belts." However, participants also spoke humorously and self-reflexively about relaxed attitudes to timing, with unpunctual mourners and priests who could be long-winded (multifaith women's focus group, Northampton). Our interviews with crematorium managers indicate that at some crematoria staff have responded to Hindu and other faith and ethnic group needs for longer services at least in part, through allocating extended time for funerals, or weekend dates to accommodate both flexible timings and maximum capacity for attendance. While 80% of crematoria report providing specific facilities for religious groups in 2021 (Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2021), it is important to note that appropriate arrangements for all minority faith groups are far from universal and may come at an extra cost.

Funeral directors and crematorium staff are crucial to funerary experience for most mourners in England and Wales. Participants praised those crematoria that accommodate different practices, for example: “Here also they allow we bring our own music. I think most crematoriums allow that” (interview with Raj, Swindon). Several participants expressed appreciation for funeral directors who had made an effort to learn about and tailor services to Hindu requirements, notably in Northampton where a local family firm of undertakers (described as “Irish”) were credited with particularly good knowledge of, and sensitivity to, Hindu beliefs and practices:

I think we are somewhat blessed in this town with the funeral directors. [...] I was just so impressed by how comforting they were, how lovely they were [...] [In addition to legal paperwork and arrangements] he asked: ‘What do you want to do with the ashes?’ We hadn’t really thought about that. And the questions, the number of questions which come at you as a bereaved family is horrendous. But they are really gentle in their approach. (Rani, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton)

In a continuation of Chetana’s description of the provision of Hindu statues and music that opened this chapter, organising a funeral for the first time, she reported additional aspects of flexibility and sensitivity on the part of funeral directors, such as allowing herself and her sister to walk with the hearse, and culturally-sensitive knowledge, such as de-thorning roses to avoid harm to the deceased:

They were really good. I think they had done Hindu funerals before, and they were very accommodating. It was not that we wanted anything out of the ordinary, but [...] with our funerals you are meant to put things in the mouth and like that, and they knew, so they were like, do you want us to leave the mouth slightly open [...]? Whereas, when you are in that state, you don’t think about those things. But they knew, so they could prompt that. So that was very, very helpful. (interview with Chetana, Northampton)

However, some participants also felt that it is important for service providers to understand the different funeral processes and ritual needs *within* different Hindu castes or regional communities, i.e., the “diversity-within-diversity” (Maddrell et al., 2018, p. 38) of Hindu funeral practices: “The South Indians and to some extent Sri Lankan Hindus they follow roughly the same procedure during death. Even within that, depending on the caste, it differs” (interview with Raj, Swindon).

## 2.6 Immobilising and Mobile Funerary Infrastructure

Funerary infrastructure includes the buildings, grounds, services and regulatory frameworks for cemeteries and crematoria. Inadequate funerary infrastructure and related services can be exclusionary for minorities and cause emotional-spiritual harm to the mourners and the deceased (Cumper & Lewis, 2010; Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021). Public services which are limited to majority normative scheduling systems and managed primarily as a functional process by providers, can be experienced as a traumatic constraint to fulfilling necessary rituals. One respondent

explained the necessity of the priest-led rituals on the eleventh or thirteenth day after death:

That is very significant, [...] in order for the soul to be free. The thirteenth or the eleventh is very, very important in the Hindu faith. And sometimes families are having to wait even more than thirteen days. It is very traumatic experience. [...] So last year, [X] dies, family was very, very anxious, that we need to get everything done before the thirteen days. And then it was Christmas holidays in between, and the doctor isn't there, the coroner isn't there. (Rani, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

Such delays due to extended mainstream holiday periods can cause anguish for mourners, regardless of culture, but this last point highlights the particular emotional and spiritual harm experienced by Hindus in this circumstance (Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021). While some participants expressed understanding that the requirement for same day cremation may have been motivated in part by reasons of hygiene in the past, they nonetheless stressed that the overriding reason was the spiritual need for cremation as a means for prompt release of the soul from the body. However, other participants were pragmatic, and considered a same day funeral as desirable, but also indicated that a delayed service could have benefits, such as allowing dispersed relatives to travel to attend the funeral, highlighting different responses to this constraint.

The size of crematoria ritual spaces was also reported as an issue for many Hindus, which was echoed by other faith groups for whom community attendance at funerals is the cultural norm. This often necessitated travelling further to facilities with greater capacity; but this resulted in extra travel for all involved, and using municipal facilities outside one's own local authority area can incur additional fees. Other structural issues include the practicalities of parking and public transport; widespread lack of washing facilities for preparing the dead at the crematorium; and the ability for family members to fulfil ritual obligations by witnessing or initiating the cremation process (Deepinder, Sikh man, mixed focus group, Newport). The question of what is in and out of sight is central to the form of European crematoria design, and is pertinent to this analysis. British crematoria are literally designed to conceal the act of cremation, with the last sight of the coffin typically occurring as curtains softly close over the catafalque, obscuring the machinery and reality of the cremation process hidden from public view. For reasons of efficiency and sustainability, this reality may include coffins being queued for the next firing of the cremator. By contrast, as noted above, witnessing the cremation is a crucial rite for Hindus, and a family member, traditionally the eldest son, has a ritual obligation to oversee proper cremation:

The one thing we need to do is to light the flame, and actually ceremoniously start the cremation. Now it is done electronically in the furnace. The person who is the eldest son does this, the ceremonies. [...] Then the priest will recite some [*shlokas*] and he will place the [*kampha*] and place it on the coffin. Which is then pushed inside. So, in some [crematoria] they don't allow this. [...] But in Hendon 'cos they have a lot of Hindus they are very flexible. (Interview with Raj, Swindon)

Participants reported a growing number of crematoria which allow immediate family members to witness the charging of the cremator, but these arrangements are typically *ad hoc* and discretionary.

Crematoria in two case study towns had integrated viewing rooms in order to make provision for Hindus and Sikhs. One crematorium manager interviewee had used other necessary building work as an opportunity to create a small viewing room with safety glass to allow families to witness the committal of the deceased to the cremator (see Fig. 2.1).

However, while viewing arrangements such as these are increasing, there is cause to examine even these improvements. Namely, while the immediate mourners in this case can witness the charge from behind a glass window, they are still separated from the cremator and cannot assist in the actual cremation themselves through “lighting the fire.” This can be problematic because pushing the coffin into and/or starting the cremator is often understood as a symbolic representation of igniting the funeral pyre which is traditionally lit by the nearest relative of the deceased (Laungani, 1996). Chetana explained that for her:

It was quite surreal [emotional pause]. You see this box go into an oven. That’s what it is. But, it was all quick. At that point in my head I knew, [...] we are burning him. [...] But in my heart, it didn’t feel like that was him. I felt quite detached in that sense. It is difficult to explain. [...] You are not allowed to [do or touch anything]... there is a glass screen. You just stand behind the screen watching it go in. And that’s it. It is quite impersonal to be honest. [...] there was no button to press. We thought there would be, to kind of [start] the conveyer part. And when you [are in the chapel], you press the button there for the curtain

**Fig. 2.1** Cremator viewing room, Kettering municipal crematoria. (Photograph by Avril Maddrell)



to go around, but then in there, there is nothing to do. You just watch it. ... you are behind a screen, to make it brutally honest, you are watching something go into like an oven. And then it just shuts off and then you are told it is done. [...] I'd rather not have the screen, but if it is needed for health and safety purposes, I get that. Just to have that final touch of the coffin, it would have been nice. [...] I know it sounds stupid, touching the coffin, but it is just that little... it would have been nice to have that opportunity. But it felt conveyer belt in that sense. It kind [of] came through, stopped for a second and went through. (Interview with Chetana, Northampton)

Not being able to perform required rituals such as this, may be understood as negatively affecting the status and wellbeing of both the mourners and the deceased (Maddrell et al., 2021; Nugteren, 2016), and may also be understood to have a negative impact upon the future welfare and prosperity of the family (Michaels, 2016). Cremation practices in the broader European context make it evident that more participatory approaches are possible and even common (see Mathijssen & Venhorst, 2019, on the Netherlands), which is indicative of much variation within the experience of the international Hindu diaspora (see Samarth, 2018, on Hindu cremation practices in Bali, Dallas, and Mauritius). However, for some Hindus the more regulated-industrial approach to cremation in the UK is welcomed as a break with certain Hindu practices such as watching the full cremation, breaking the deceased's skull, and turning the body in the flames (Firth, 2003).

Matters of familial and religious obligation can also arise when there are infrastructure failures, e.g., when the cremator breaks and there are delays to the cremation process. For one family, a faulty cremator caused delay, but they felt it was necessary to stay to complete their rites and obligation of care for the deceased. Here technical failure resulted in processual immobility: the immobility of the corpse, a hiatus in the spiritual process for the deceased, rendering the mourners immobile:

Something went wrong with the machine. And there were people leaving their coffins on one side of the door. And I didn't want to go like that, I said [...] I'm not leaving like that. So we waited quite a while. Because you can't jump the queue. It is like a machine. So we just stood there on one side, and we said: 'No, we are not moving, until we see him cremated.' [...]. And there was a coffin in a line, like that [gestures], on the floor. That is not the right way. (Saira, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

Another focus group participant highlighted the issue of fixed infrastructure features which are implicitly and explicitly culturally and symbolically Christian. This was experienced at best as a distraction, and at worst, upsetting: "You go there, and they have a cross. My focus is on the cross and it is ... [inappropriate]" (Hindu woman, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton). Optional portable icons and curtains are an obvious solution (Maddrell et al., 2018) which have been adopted by some newer crematoria (see Fig. 2.2), but in several cases mourners had to provide their own statues, which is an additional thing to arrange and carry for the funeral: "They have recently installed an [...] idol, lord Shiva, who is the important idol when people die. So, they have achieved that in Wellingborough. But in Northampton, people have to take theirs with them at the time of bereavement, the funeral" (Rani, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton).



**Fig. 2.2** Portable Shiva statue, crematorium office, Northampton. (Photograph by Brenda Mathijssen)



Other aspects of the fabric and layout of buildings which are based on assumptions of majority practice can also reinforce majority norms, for example, pew-like benches which build in limitations of movement and mingling.

The only comment I'd make is that when you enter [the municipal crematorium] you feel that it's like a church, Christian. [...] Hendon put a curtain over the cross, and they put the Hindu symbol of ohm, which is in brass. [...] [describing his ideal crematorium] It won't look like a church. All the benches – they wouldn't be there. It would be a hall. Although for people who can't sit on the floor there would be chairs. People generally sit on the floor. (Interview with Raj, Swindon)

This highlights the drawbacks of materially embedding and fixing majority heritage beliefs, iconography and cultural norms within the architecture and fittings of municipal buildings which serve increasingly diverse local populations, including multiple faiths and secular residents.

One Hindu ritual which is difficult to practice in Britain is *phūl chānnā* or “picking the flowers,” when the family pick over the cremated remains in the presence of a priest in order to find any visual signs in the remains of the deceased as to their fate in the afterlife, which are then taken with the ashes to the river. As Rani explained:

In Hindu culture, we are not supposed to bring those ashes in [to the home] [...] So there is that ritual that has to happen in my religion, which is called *phūl chānnā*, and what it means is that the family picks up the bones. Now, practically that is not possible here. (Rani, multi-faith women's focus group, Northampton)

The standard crematorium practice of processing or cremulating cremated remains into fine grain fragments, as well as the lack of appropriate venues, represent barriers to the practice of *phūl chānnā* making this “not possible.” However, *phūl chānnā* could be accommodated by firstly, making cremulation an option rather than assumed norm, and secondly, with the provision of a suitable bookable side room at the crematorium or in funeral homes, which could be used by Hindu families and their priests.

On a more prosaic level, the physical mobility of mourners, the getting to and from funerals, especially multi-staged events, can be an issue, as public transport links are often poor for suburban or out-of-town crematoria and cemeteries, where high levels of car ownership are assumed. This was reported as the case even for new and otherwise well-designed crematoria. One, which was praised for suiting Hindu needs in other respects, such as neutral and flexible ritual spaces and longer time allowed for ceremonies, required a fifteen-minute walk from the nearest bus stop, along a major road with inadequate pedestrian walkways (multifaith women’s focus group, Swindon). This inadequate infrastructure excluded a significant number of elders from attending community funerals (Ghurkha focus group, Swindon). Taking taxis or hiring buses for communal transport for funerals is expensive, either for individuals or “another expense on the family, you know. Hiring a bus” (Dhriti and Mariam, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton). Such barriers to mobility highlight the need for diversity-sensitive planning and management of public services (Beebeejaun et al., 2021).

The next section turns to the practical material and more-than-representational spiritual mobilities of the deceased after cremation.

## 2.7 Dispersal of Cremated Remains, Spiritual Mobilities, and Gender

The dispersal of cremated remains in the Ganges is an iconic image of Hindu funerary practice, whereby the physical mobility of the ashes in the river travelling to join the unifying ocean is symbolic of the spiritual journey of the deceased. In keeping with the wider trend of declining repatriation from the UK to South Asia, participants reported both continuity of that practice and new places for, and ritual forms of, dispersal in England and Wales:

It varies quite a lot [...] if the individual has not expressed a desire what they wish them to do with the ashes, then, different things happen. A dear friend just took it to a place in Coventry, where you are allowed to scatter the ashes. Sometimes, people go to India and take the ashes and do the ceremony. [...] There is no hard and fast rule about it. And the majority of families still, in my knowledge, take it to India. So they keep it in the garage or somewhere, [...] and they try to make that happen sooner than later and take the ashes to India, to the river Ganges. (Rani, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton)

One point of interest in this and other accounts such as Chetana’s, is the tension between the need of the deceased for prompt cremation in the interests of spiritual

mobility and the commonly delayed material mobility of mourners and the remains of the deceased until they are able to travel from the UK to India for final disposition, leaving both the deceased and mourners in hiatus. In the case of the remains of the deceased, this liminal state is evident in their containment in places such as a domestic garage, or, as reported in another interview, with specific undertakers who agree to store ashes for some months, in order to avoid ritual pollution to the Hindu home. For other participants, the UK is their preferred location for the disposition of cremated remains. Consequently, finding a suitable location for scattering ashes was seen as the biggest obstacle for funerary rituals for both Hindus and Sikhs.

Informal conversation at a women's focus group in England suggested clear gender differences in disposition preferences, evident in those Hindu women expressing a tactical approach (de Certeau, 1984) to their religious practice, preferring for their remains to be nearer to their children, rather than being taken to the Ganges, where their more traditionally observant husbands preferred to have their remains dispersed. Indeed, some women were complicit with their adult children in these arrangements. One woman stated with laughter that if she died first, her husband would take her remains to India, but that if she survived him, her adult children were to disperse her remains wherever suited them (focus group, Northampton). Another reported:

The dispersal of ashes. We used to have the river Ganges, flowing water. Now my children have said, what are we going to do? I said, you know what, just do it down the stream at the back of the house. That will be fine for me. [...] You don't want to put too much pressure on the children, we need to simplify it. (Gita, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

She also considered the effort and expense of hiring a boat in Brighton or London for ash scattering to be an unnecessary burden on the next generation, favouring a pragmatic and nuclear family-place-attachment-centred choice for disposition.

Interestingly, few participants had heard of the consecrated and Environment Agency approved site for disposition of cremated remains on the River Soar, although many were aware of other informal sites and practices of dispersal, and some faith groups were lobbying for local designated sites for dispersing cremated remains on moving water near or leading to the sea. However, extended and concerted lobbying for a locally approved ritual dispersal site by joint Sikh and Hindu interest groups had caused much frustration for long time campaigners in Wales: "We want it here in Cardiff [slams his hand on the table] where the local community people can go to the place, and numbers are not a restriction" (Ajeet, Sikh focus group, Newport). At the time of data collection, progress had been achieved with a willing local authority, but developing an officially sanctioned site in South Wales had stalled; the site was finally opened in 2021 (BBC, 2021). Others reported that elsewhere the Environmental Agency had agreed *ad hoc* arrangements when pressed by visiting transnational mourners under the time pressure of return travel, visa restrictions etc., and that this site at the confluence of rivers near Luton was subsequently formalised as a designated zone for scattering cremated remains (Harpreet, Sikh focus group). Hindu and Sikh participants expressed a strong desire firstly for an agreed suitable fixed point for local disposition, what in mobilities studies is

referred to as a “mooring” for mobile practices (Hannam et al., 2006); and secondly, for the convenience and affordability of such local sites:

I think that could simplify life for people and make it a lot easier. As long as that flowing water [...] [goes] into a river and then an ocean or something, then it will release people. [...] So I think, if one looking at building such appropriate facilities [...] that would just complete the whole picture. And the whole process could be stress-free [...] I think every city should have that facility. If families want to scatter the ashes, they should be able to do it. (Rani, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton)

Participants from this focus group have since initiated negotiations with local authorities for a designated local site for the dispersal of cremated remains.

## 2.8 Fixed, Evolving and Hybrid Spaces and Practices

The examples discussed above evidence both common sacred beliefs and practices and differences between varied Hindu geographical communities and faith traditions, as well as varying degrees of fixity, evolution and hybridity of both majority and Hindu infrastructures and practices. The change in practice away from the repatriation of cremated remains to India to local disposition echoes trends emerging during the fin de siècle with British Muslims moving towards the local disposition of the dead (Gardner, 1998; Jassal, 2015), a trend which has continued in the first two decades of the twenty first century (Maddrell et al., 2018), and which also has been observed elsewhere in Europe (Balkan & Masarwa, 2022; Kadrouch-Outmany, 2016). Yet some young British-born Hindus, such as Chetana, have made arrangements for their own disposition in India, illustrative of both the continuity and multiplicity of Hindu disposition practices in England and Wales.

Participants in this study also reported both the shortening of traditional rituals because of work obligations, or the time limits of mourners travelling from other parts of the UK only staying briefly for the funeral and immediate rituals; or due to clashes with other pre-existing life events such as long-scheduled weddings: “People are cutting it short, they are having a more practical approach. So they are not waiting for the eleventh or the thirteenth day, they do it like on the fifth day or the seventh day” (Rani, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton). They also described other aspects of hybridisation of cultural practices through the adoption of British practices such as giving eulogies at funerals: “Now that we are in the western world, people follow the western style and do speeches. In India they don’t do speeches” (interview with Raj, Swindon). Other changes include the wider unpredictable ground of contemporary funeral dress codes, with some adhering to the strict Indian tradition of white clothing for mourning, others being more pragmatic. One participant noted: “It used to be white .... sometimes [...] you come from work in the morning [so wear work clothes]. So I think we are moving all the time” (Gita, multifaith women’s focus group, Northampton). The same participant planned to leave radical instructions for her own funeral, reflecting personal preferences and majority British trends away from uniform dress codes for funerals: “So

dress code, for myself, I'm going to do mine personal. Everybody to wear something red you know. Colourful. It is a personal choice" (Gita, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton). The women in this focus group were happy to be free of other traditions such as the *rudaalis*, professional ritual mourners who were paid to attend funerals in some parts of India, and who were discussed with a mixture of nostalgia and amusement.

The discussion amongst this group about ritual cleansing after the funeral and whether it was permissible to eat before bathing and changing clothes was less unanimous. One respondent described how she had faithfully refused to eat before bathing after a funeral, but had been surprised to discover at a funeral in India that this ritual was no longer the norm there and had been superseded by the washing of hands and a symbolic sprinkle of water. These changes are summed up well by the concluding remarks in a wider conversation on this topic by Hindu women at the multifaith women's focus group:

Rani: I have now changed to a situation where after the funeral, I go back to the hall or the family home, and done the sprinkling of water, you know, quick rinsing of hands and things, and then [afterwards] I will go home and have a shower, wash my hair.

Saire: [If] I don't do straight away [washing], I can't eat anything.

Rani: Ah yes, I have started eating now. It moves on with time. (multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

Others reflected on changes in the spatialities and temporalities of ritual, especially single day travel to distant funerals and a declining practice of having or handling the body in the home prior to cremation, as well as wider personal circumstances, as justification for changes to the requirements for ritual cleansing. However, some persistent sectarian and social divisions were transferred from South Asia to Britain (Zavos, 2012). For example, Arya Samajis include an additional fire ceremony after the cremation and have a shorter mourning period; however, this shorter mourning process is not necessarily deemed acceptable by all other Hindus (interview with Raj, Swindon).

Two further key shifts in ritual and social performances related to gendered and generational changes to Hindu funerary practices: "In India, ladies don't go to the crematorium. They send off the body and that's it. [...]. Here they will sit in the front row" (interview with Raj, Swindon). As Chetana articulated in the opening interview extract, the role of chief mourner in Hindu rituals is traditionally reserved for the eldest son. Shifts evidenced in women's attendance at funerals, and even more so in taking on ritual roles, represent symbolic and discursive movement – mobility – in the gendering of ritual practices. Although religiously conservative in some aspects of funerary rites, such as maintaining the ideal of the dispersal of cremated remains in the Ganges, as an educated and independent (single) woman, Chetana was empowered to challenge gendered norms shaped by traditional timeframes and assumptions about menstruation. For her, the reduction of the twelve-day mourning process to a concentrated timeframe centring on the cremation and a deferred trip to scatter ashes in the Ganges, meant that biologically-determined exclusions of women from ritual roles were redundant:

The reason in the olden days that women didn't used to do this is because it used to be an eleven days period, sometimes longer, and in that period, in India in the olden days, there used to be a religious ceremony every day. But the same person has to do it [all]. Now a woman, if she comes on her period, she wouldn't be able to do it. [...]. If you are on your period, you are not allowed to do religious stuff. So that's why women didn't use to do it, and why it was always very male dominated. Whereas in the UK, it is not, and even in India now, it is not done like that, with a religious ceremony every day as such. It is all accumulated on the eleventh day, when it is all done at once. So there is no reason why a daughter wouldn't be able to do it [...] because you are not meant to go to the Mandir and stuff [when menstruating]. You are not meant to stand before God for those three or four days. You are impure. I never understood it, because it is God who gives you this [bodily function] technically, so... God made you that way [...] (Interview with Chetana, Northampton)

The women in our study also indicated that their children might not want to follow the traditional Hindu cremation practice of the ritual washing of the body. Attitudes to ritual washing were shaped by a lack of experience for the younger generation, and motherly concern to avoid over-burdening their children emotionally at what would already be an emotionally-laden time-space:

It is a proper procedure, it is not just a bucket of water on them. [...] I don't want them to go through all that ....[...] Because... [...] it's] too traumatic ...[ ...] You don't want to add pressure on them. (Saira, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

Instead, the mature women in this group offered support to each other and had agreed to support the younger generation when one of their group passed away, each advising their children to refer to the group's leader who would guide and assist: "[Rani] will be able to help you.' That's what I said to them, 'and she will arrange everything and will help you.' Because we are all mothers and all our children are very close" (multifaith women's focus group, Northampton). These women in the focus group also expressed their adult children's unfamiliarity with death rituals and preferences to break with traditions such as viewing the body in the coffin at home:

At the moment they bring the body home, some are doing a little ceremony at home as well, but some do it at the crematorium. They open [the coffin to view] the body. My [daughter] said: 'Mom I don't want to bring you home.' I said: 'No problem' [all laugh]. I don't want to come home. (Gita, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

Open one time, that's it. Not three times open the coffin, and the children have to go through again, and have to look at Mom's face and cry again. (Saira, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

Positive changes, such as better arrangements of and at crematoria, were really welcomed for the ease this brought to an already emotionally fraught time-space of mourning and funeral arrangements. Equally, immobility, in the case of persistent lack of change over decades was deeply disappointing and frustrating to those hoping for change, as well as hurtful, resulting in a sense of less than full citizenship:

I haven't seen any changes in the last thirty years. Any changes. Every time I go I feel, not disgusted, but disappointed, thinking... We go to London quite a lot to do the funerals and I see the changes there every time. The cafes and the flowers and the bits and pieces. And to me, that [Ohm] symbol is very important, and I just think here, you go there, and they have

a cross. My focus is on the cross and it is...[distracting]. So I haven't seen any changes in 30 years. (Gita, multifaith women's focus group, Northampton)

This persistent symbolic marginalisation of minorities within public spaces and services accumulates emotionally and politically and constitutes a form of slow harm (Maddrell et al., 2021) and exacerbate what Bhugra and Becker (2005) have described as a form of cultural bereavement.

## 2.9 Conclusion

Drawing on embodied, gendered, racialised and other meaning-centred approaches to understanding migration and mobilities (Kofman, 2004; Vacchelli, 2018), this empirical study has examined current Hindu cremation practices in England and Wales. It evidences trends away from repatriation by British families of South Asian origin or heritage resulting in increased demand for appropriate and timely cremation services that suit varied Hindu ritual needs. This fine-grained research has identified these needs as: prompt cremation; accommodating ritual requirements for witnessing the charging the cremator; appropriate religious iconography in municipal crematoria; the option for non-cremulated remains; agreed designated accessible sites and infrastructure for the disposition of cremated remains in local rivers; public transport connectivity; and long-term planning to meet the needs of changing demographics. Some communities would also welcome venues which can be made available at short notice for pre- and post-cremation rituals, and appropriate designated spaces for the bodily rituals of washing the deceased prior to cremation and “picking the flowers” post-cremation.

Personal mobility affords mourners from other areas the opportunity to witness different and better crematorium services and practices elsewhere, as is evident in participant references to crematoria in larger urban areas with concentrations of Hindu residents, such as Hendon (a North West London borough) and Luton, where ongoing negotiations of funerary needs and provision are typically more advanced. These crematoria serve as a benchmark for inclusive practices for wider Hindu communities, and awareness of better provision for Hindu rituals elsewhere heightens the sense of injustice in being subjected to lack of movement – progress – in inadequate funerary infrastructure and norms in smaller towns, which raises questions about what Modood (2010) describes as inclusive citizenship.

This study also evidences continuities and changing practices within Hindu rituals, witness Chetana, the young British-born Hindu woman whose words opened this chapter, and who both challenged gendered Hindu funerary ritual norms and expressed her commitment to having her cremated remains taken to the traditional sacred site of the Ganges. International mobilities also lead to evolving practices, seen in the case of migrants who made return visits to India were surprised to discover changes to practices in their country of origin compared to more conservative practices upheld by migrants in England and Wales. Participants also highlighted

the importance of networks of mutual emotional and practical bereavement support, notably within informal women's groups and more formal strategic alliances, such as those between Hindus and Sikhs in Wales co-lobbying local councils for the provision of a riverside site for the dispersal of cremated remains in the Newport-Cardiff area. However, while these negotiations reflect active "lived citizenship" (Kallio et al., 2020) and this designated area was agreed in principle, until 2021 funding had proved an infrastructural barrier to materialising this translocal and mobile practice which would allow residents to meet their lifecycle ritual needs within their municipality, i.e. the "mooring" of their home area and community.

Thus, death rituals and disposition preferences amongst migrant and established minority Hindu communities evidence diversity, conservatism, and hybridity with local culture in different ways and to varying degrees. At the same time, majority practice can also change to become more accommodating of diverse ritual needs, and may adopt elements of minority practices (Maddrell et al., 2018). Focusing on Hindu crematorium and funerary needs in England and Wales contributes to the call for attention to different kinds of mobilities and the significance of the migrant dead (Jassal, 2015). It also highlights the changing local-national-international mobilities of cremated remains and other varied and evolving practices and beliefs, as well as contributing to a reframing of (post)diasporic Hindu identity and belonging in Britain. This chapter has shown aspects of both diasporic and post-diasporic identity expressed and experienced through varied dialogic and dialectical corporeal, material, institutional and religious-emotional mobilities and immobilities which are shaping contemporary Hindu funerary practices, and experience of these, in English and Welsh towns.

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# Chapter 3

## Cemeteries as Translocal Contact Zones: Navigating Regulations, Unwritten Rules and Divergent Expectations in Luxembourg City



Mariske Westendorp and Sonja Kmec

### 3.1 Introduction

Mourning, grieving and taking care of the dead are universal human activities. Despite this universality, material provisions (such as cremation, burial, grave-goods and monuments) are socially and culturally embedded, reflecting national and local differences as well as personal preferences. Consequently, a plurality of funerary practices may coexist within any given locality, e.g., as a result of multiple religious communities and worldviews found in dynamic societies that have been shaped by migration and other forms of mobility. To regulate this plurality and its consequences, states and religious authorities have, over the centuries, sought control over burial grounds and related social spaces. In the modern-day context of hypermobility and accelerated migration, cemetery managers find themselves confronted with an increasing range of needs and desires expressed by the bereaved. Based on the case-study of Luxembourg City (the capital of the small European state of Luxembourg, which borders Germany, France and Belgium), we investigate cemeteries as ‘translocal contact zones.’

At cemeteries, people from different cultures and religions come into contact with each other and shape each other’s understandings through embodiment, materials and practices – in a hierarchically structured setting. The concept of ‘contact zones’ has been defined by literary critic Mary Louise Pratt as

an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. ... [It]

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M. Westendorp (✉)

Department of Anthropology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

e-mail: [m.f.westendorp@uu.nl](mailto:m.f.westendorp@uu.nl)

S. Kmec

Department of Humanities, University of Luxembourg, Esch-Belval, Luxembourg

e-mail: [sonja.kmec@uni.lu](mailto:sonja.kmec@uni.lu)

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emphasises how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other ... not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (Pratt, 1992, pp. 6-7; see also Pratt, 1991)

Pratt focused on imperial contact zones, but she also conceptualised the classroom as a contact zone. Other scholars have applied the term to additional fields in which contact takes place between individuals who have not previously come into contact with each other (e.g., Isaacs & Otruba, 2019 on ecological systems; Schorch, 2013 on museums; and Yeoh & Willis, 2005 on Chinese cities). This can also be the case in cemeteries, which are “sites of encounter and interaction where different types of people meet, either in person or through encountering the graves and material artefacts of remembrance” (Maddrell et al., 2018, p. 51). Here, encounters take place between, on the one hand, an institutionalised cemetery sector that is bound by national legislation, municipal regulations, and majority cultural norms and traditions, and, on the other hand, diverse users who have their own religious and cultural requirements, expectations and experiences. As such, cemeteries are sites of negotiation, exchange, potential conflict, possibility and synthesis. Viewing cemeteries as contact zones acknowledges this presence of multiple discourses and communities in addition to the power relations shaping the particular space. As we show in this chapter, often these power relations are, or are experienced as, asymmetrical.

This chapter focuses on migrants’ lived experiences of cemetery rules and codes of behaviour. As Weissköppel (2013, p. 286) has shown, “from the perspective of immigrants, it is not always the national structures that are the relevant ones, as is conceptually assumed in the transnational paradigm.” Rather, migrants engage with a particular local setting, participating in its ongoing construction and development while drawing on their experiences of other local places. The concept of ‘translocality’ focuses on these types of interactions and allows us to investigate the everyday spaces and actions of migrants. Migrants are often identified by their nationality or country of origin – not only by statistical surveys but also (as we must self-critically admit) by our own study design. However, it transpires that it is more salient to ask about the production of locality “under the conditions of contemporary urban life, which involve national regimes, mass mediation, and intense and irregular commoditisation” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 181). To bring forth the relational production of localities and the politics of space as advocated by Massey (2004), we thus propose the notion of ‘translocality.’ This notion has been used by scholars to address the *emergence* of networks in which people, resources, practices and ideas circulate (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 375) and “the *outcome* of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas, and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or political” (Freitag & Von Oppen, 2010, p. 5, *our italics*). Contact zones are a product of translocality, because they reveal the impact of encounters between individuals, materials and practices and the resulting *transformation* of the space and of the social actors in it (Askins & Pain, 2011).

Cemeteries as ‘translocal contact zones’ not only engage the living but also involve actions revolving around affective, emotional and spiritual bonds, which the living continue to have and with they maintain with the dead. It is clear that mourning and, more generally, evocation of the dead take place not only at the cemetery but also – even more – outside it (Klass et al., 1996; Klass & Steffen, 2018; Valentine, 2008). Moreover, the “relational tension between the physical absence (not being there) and emotional presence (a sense of still being there)” (Maddrell, 2013, p. 505) is highly dynamic, because it responds to social expectations and life events, such as moving home or finding a new partner (see also Mathijssen, 2018). Still, funeral ceremonies represent a crucial moment in this bonding process, and for some people, as we will show, grave tending continues to be important in maintaining these bonds. It is not merely out of social convention that our interviewees often referred to a funeral as “saying goodbye” and to visiting a grave as “saying hello” to the deceased. Whether religious or secular in their appearance, grave sites “make the ‘absent’ ‘present’ and act as spaces that transcend absence” (Maddrell, 2013, p. 505). Although grave decorations may be standardised and address the living (family members and visitors to neighbouring graves at the cemetery) to show that one cares (Benkel et al., 2019, p. 82), there is also evidence that they are seen as a form of on-going communication with the dead (Francis et al., 2005; Kjærsgaard & Venbrux, 2016). In this chapter, we reveal that these practices are culturally and religiously sensitive, and that they are laden with ritual significance on personal, collective and managerial levels.

In the first part of this chapter, we describe how cemeteries in Luxembourg City function as municipal service providers with specific laws and regulations. The second and longest part of this chapter examines the experiences and lived realities of migrants who use, embody and impact on these spaces, focusing on three contested issues: (i) burial practices and rituals (with a focus on ceremonies that take place at the cemetery); (ii) cemetery architecture and grave design; and (iii) the re-use of grave plots. We conclude this chapter with a discussion of these contested issues and an argument for more emphasis on agency in the acknowledgement of cemeteries as translocal contact zones.

### 3.1.1 *Methods*

The data analysed in this chapter were collected in Luxembourg City between July 2019 and October 2020. During this time, we held interviews with 21 stakeholders (representatives from religious and ethnic communities, the municipality, cemeteries and funeral parlours, so-called *pompes funèbres*) and sixteen individual users of cemeteries. The interviews were held by one or both of the authors in person (except for one, which was done using Facetime), and the interviews lasted for between half an hour and three hours. They were held at the offices of stakeholders, or in cafés in the city centre. The interviews were conducted in English, French, German or

Luxembourgish. In addition, we held five focus-group discussions with eighteen participants in total. Four of these discussions were held during the *Festival des Migrations, Cultures et de la Citoyenneté* (29 February-1 March 2020); the other was held online (via Zoom). Information about the national and religious backgrounds of the interviewed cemetery users and the participants in the focus-group discussions is represented in Table 3.1. In terms of gender, there were eight men and 26 women. Age-wise, our participants ranged between 19 and 78 years. There were significant differences between the participants in terms of how long they have been in Luxembourg, with some arriving in the country less than a year before the interview or focus group and others having lived there for most of their life; further analysis could explore whether length of stay and country of origin have any influence on how people negotiate and experience the soft boundaries and informal rules and customs of Luxembourg's funeral sector. At the *Festival* we also set up a Memorial Café, where we discussed the subject of burial and cremation practices with (walk-in) visitors. At the café we used a variety of creative elicitation methods, which led to a collection of written and visual material. All interviews and conversations were audio-recorded, transcribed, encoded and analysed using Atlas.ti. Recurrent topics were examined and compared with national burial acts and official statistical data.

**Table 3.1** Overview of interviewees and focus group participants

|              | Interviews                                   |                   | Focus groups              |                   |    |
|--------------|--|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----|
|              | Religion                                     | Country of origin | Religion                  | Country of origin |    |
|              | (Roman) Catholicism (3)                      | Algeria (1)       | (Roman) Catholicism (4)   | Afghanistan (1)   |    |
|              | Protestantism (2)                            | Cape Verde (4)    | Protestantism (6)         | Belgium (1)       |    |
|              | Orthodox Christianity (3)                    | China (1)         | Orthodox Christianity (2) | Brazil (1)        |    |
|              | Islam (2)                                    | Egypt (1)         | Islam (3)                 | Egypt (1)         |    |
|              | No religion (3)                              | Indonesia (1)     | No religion (3)           | Ireland (1)       |    |
|              | Ancestor worship with Christian elements (3) | Luxembourg (1)    |                           | Luxembourg (2)    |    |
|              |  | Madagascar (1)    |                           | Montenegro (1)    |    |
|              |  | Netherlands (1)   |                           | Netherlands (6)   |    |
|              |  | Russia (1)        |                           | Portugal (2)      |    |
|              |  | Togo (2)          |                           | Serbia (1)        |    |
|              |  | UK (1)            |                           | Turkey (1)        |    |
|              |  | Ukraine (1)       |                           |                   |    |
| <b>TOTAL</b> |  | 16                | 16                        | 18                | 18 |

## 3.2 Luxembourg City: Small and Diverse

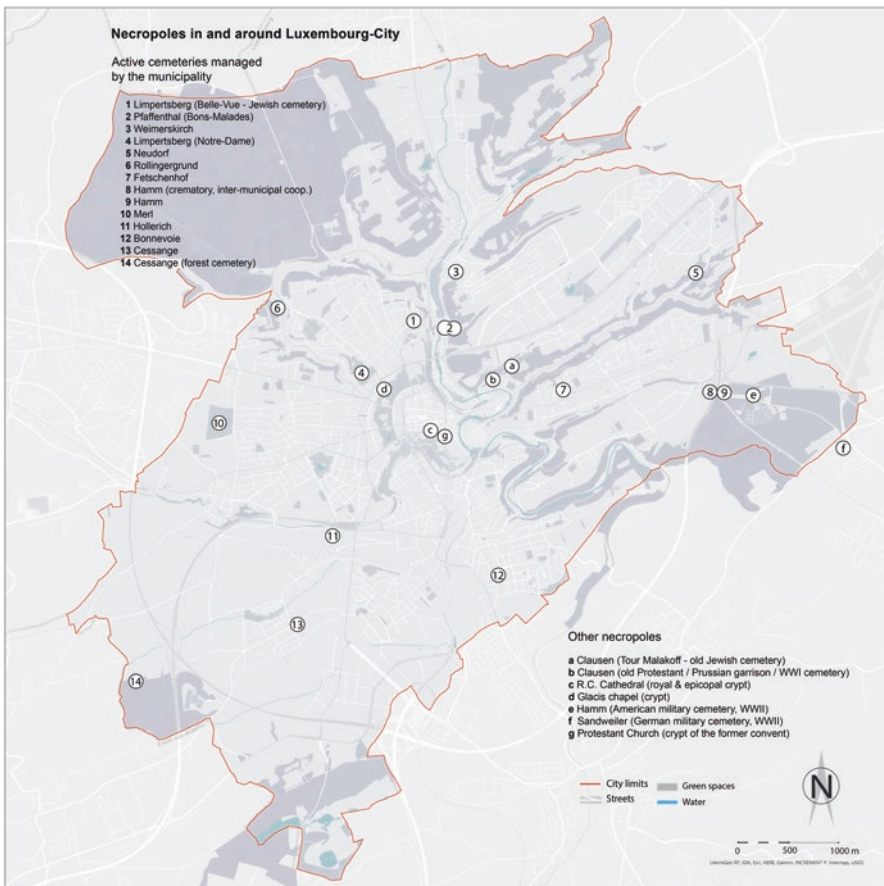
Luxembourg City is a particularly interesting case study for research into transnational lived citizenship on the one hand, and bureaucratised practices surrounding burials on the other. Luxembourg has high levels of migration and diversity because it hosts European Union institutions, multinational financial institutions, and associated service and construction industries. Over 70% of Luxembourg City's 120,000 inhabitants are non-nationals, which makes the capital city a 'node' in transnational networks spanning 164 countries around the world (see Table 3.2). Around 10% of

**Table 3.2** Luxembourg City's population as at 31 December 2019 (Source: VDL, 2019)

| Population by continent of origin<br>(n = 122,273) |         |            | European population by country of origin<br>(n = 122,273) |         |            |
|--|---------|------------|---|---------|------------|
| Continent  | Number  | Percentage | Country   | Number  | Percentage |
| Europe   | 110,984 | 90.77      | Luxembourg  | 35,913  | 29.37      |
| Asia   | 5460    | 4.47       | France  | 20,889  | 17.08      |
| America  | 2879    | 2.35       | Portugal  | 12,209  | 9.98       |
| Africa   | 2788    | 2.28       | Italy   | 8601    | 7.03       |
| Oceania  | 97      | 0.08       | Belgium   | 4622    | 3.78       |
| Unknown  | 40      | 0.03       | Germany   | 3904    | 3.19       |
| No nationality                                     | 25      | 0.02       | Spain   | 3872    | 3.17       |
| TOTAL  | 122,273 | 100.00     | Rumania   | 2254    | 1.84       |
|  |         |            | UK  | 2029    | 1.66       |
|  |         |            | Greece  | 1915    | 1.57       |
|  |         |            | Poland  | 1700    | 1.39       |
|  |         |            | Netherlands   | 972     | 0.79       |
|  |         |            | Ireland   | 943     | 0.77       |
|  |         |            | Sweden  | 929     | 0.76       |
|  |         |            | Bulgaria  | 928     | 0.76       |
|  |         |            | Hungary   | 767     | 0.63       |
|  |         |            | Finland   | 743     | 0.61       |
|  |         |            | Denmark   | 640     | 0.52       |
|  |         |            | Lithuania   | 631     | 0.52       |
|  |         |            | Croatia   | 520     | 0.43       |
|  |         |            | Czech Republic  | 493     | 0.40       |
|  |         |            | Estonia   | 417     | 0.34       |
|  |         |            | Slovakia  | 402     | 0.33       |
|  |         |            | Austria   | 373     | 0.31       |
|  |         |            | Latvia  | 351     | 0.29       |
|  |         |            | Slovenia  | 323     | 0.26       |
|  |         |            | Malta   | 135     | 0.11       |
|  |         |            | Cyprus  | 128     | 0.10       |
|  |         |            | Other   | 3381    | 2.77       |
|  |         |            | TOTAL   | 110,984 | 90.77      |

these non-nationals are non-European Union citizens (VDL, 2019, 2020a). These figures must be interpreted with caution, as not all non-nationals are foreign-born and some hold dual citizenship. Nonetheless, as Callens et al. (2019, p. 287) have noted, “based on migration background instead of nationality, the minority group actually outnumbers the native population [and] this particular minority/majority composition offers a unique research site.”

The municipality of Luxembourg City manages a total of thirteen ‘active’ cemeteries (covering 27 hectares and containing over 15,000 burial plots), which are scattered throughout the city (see Fig. 3.1). In addition, the municipality has joined a consortium operating the country’s sole crematorium, located in the capital’s district of Hamm. The cemeteries follow strict burial regulations in line with a ‘continental European’ model, which is similar to the situation in neighbouring countries but much stricter than in, for example, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. In



**Fig. 3.1** Necropolises in and around Luxembourg-City. (Map by Ville de Luxembourg, Service Topographie et géomatique; adapted by Thomas Kolnberger and Sonja Kmec)



keeping with the Napoleonic tradition, which granted each religious community equal access to burial sites, the 1972 cemetery law stipulates:

In municipalities where several cults are professed, each cult may have a particular place of burial; in cases where there is only one cemetery, it can be divided into as many parts as there are different cults, with a separate entrance for each, and by proportioning this space to the number of inhabitants of each cult. (Loi, 1972, art. 2, authors' translation)

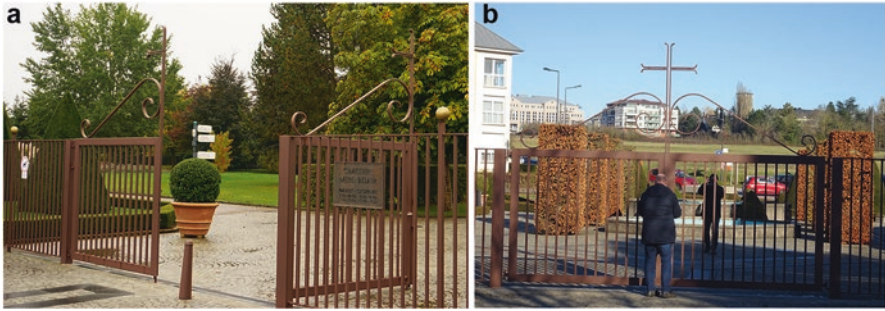
The key word here is *may*: a modal verb of authority and potential ability, delegating that decision to the municipal level. In Luxembourg City the Jewish community and the Protestant one (the Prussian garrison) have historically been granted their own cemeteries, which are now maintained by the municipality.

The practice of burial at cemeteries in Luxembourg is based on the national funeral legislation of 1972, and the city regulations of 2014. One crucial regulation states that human remains that stay in Luxembourg need to be disposed of within the confines of a cemetery or a plot reserved specifically for that use. Before a crematorium was opened in 1995, there was significant post-mortem cross-border mobility to crematoria abroad and a return of the urns to be buried in Luxembourg (Kolnberger, 2017, 2019). Today, ashes may be scattered in the crematorium garden and in designated areas of an increasing number of cemeteries. Since 2014, the burial of cremated remains has also been allowed in the municipal 'forest cemetery' at Cessange (on motivations for creating and using such alternative sites, see Kmec, 2019; Kmec & Kolnberger, 2020). The important leeway given to municipal authorities is illustrated in a by-law that allowed the laying of ashes on private grounds or any other place, according to the wishes of the deceased, by authorization of the mayor (RGD, 1978, art. 3). In 2018, this option was officially discouraged and the prohibition of keeping the ashes of the deceased at home was reiterated, as doing so would restrict the access provided to family and friends (QP, 2018).

Another key regulation, which has a significant influence on burial practices, is the legal obligation for bodily inhumations to take place in the cemetery of the district where the deceased resided (VDL, 2014, art. 9). The main exception to this regulation regarding location is the cemetery of Merl, which has confessional sections for Jews and Muslims and is open, upon authorisation by the mayor, to faith members from the rest of the city and the entire country. The Muslim section of the cemetery (which consists of rows of graves without stone vaults, oriented to face Mecca, in a demarcated area set apart from the rest of the cemetery, with red beeches planted alongside high hedges, creating a double hedge; see Fig. 3.3) was opened in 2002, after almost two decades of campaigning by Muslim communities (Pirenne, 2019a, b). At present, there is no commercial incentive for or municipal interest in adapting to the wishes of other minority groups (e.g., as can be seen in certain cemeteries in the Netherlands; see Jedan et al., 2020, pp. 14–15). According to the distinction applied by Rugg (2020, p. 7) to the service user as "a citizen, consumer or disenfranchised 'supplicant'," cemetery users are treated as citizens in Luxembourg. However, not all citizens' sensibilities are treated equally.

For one, the Catholic normativity of Luxembourg's funeral sector is not to be underestimated. Although run by the municipalities since 1804, cemeteries are

shown on road signs and maps by stylised crosses, reflecting the majority culture. This iconography can also be detected in the cemeteries themselves. In Merl cemetery, which includes a Jewish and a Muslim section, the main entrance gates clearly depict a cross (see Fig. 3.2a, b). In the middle of the cemetery, which has been extended several times since 1915 with the current infrastructure dating from the



**Fig. 3.2** (a, b) The gate to the Merl cemetery, open and closed. Upon closing the gate, a cross can be seen. (Photographs by Mariske Westendorp © Photothèque de la Ville de Luxembourg)



**Fig. 3.3** The Muslim section of the Merl cemetery. While all the grave plots are of a similar size and orientation, the decorations reflect personal preferences and traditions in various countries of origin. (Photograph by Mariske Westendorp © Photothèque de la Ville de Luxembourg)

1980s (Philippart, 2020), the *chapelle* displays Christian artefacts, including a cross hanging from the ceiling and a massive candelabra adorned with a cross. Visitors to the cemetery administration office, the morgue (*Leichenhalle / morgue*) and the viewing rooms (*Aufbahrungssaal / salle d'adieu*) are greeted by a statue of Saint Andrew (Jesus's first disciple) and a Catholic priest's memorial plaque depicting a chalice and host with a cross.

Second, unwritten rules seem to be in place which favour some citizens' rituals and practices over others. In our interviews, cemetery users and stakeholders expressed ideas about "how things are done in Luxembourg," that are persistent enough for people to believe they are regulations, even though they are not included in the official body of cemetery and funerary laws. These unwritten rules, sometimes even more than the official regulations, shape the expectations of people in general, and migrants in particular, who might feel restricted in what they can and should do. We illustrate this in the next section, by focusing on three contested issues: burial practices and rituals, cemetery architecture and grave design, and the re-use of grave plots in Luxembourg.

### 3.3 Cemeteries as Translocal Contact Zones: Contested Issues

Fenced off from the outside world and closed at night, cemeteries in Luxembourg City – as in most towns in North-west Europe – have their own rules and regulations. There is a well-defined division of labour, and hierarchies are clear; values such as quietness and decorum are rather specific to the cemeteries. However, these behavioural norms are not set in stone. They are changing due to a variety of influences, such as leisure culture, heritage tourism, and reactions to users' experiences in other cemeteries.

In line with earlier research by Maddrell et al. (2021), we propose that cemeteries should be seen not as bounded spaces, but as sites where majority behaviour and rules are tested, challenged and potentially adapted through interactions with various minorities (whether of migrant or other heritage), raising questions about everyday 'lived citizenship' (Maddrell et al., 2021, p. 11, 20). Citizenship is not limited to the duties and rights linked to one's status as a certified member of a nation state (*Staatsbürgerschaft*); rather, it is understood here as lived practice, emphasising "the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens" (Hall & Williamson, 1999, p. 2). Citizenship in this sense is expressed in the everyday actions of people negotiating their membership of a particular (political) community. As such, lived citizenship is the result of a "dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society" (Ong, 1999, p. 738). To study citizenship is therefore to study "how we live with others in a political community" (Lazar, 2013, p. 1), recognising

multiple scales and sites. The scale we focus on here is the local, albeit in terms of its connections to other localities. In such *translocal* spaces movements of goods, capital, people, ideas, emotions and practices can foster intercultural and interreligious encounters based on compassion (Swensen & Skår, 2019), or create tensions, that may even amount to (infra)structural violence (Maddrell et al., 2021). In this section, we show how official regulations and unwritten rules affect migrants' expectations, appropriation and experience of cemeteries. Using an actor-oriented approach, we focus on people who were born or raised abroad and socialised into other sites and practices of mourning, and we explore how they engage with the provisions available to them in cemeteries in Luxembourg City. Some of these migrants identify as members of minority communities: groups with specific social, religious, ethnic, racial, linguistic or other characteristics that are perceived by their members and by the majority as different from the 'mainstream.' Others may refuse to adopt a minority position but find themselves cast as 'different' nonetheless or are ascribed diasporic identities (Délano Alonso & Mylonas, 2019).

When confronted with their future death, migrants often face the question about where they want to be buried: in the country where they are currently residing or in their country of origin, perhaps in a traditional family grave. Choosing a cemetery situated close to their 'new home' rather than repatriation is often seen as a sign of a migrant's symbolic and affective place-attachment to their 'host' country. Hunter (2016), for example, argues that repatriation might reinforce the temporary nature of the stay in a host country, whereas local burial (in Hunter's article: in France) can serve as the foundation of home-making in the diaspora (see also Hunter's contribution to this volume). Likewise, Maddrell et al. (2018, 2021) and Beebejaun et al. (2021) observe in England and Wales a clear shift away from repatriation, especially among younger generations, due to family ties, sense of place, costs and practicalities, in addition to changing theological prescriptions (and adherence to these prescriptions).

While there is a vast body of literature dealing with repatriation and what is generally described as a shift towards burial in one's country of residence, most of the research focuses on a particular country (e.g., Marjavaara, 2012 on internal mobilities in Sweden; Maddrell et al., 2018 on manifold international networks of repatriation from England and Wales) or compare different national settings (e.g., Ahaddour & Broeckart, 2017). Mertz (2019) offers a statistical comparison between the attitudes of various migrant communities in Luxembourg. He distinguishes between the wish for burial in Luxembourg expressed by French, Italian and Portuguese respondents and a preference for post-mortem repatriation given by respondents from Cape Verde and the Balkans. The reasons behind these preferences have not yet been researched, but they may be linked to more or less entrenched social and emotional ties to Luxembourg or to more or less pronounced religious and cultural differences in terms of funerary practices. The high percentage of undecided respondents (of all origins) found by Mertz is particularly poignant, as it shows that the answer to the question of where one wishes to be laid to rest is far from being clear.

Choosing to be buried in Luxembourg instead of opting for post-mortem repatriation results in the bereaved actively engaging with a social space that is highly

bureaucratised and regulated, both on the national level and the local municipal level. In the next section, we explore how and why migrants choose to bury their dead and be buried in Luxembourg, and *how* they do this. We bring together the perspective of the regulatory framework and those who convey its content (cemetery employees and the municipality<sup>1</sup>) with the perspective of cemetery users (visitors, grave tenders and funeral attendees) to understand the particularly sensitive intercultural and translocal ‘contact zones’ that cemeteries constitute.

### 3.3.1 *Burial Practices and Rituals*

Municipal rules and regulations insist on “decent behaviour” and “respect for the dead” and give as examples of deviant behaviour littering, peddling, drunkenness, and climbing on tombs. Those engaging in such deviant behaviour can be expelled from the cemetery grounds (VDL, 2014, art. 39–42; see also Deering, 2010). In the Luxembourgish regulations, there is no mention of sound (levels), yet loud lamentations – a traditional feature of funerals in many cultures – may be seen as ‘improper’ in Luxembourg, not necessarily by the cemetery management but by migrants themselves, who wish not to stand out as ‘different,’ as the following example illustrates.

When we spoke to Joana,<sup>2</sup> a Cape Verdean migrant in her late sixties, who had been living in Luxembourg for fifty years, she shared her experiences of burying her mother and her husband. She chose to do both funerals, in her own words, “the Luxembourgish way”: in a very small circle, with no onlookers and no lamenters (usually female family members or community volunteers). This was criticised by other members of the Cape Verdean community, who believed that a proper farewell should be more inclusive and communal. To do it “her way,” Joana had to be assertive with her friends, family and the larger Cape Verdean community. Reflecting on the same situation, her sister Ana, whom we talked to on a separate occasion, sees this choice as depriving other funeral attendees of their way of mourning:

My aunt does it [lamentation], one of my aunts does it still. She was also at the funeral of my mother. The people came to make her stop. Not the people from the cemetery, but the members of the family. Because there is this acculturation, you know. And the family, the people were ashamed of this, because they know that others don’t understand. So they want to wipe this typical Cape Verdean tradition out, in order to just adjust. (authors’ translation)

The response to these unwritten rules and norms thus depends on each individual, and is a clear example of the cemetery as a translocal contact zone. The choice to

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<sup>1</sup>Funeral undertakers are also important actors, who seek to reconcile regulations and the wishes of their customers, and may deal with the bureaucracy on their customers’ behalf. Further research will elucidate the role of these important brokers (*‘kommunikativer Knotenpunkt,’* Coenen, 2020, pp. 137–142).

<sup>2</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant.

keep or break with cultural traditions reflects the wish to fulfil (often unspoken) expectations about fitting in rather than the desire to abide by official regulations.

Another example of a potential contest between expected behaviour in cemeteries and divergent cultural habits or practices relates to the question of who can be present when a coffin or urn is entombed: the immediate family, the entire funeral party or only the cemetery employees whose job it is to close the grave. In Luxembourg, the actual burial of a coffin is generally a backstage practice (Goffman, 1956), carried out by cemetery workers in a quick and efficient manner in the absence of funeral attendees. The mourners may attend a funeral ceremony elsewhere (at a church or a non-denominational farewell hall) while the burial takes place, and only come to the grave once it has been covered. Migrants from different backgrounds told us that they would wish for a more frontstage and solemn ceremonial burial of the coffin with the whole funeral party present. Mette, a Danish woman in her forties, shared how she experienced the funeral of a member of the Danish church community:

It was a large funeral. It was not possible for the rest [non-family members] to come and see when the coffin was put in the ground. And it was the workmen, the people working on the cemetery, who did that. And that's not the Danish way. It was not put down very elegant as well. ... So because it was so strange for the people working at the cemetery that the whole group was there to seeing them putting the coffin in the ground. For me, that's all natural, that we are there and see it. ... The working men did it, and we all watched. And it didn't go easy. That's not good to see.

This type of shock is experienced not only by migrants but also by those socialised in Luxembourg when they attend funerals that “go against the grain.” In another conversation, Monique, a Luxembourgish woman also in her forties, mentioned that when she witnessed an urn burial in the Notre-Dame cemetery, organised by a friend of German origin, she was aghast when she saw cemetery workers in fluorescent orange jackets in the midst of the mourners, waiting impatiently for the ceremony to end so they could finally finish their job. Here, we can clearly see how in the contact zone of the cemetery, different – and, at times, divergent – values and experiences come together.

The separation of everyday frontstage and backstage behaviour and languages, as developed by Goffman (1956), is seen as crucial by Coenen (2020), who examines modern rituals and bureaucracy surrounding farewell ceremonies. Coenen, using Mary Douglas's theory of ‘matter out of place’, argues that

[n]o ‘unclean’ actions relating to the backstage are allowed to interfere with the course of a funeral. They rather have to be strictly separated and carried out covertly, as exemplified by the closing of the grave. With the exception of Muslim burials, where the grave is refilled collectively as part of the ritual chain, the closing of the grave generally takes place in Germany in the absence of the mourners. (Coenen, 2020, p. 152, authors' translation)

As ‘matters out of place,’ grave diggers’ tools and work clothes are expected to remain hidden and in all cases separate from the mourners. When they are not, the experience is jarring. Reflecting on this, Mette, who had only recently arrived in Luxembourg, said that to avoid this type of situation it would have been important to be more explicit about her wishes. Similarly, Isabelle (who grew up in Togo and

had been living in Luxembourg for 25 years) was equally displeased by the exclusion of the funeral party from the burial. She explained that there is a way to ‘solve’ the backstage handling of the coffin; namely, by insisting that one’s own wishes are fulfilled:

To be able to bury our dead, that means to throw the earth on it, approach the grave as you put the body, in Luxembourg, it is forbidden. ... But we pushed. We pushed, because we absolutely wanted to say goodbye and throw the last earth on him, so we forced, and it was accepted. But we had to call the one who was there and he had to call his boss or the municipality. So much asking permission. But otherwise, it would have been bad, we couldn’t get close to the grave. (authors’ translation)

Isabelle believed that it was not only her right but her duty to make the burial happen in the ‘proper’ way. In other words, she insisted on her request and did not let prohibitions – whether written or unwritten – hold her back. This is a clear case of individual agency and negotiation, which is discussed in the next section as an act of lived citizenship.

### 3.3.2 Cemetery Architecture and Grave Design

Cemeteries at Luxembourg City are maintained by 56 employees of the municipal Cemetery Department, who care for the paths, trees, hedges and architectural features, in addition to managing the digging and filling of graves. Consequently, almost all the cemeteries – with the exception of Merl, which was planned in the 1970s and 1980s with a park-like infrastructure – are similar in their overall appearance. They are large, square spaces with rectangular grave markers, mostly constructed in marble or stone. The paths between the graves are covered with light-grey or red gravel, and the bushes – placed primarily to separate different burial sections – are neatly trimmed (see Fig. 3.4).

The individual grave markers are often similar in appearance too. Most include a horizontal slab, generally adorned with the family name, a large but plain cross and a container for holy water at the foot end, indicative of Luxembourg’s majority Catholic culture. All grave markers need to adhere to regulations that are as strict as they are vague, and their construction must be approved by the mayor:

Tombstones and other funerary monuments need to be adapted to the character of the cemetery or the section of the cemetery where they are placed. (...) Monuments and ornamental accessories must be made of natural stone, wood, cast iron, wrought iron, bronze, copper or other materials approved by the municipal council. Ornamental accessories made of other materials, as well as photographs fixed on the monuments are not allowed. (...) The construction and transformation of a funerary monument must be authorised by the mayor. (VDL, 2014, art. 47, authors’ translation)

Despite these regulations, photographs can be seen on quite a number of grave markers at cemeteries, particularly on gravestones of people with Italian or Portuguese backgrounds, as are personal objects made from all kinds of material, especially on children’s graves.



**Fig. 3.4** Hollerich cemetery. (Photograph by Mariske Westendorp © Photothèque de la Ville de Luxembourg)

Conformity is imposed more rigorously when it comes to urn graves. In recent years, some cemeteries have added sections containing individual urn graves and columbaria. Some of these columbaria only allow for a small grey plaque on which is written *'famille'* and the family name(s) of the deceased, usually all in capital letters. The only variance is whether the first name is mentioned (see Fig. 3.5). These plaques are supplied by the municipal administration, and their material and typography are predetermined.

Such homogenising directives can cause emotional and spiritual harm (Maddrell et al., 2018; Maddrell et al., 2021), as Robin, a Christian priest who had visited the columbarium with a mourner, witnessed:

You know, in this wall, they are all alike, with the name and *'famille.'* This Belgium man said to the undertaker at the cemetery: "It should not say *'famille,'* but only her name. She didn't have family, so only her name should be put there." And he couldn't get that through. He came and he saw *'famille.'* He was so sad about that, every time we go.

Here, the experience of difference is not necessarily based on enculturation in different (trans)local contexts, but on one's individual circumstances and background. Experiences are thus not only communal or national, but also highly individual, relational and translocal.

Lastly, the municipality of Luxembourg has set regulations regarding the temporary adornments that can or cannot be placed on top of graves. Cemetery workers have the right to remove any objects deemed 'unfit' for the cemetery's appearance and "deposit them in a place where the owner can reclaim them" (VDL, 2014, art. 47); they may also dispose of faded floral decorations "that give cemeteries a neglected and unworthy appearance" (VDL, 2014, art. 59–61). The resulting appearance was appreciated by some of our research participants. For example, Andras, a





**Fig. 3.5** Columbarium at Notre Dame cemetery. Each niche has the same cover, made of grey stone with ‘*famille*’ and the family name in the same black lettering. No alternative designs are offered. (Photograph by Mariske Westendorp © Photothèque de la Ville de Luxembourg)

Coptic Egyptian man, who had buried his mother two years earlier, explained in detail how he managed to secure a family grave in Luxembourg. Upon asking him if his mother did not wish to be buried in Egypt, he answered:

She was always comparing the graves in Egypt with here. Her wish was to be buried here because the graves in Egypt are normally in the desert, [far] out of the city. It is a lone, sandy place with graves. There are no flowers. There is only cactuses because we put beside every grave a cactus because they do not need water and nobody is coming to water them every day or every week. When she came here she was happy to visit the graves and her wish was: “I would like to be graved in such a garden.” Because for her it was a garden. There were flowers, marble ... And I think we fulfilled her wish.

Two things stand out in this positive narrative. Firstly, Andras’s mother had noticed and appreciated the many flowers that often adorn graves in Luxembourg (especially around All Souls); and secondly, related to this, she has mentioned the close proximity of the cemeteries to residential areas and thus their accessibility.

These examples show that cemeteries in Luxembourg are experienced both positively and negatively. Regardless, in all the narratives a sense of homogeneity comes to the fore. All our informants described a similar picture of cemeteries in Luxembourg. This apparent uniformity is rather perplexing considering the wide diversity of Luxembourg’s population. The reasons that may explain the possible

discrepancy between the diverse living population and the homogenous deathscapes are, as described above, the strict regulatory framework laid out by the municipality and the tendency to do what others do, which results in a “materiality of conformity.” The latter is advanced by Streb et al. (2019), who argue that homogeneity might be the result of “neighbouring effects,” in other words, the wish to fit in. Schmitt et al. (2018) also highlight the limited commercial options for headstones and so on, which restrict choice. Nevertheless, our interview participants did not consider the design of local cemeteries or grave markers to be problematic. In contrast, the issue that prompted the most lively discussions was the question of the re-use of graves.

### 3.3.3 *Perpetual Grave Rights*

In Luxembourg, municipalities can grant the right to use a grave plot for up to thirty years (Loi, 1972, art. 10). In Luxembourg City the temporal frame of these ‘concessions’ is fifteen or thirty years, and if the fee has not been paid after five years the grave or columbarium compartment may be cleared (VDL, 2014, art. 11). The concession-holder may renew the tenure for another fifteen or thirty years as often as desired, and bequeath the grant to their next of kin. If the grant is not renewed, the municipality may remove the gravestone, displace the remains and reallocate the plot. Although a system of limited grave tenure is practised in most Westernised countries (Rugg, 2020, p. 4), people who are not familiar with it may experience it as a shock that resonates for a long time. For example, when discussing the topic with Rosie, an Irish migrant who had been living in Luxembourg for over twenty years, she expressed how upset she got every time she heard of it.

Even though perpetual grave rights are not the default in Luxembourg, they still exist and may still be acquired. The concession fee for an individual grave of two square meters in a cemetery in Luxembourg City amounts to €200 for fifteen years or €600 for thirty years (VDL, 2015). A perpetual grave is significantly costlier (€2000) and the deed must to be reconfirmed every thirty years (VDL, 2020b). Besides, “perpetual concessions may be granted in places of burial reserved for members of a religious faith, if such is the requirement of this faith” (Loi, 1972, art. 10; VDL, 2014, art. 13, authors’ translation). While the Jewish cemetery in Bellevue is mentioned explicitly in the regulations (VDL, 2014, art. 62–66) and perpetual grave rights are also granted for the Jewish section at Merl cemetery, this is less clear for the Muslim section of Merl (see Fig. 3.3). It is only the second Muslim section in the whole country (the first being situated in Esch-sur-Alzette), and it was opened at the request of the *Mutuelle du Centre Culturel Islamique Luxembourg* (CCIL, an insurance organisation that mainly arranges post-mortem repatriations of Muslims, primarily to Balkan countries).

In interviews with different members of the Muslim community, two things stood out. Firstly, as Muslim graves in Luxembourg City are still relatively new, nobody seemed to know exactly what would happen to them once the thirty-year

concession period was over. Secondly, opinions were divided on the question of whether perpetuity would be required from a religious perspective. One of Luxembourg's imams mentioned in an interview:

In Islam, the dead have the right for their own grave. But just as long as the body needs to decompose. As long as the body is decomposed, you can rebury someone. I have a scientific study from Liège, where someone was asked to look in the graves of the 1950s and see what's left. And he found nothing. So, the forty [red.: thirty] years for Luxembourg seems to be okay, it's very fine.

A similar pragmatic view was expressed by Karim, a young Muslim man originally from Afghanistan, during a related focus-group discussion. He considered the question of perpetuity to be less a matter of religion than of available space: "If there is a problem of space, and other people die and there is no space, maybe we can make the graves disappear." Following his answer, Karim mused on how long it would have to be before a grave could be reopened and the remains removed. He concluded that he would rather rely on "medical" than religious experts to advise on this issue, because they would know best when a body would be decomposed.

As these examples show, ideas about perpetuity are individual and depend on where a person comes from, their recent experiences, their religious and cultural habits, and many other factors. The communities using a cemetery are diverse, and equally there is much diversity within these communities (diversity within diversity; see Maddrell et al., 2018). This diversity is dependent on local and translocal citizenship but it is also, in a way, trans-temporal. Values, experiences and practices change over time: throughout one's lifetime, and over the period in which a migrant community finds itself in a host country. At present in Luxembourg City, where the recently opened Muslim section contains a mere seventy graves, the question of whether perpetuity is required for religious reasons seems not to be at the forefront. How this will change over time – as the graves become older, the number of graves increases, and Muslim communities in Luxembourg develop – is difficult to predict.

As can be detected from the contested issues described in this section, cemeteries are contact zones in which the regulations and unwritten rules are continuously negotiated by those who manage and use these spaces. These negotiations intertwine with expectations based on socialisation in other countries, previous experiences of cemeteries, religious and secular attitudes and beliefs, translocal traditions, and so on. These negotiations, and the potentially problematic discrepancies between what can be done and what should be done, make the cemetery a translocal contact zone.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored how migrants in Luxembourg City experience funeral dispositions and material provisions at cemeteries. As we have shown, Luxembourg is a particularly telling case for the diversity of cemetery experiences,

given the high proportion of non-nationals living in the city and the finding that even European and Christian residents socialised elsewhere find some customs peculiar and hard to accept. As indicated, we believe this is linked to the strictness of cemetery and funerary regulations in place in the city. The relative standardisation of grave stones could be an indication of top-down pressure to integrate: migrants are required by the regulations to be buried in a specific cemetery (in the district where they last resided), and with a grave marker that is in keeping with the regulations. However, we have questioned this assumption by showing that the standard grave design does allow some leeway (such as the inclusion of photographs and personal objects) and is generally not a matter of concern for our respondents. The migrants we spoke to rarely objected to the lack of individualisation or the imposed aesthetical conformity that characterises Luxembourgish cemeteries. On the contrary, the experience of conformity was cast mostly in positive terms, with an appreciation of the neatness and the fresh flower arrangements as signs of respect for the dead. The only example where the imposed design was (unsuccessfully) rejected was related to a person's family status rather than migratory (cultural, religious or ethnic) specifics. Similarly, expectations around perpetual grave rights posed less of a challenge than expected, and the regulations were more upsetting to an Irish woman of a Christian upbringing than to our Muslim respondents, who had a more pragmatic outlook. We do not claim that these findings are representative in any way, and a more comprehensive survey of Luxembourg's Muslim population may yield different results. Yet what we can demonstrate is the sheer variety and unpredictability of individual responses and the diversity that exists within a community. For instance, the refusal of one respondent to organise a 'typical' Cape Verdean burial revealed a strong personal assertiveness, even a resistance to family expectations, that resulted in adherence to the 'local' practice because it better fitted her personal preference.

The most sensitive issue was related to burial practices, as service providers' and migrant mourners' interpretations of frontstage and backstage operations performed during the inhumation ritual led to half-hearted changes in procedures and feelings of irritation, presumably on both sides. There is, nonetheless, at least a potential for change, as Mette from Denmark considered taking up this issue with the cemetery administration. The administration was more involved in and responsive to the request of Isabelle from Togo, who had engaged in intensive negotiation *beforehand* and obtained a modification of the standard procedure. Although this might have been an exception, it could also set a precedent. A more collective effort can be seen in the pressures exerted by Muslim communities to obtain a separate section in a cemetery, which led to a new grave site in the cemetery of Merl. These efforts are still on-going in other municipalities, and have intensified after COVID-19-related difficulties with repatriation revealed a lack of adequate local burial grounds.

Transformation is thus an active process driven by individual agents, and not at all an automatic outcome. It needs acts of 'lived citizenship,' as well as political and administrative willingness to acknowledge them. Citizenship in this context means, as stated previously, an active attempt by individuals to become part of a community, regardless of whether they are officially classified as such, and it takes place in matters related not only to life but also to death.

The negotiations that take place in these cemeteries pertain to translocal networks and relations, as users draw on past experiences of other places and ritual experts from their community or country of origin. This transformative process does not entail radical innovation but rather a spectrum ranging from tranquil appreciation to more or less successful attempts to alter ingrained practices. These highly affective acts of contestation and participation involve interactions with gravediggers, cemetery managers, ceremony masters, undertakers and fellow mourners. To be able to address these negotiations and foster ‘lived citizenship,’ we propose that cemeteries are reconceptualised as ‘translocal contact zones’ - similar to other micro-publics such as schools, hospitals and even public transport (Back & Sinha, 2016). We argue for the need to be more open to the agentic possibilities of potential citizenship that arise when cemeteries are regarded as open-ended, non-bounded contact zones. Cemeteries should be used as an (educational) opportunity to discuss preconceived notions of various religions and cultures, and present visitors with a range of materialities and embodied practices. Individual agency, alongside structural constraints and asymmetrical power relations, must be highlighted if we are to recognise the potential for transformation.

Municipalities play a key role in Luxembourg, as much authority is delegated to them by the legislator. They are in charge of planning cemeteries and accepting individual requests for access to specific burial sites or use of particular grave marker designs. In the Luxembourg context, municipalities need to become more aware of this responsibility for making cemeteries positive contact zones that allow for conviviality to emerge. This means, for instance, promoting and organising activities at cemeteries such as grave art projects, shared music events, or ‘pop-up’ cafés where people can come together over a cup of coffee or tea, share their experiences and stories, and learn from and through each other. Just as Askins and Pain (2011) used participatory art in northeast England to explore inclusion, exclusion and notions of belonging, similar activities could be organised in cemeteries. Initiatives such as opening a café could generate exchanges and improve understandings of various positions. At our Memorial Café in March 2020, we asked visitors, for instance, whether people should be allowed to have a picnic at the cemetery. Replies (in the form of Post-Its attached next to the question on the wall) expressed a wide-range of reactions ranging from “NO! A cemetery is a place where we show we always think about a person” (24-year-old Brazilian woman), to “Eating, yes. But there should not be a party with music and alcohol”(56-year-old male from Luxembourg) or even “Yes. Everybody has other coping mechanisms so why not celebrate with the deceased other?” (23-year-old Luxembourgish woman). When asked whether tea rooms should be opened at cemeteries, one person answered “No! It would be too commercial” (53-year-old Belgian man), while another wrote “Good idea, one could talk there with others visitors to the cemetery, cope with difficult times and console each other” (72-year-old Luxembourgish woman). What can be derived from this multitude of answers is that cemeteries as public spaces are sites that require careful negotiation. Rather than shunning the debate, we encourage those who manage these spaces to use and enhance the potential of cemeteries as translocal contact zones.

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# Chapter 4

## Managing Migrant Border Deaths in Southern Italy: Medico-Legal, Ritual and Burial Practices



Daniela Stauffacher and Avril Maddrell

### 4.1 Introduction

We don't cross for pleasure. We cross knowing that death is out there, but we do it anyway. Not because we don't know the value of life but because we are forced to do it. We are forced to do it. (19-year-old man rescued from the Mediterranean, cited by Gasperini, 2021).

The Mediterranean Sea, associated with seafaring ports, fishing communities and holiday resorts, acts as a 'blue border' between Southern Europe (and the wider European Union) and neighbouring countries. Irregular migrants who die attempting the high-risk crossing are referred to as the 'border dead' (Last, 2020). These border dead as a group and as a concept are at the heart of this chapter. By its very nature, the exact number of unauthorized migrants crossing the Mediterranean are unknown, likewise international records of those who died crossing the Sea lack compatibility (Brian & Laczko, 2014) and likely underestimate the total (Last & Spijkerboer, 2014). The most prominent effort to count the dead is made by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) *Missing Migrants Project*, and by researchers analysing death certificates (Spijkerboer, 2013) and documenting burials in cemeteries (Last et al., 2017). The Missing Migrants Project report the deaths of 25,351 people crossing the Mediterranean 2014–22 (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2022). The Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) between Libya/Tunisia and Italy (see Fig. 4.1) is considered to be the most lethal migration route in the world. Since 2014, over 17,000 people have died and at least a further 12,000 are estimated to be missing on this crossing to Southern Europe (IOM, 2022). In the light of these figures, the Mediterranean Sea constitutes a mass

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D. Stauffacher (✉)

Science des religions, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland

e-mail: [daniela.stauffacher@unifr.ch](mailto:daniela.stauffacher@unifr.ch)

A. Maddrell

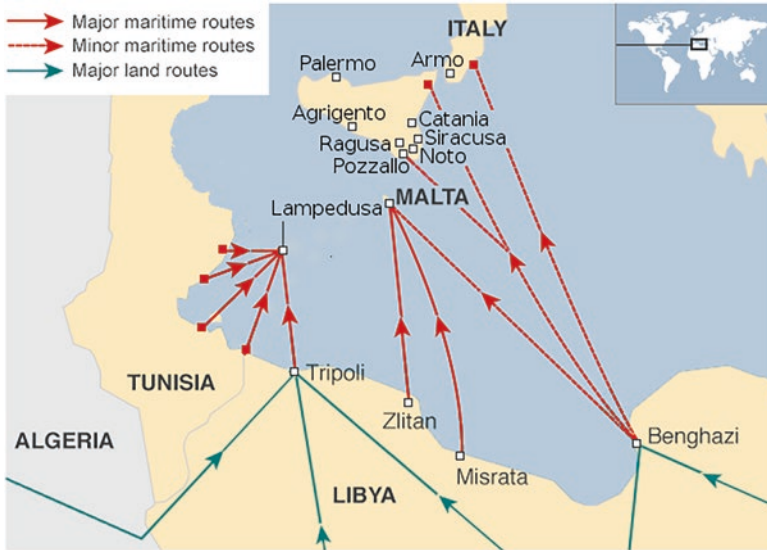
Department of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Reading, Reading, UK

e-mail: [avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk](mailto:avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk)

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**Fig. 4.1** Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). (Source: BBC, 2015; adapted by Daniela Stauffacher)

deathscapes (Stevenson et al., 2016, p.156). As the quote above from a 19-year-old man who had been rescued on the Mediterranean by an NGO makes clear, people who engage in these irregular crossings are well aware that their lives are at peril, but, as is widely documented, they feel they have no choice in the face of poverty, debt, discrimination, war, abuse or other forms of violence (Crawley et al., 2016; MacMahon & Sigona, 2018; Press, 2017; Squire et al., 2017).

According to figures of the UNHCR (2020, 2021) Tunisians (38%) and Bangladeshis (12%) constituted the largest group of arrivals by sea in Italy in the year 2020, followed by Egyptians, Sudanese, Moroccans, Iranians and Afghans. Many arrive from Sub-Saharan Africa departing from Nigeria, Eritrea, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali, Somalia, and Ghana. 75% of the 34,154 arrivals to Italy during this period are listed as male, and only 7% as women; 20% of arrivals are children, 15% of whom travel unaccompanied. Between 2018–2020 between 30 and over 50% of all travellers on the CMR embarked from Libya (UNHCR, 2020). However, the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea is typically only one section of a broader and complex mobility pattern for many irregular migrants, which may take months or even years. As Crawley & Skleparis (2018, p. 49) point out, the notion of a linear, uninterrupted migration flow of people heading from the country they were born towards Europe represents a specific European migration ‘crisis’ discourse, rather than the lived experience of these migrants. People engage in much more complex “fragmented” or “disjunctive” mobility patterns (McMahon & Sigona, 2018) in which motivations, destinations and means of travel are adjusted over time and in response to shifting circumstances.

Both these non-linear migrant mobility trajectories and subsequent deaths on the CMR are the outcome of a dense border apparatus which are controlled and regulated by different actors, enablers and enforcers, who together constitute an assemblage of colliding interests and conflicting strategies on the part of migrants, people smugglers, security forces, local communities and humanitarian agencies. In order to understand how nameless graves of dead migrants in Southern European cemeteries become a reality, or even a normality, it is crucial to highlight the border and wider migration regimes (Horvath et al., 2017) that necessitate such risky mobilities for those excluded by official routes. The human cost of unauthorized Mediterranean mobility needs to be contextualized in terms of what has been called the ‘illegality industry’ (Andersson, 2014) or ‘border industry’. According to Cuttitta (2020, p. 15) this requires attending to: “The entire range of activities related to the control and management of irregular migration”, such as the private security industry, the military, the smuggling industry (see Triandafyllidou, 2015), and the governmental and non-governmental care for migrants. Terms such as ‘illegal’, ‘undocumented’, ‘clandestine’; ‘migrants’/‘refugees’ have been used to categorize the status of people on the move. These terms are “deeply politicized” (Crowley & Skleparis, 2018, p. 49). For the purposes of this chapter the terms ‘irregular’ and ‘unauthorized migrants/migration’ seem most appropriate since they distinguish between ‘approved’ and ‘unapproved’ migrants as reflected in border governance and associated discourses.

In terms of border governance and securitization, the Strait of Sicily is one of the “most patrolled straits in the world” (Campesi, 2018, p. 64). The CMR is part of a contested and “hybrid border management system” (Cuttitta, 2018a, p. 651) that, besides migrants and associated people smugglers (and traffickers), involves and connects a multitude of different actors: (1) the EUROSUR surveillance system; (2) Italian border assistance missions (Mare Sicuro, formerly Mare Nostrum); (3) EU security patrols (Frontex); (4) European Fisheries Control Agency vessels; (5) the EU Common Security and Defence Policy mission EUNAVFOR Med Irini (formerly ‘Sophia’); (6) NATO’s Sea Guardian mission; (7) coast guards and navies of regional coastal states; (8) the Irish Operation Pontus; (9) commercial vessels that get drawn into search and rescue (SAR) operations; and (10) humanitarian NGOs (of which Cuttitta (2018b) counted 13 engaging in SAR missions, among them Sea Watch and Médecins sans Frontières). Thus, beyond the motivations of the people on the move, migration on the Mediterranean must be understood in the context of a nexus of ongoing tension between efforts of securitization (e.g. Operation Triton/Themis), criminalization (Operation Sophia/ Irini) and humanitarian engagement (e.g. Mare Nostrum and NGOs). This nexus produces an effective ‘crisis’ mode of governing human mobility in which humanitarian and security techniques are co-producing, resulting in potentially deadly border control activities (Perkowski, 2016), in what is critiqued as the inherent violence of Europe’s bordering practices (Mainwaring, 2020). The border apparatus which causes death “reaches unapologetically beyond national and EU boundaries” (Albahari, 2015, p. 15; cf. also Gaibazzi et al., 2017; Raeymaekers, 2014).

For many of the people dying *en route*, the journey ends at sea, their bodies never reaching land. It is estimated that only 14% of the bodies of those dying on the Mediterranean make it to Southern European shores where they are buried in cemeteries in Spain, Italy, Malta or Greece (Baraybar, 2020). Data from the Death at the Borders Data Base indicates that 1184 bodies were accommodated in Southern Italian cemeteries between 1990–2013, and in Sicily alone, between 2013–2018, 1000 bodies were buried in local cemeteries (Last et al., 2017). The identity of these dead people who cross borders post-mortem is in most cases unknown, their identities lost with their lives, meaning that even for those recovered, names, family connections and any religious affiliations of the deceased are typically unknown to the authorities dealing with the bodies (Perl, 2016). In North Africa, different community initiatives have led to private cemeteries for the border dead recovered there. The most prominent figure in this initiative is the Tunisian fisherman Chamseddine Marzoug who has himself buried “around 400” dead bodies between 2011 and 2019 (Amnesty, 2019). Further, following the initiative of Rachid Koraichi, an Algerian artist, UNESCO recently inaugurated a non-denominational cemetery in Tunisia containing a morgue, an interfaith prayer hall, and a DNA database (cf. Hadani, 2021).

What happens to the often unidentified ‘border dead’ in southern Italy is the focus of this chapter, which contributes to the wider body of work on border death on the Mediterranean through its detailed analysis of personal and community responses to, and official management of, the bodies of the dead recovered in southern Italy. It analyses community and religious interventions and evolving burial and cemetery practices for the border dead in Sicily, going on to discuss the ways in which these institutionalised processes, burial and rituals reflect humanitarian and charitable versus othering and exclusionary values and practices. In addition to “everyday bordering” (see Yuval-Davis et al., 2019), the theoretical framing of the following analysis centres on ‘border deaths’. “In the broadest sense, ‘border deaths’ or ‘migrant deaths’ describe the premature deaths of persons whose movement or presence has been made irregular and unauthorized as they navigate or interact with state-made boundaries.” (Last, 2020, p. 21). Analysis also draws on Butler’s (2009) distinction between “grievable” and “non-grievable” lives in order to reflect on the treatment of the border dead.

## 4.2 Methodology

Data was collected by the lead author between 2018–2022 as multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) in 14 southern Italian research sites. Namely, data was collected in Agrigento, Augusta, Catania, Favara, Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Ragusa, Reggio Calabria, Santo Stefano Quisquina, Scicli, Sciacca and Siracusa. Following Schatzki (1991), these research sites were assigned to five settings, whereby settings are understood as “loosely or tightly bundled totalities of places” demarcated by an organisational structure - in this case the units of Italian state administration. The focus of the data collection was on *practices* in the sense of Schatzki’s (1996)

“doings and sayings” produced by participants and relevant institutions. The dominant organisational structure in the case of the border dead was identified as the Italian state administration, insofar as it has authority over the mobility of a dead body on land. Those practices that related to the official processing, funeral, burial and commemoration practices were of particular interest, as these are central to understanding what (and who) are considered to be “grievable” or “non-grievable” lives.

Twenty-seven interviews and participant observation of local practices were conducted across the field work locations. Interviewees were selected because of their central roles in the respective structures and events relating to the border dead. This included occupational dealing with the dead migrants in the context of their professional activities, such as cemetery workers, undertakers, administrative and medical staff, social workers, law enforcement officers, clergy; and those who had special knowledge of the migrant dead due to volunteering with NGOs or being involved with funeral or commemoration activities. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken and analysed following Mayring’s (2021) double strategy of inductive category formation on the one hand and the contextualisation of interview passages in relation to the wider setting in which they arose and are to be understood.

The theme of management of the border dead was selected as a “limited slice of action” (Falzon, 2009, p. 13) that constitutes a horizontal research path through space and led to a multi-sited ethnography. The participant observation followed Breidenstein et al. (2020) in terms of focus and documentation methods. Mobility is both a context and method for this research: “fieldwork as travel practice” (Clifford, 1997, p. 8) was exercised in the mode of following (in this case following the body), as proposed by Marcus (1995). This ultimately translated into the principle: *follow the dead, follow the thing, follow the metaphor*. The data sample concentrates on Italian management of the dead; the perspective or practices of survivors or relatives is beyond the scope of this piece. Focusing on Italy was chosen in order to document the meaning and status of the dead within one national territory and associated regime of governance. Relevant secondary data such as maps, images, artefacts, newspaper articles and tweets were also collected and analysed using Diaz-Bone’s “interpretative analytic” (2010, p. 203) in order to detect connections, regularities and dissonances relating to the migrant dead in funerary practices and public discourse.

### 4.3 Mediterranean Mobility and the Border Management Apparatus

People crossing the CMR typically die through drowning, asphyxiation, dehydration, exposure, being crushed, or burnt by a toxic mixture of fuel and salty water. Migrants also reputedly die because of neglect or violence exercised upon them by border agencies, and cases are reported where migrant vessels have been fired on with live ammunition by the Libyan Coast Guard when they were intercepted (cf. Sea Watch, 2021).

Even if the authorities are informed about a vessel in distress, a SAR case on the Mediterranean Sea does not necessarily lead to intervention (see Heller's & Pezzani's, 2014 study of the so-called 'left-to-die' boat, which was left adrift for two weeks causing the slow death of 63 passengers), prompting the creation and interventions of NGOs. Marco, Lifeguard for a SAR-NGO in Sicily, explained the challenges faced during shipwreck rescue attempts, as well as the emotional legacy of the trauma of rescuers watching someone drowning in sight but out of reach:

I've seen people die in front of me, you see. I've seen people drown at 15 meters. There's nothing you can do. You can't do anything. I couldn't reach them. Because there were other people floating between that person and us, we couldn't go with our boat over the living. So hey, I saw this guy, this person drowning in front of me. That's something I have to carry (Interview with Marco, Lifeguard for a SAR-NGO, Sicily).<sup>1</sup>

There are several options for the disposition of those bodies recovered from the sea. Some may be left or thrown back into the high seas; this may appear to be uncaring, but for seafarers, burial at sea is a common practice, and the decision to leave or throw back bodies or body parts may be necessitated by the lack of refrigerated on-board-storage fishing or rescue boats, or the prioritization of the needs of the living over the dead during rescue. Only shipwrecks causing the death of a great many people, or those which occur in the immediate proximity of the coast lead to extensive operations with a specific focus on the search and recovery of the dead, as was the case in Sicily in October 2013 and April 2015. If recovered from the sea, the border dead are transported ashore either by a NGO, coast guard, police, military or cargo ship. The following section turns to following the border dead on land.

#### 4.4 Burial and Funeral Practices

Upon arrival ashore, the treatment of the dead takes place in a professionalized setting in which medico-legal and bureaucratic structures frame the different phases of specialized 'deathwork' (Moon, 2018). These procedures which are central to Italian state processes include (i) bureaucratic processes such as inquiry into the cause of unknown death by the *Procura della Repubblica* (Public Prosecutor's office); (ii) certification of death; (iii) forensic investigation and recording of data; and (iv) burial (the latter being the responsibility of the municipality where the body was brought ashore) (Mirto, 2019). These medico-legal practices result in recovery documentation, death certification, forensic reports including records of DNA and other identifiers, storage and burial records. However, the involvement of multiple agencies in data management and storage frequently leads to a situation where information about the dead is critically disjointed, and data may be altered, lost or destroyed. Further, details about the dead known to their companions may be

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<sup>1</sup>All interviewees have been given pseudonyms. All direct quotations from interviews have been translated from Italian into English by the main author.

ignored by the authorities, and the dead may be buried anonymously or under a name allocated by officials (Mirto, 2019), adding to the transnational trauma and barriers to be surmounted by family and friends trying to find their loved ones (Kovras & Robins, 2016; Brian & Laczko, 2016). However, while procedures for the dead are legally codified, their practical implementation is highly varied, and the following section discusses data management and storage, the practical and ritual treatment of the dead, and burial practices.

In the case of shipwrecks or sinkings, the large number of migrant dead thwart local infrastructure and protocols for dealing with dead bodies. In an incident described by cemetery workers in Avola, four dead people were deposited at the cemetery without any prior notification during a national holiday, and, left in an unrefrigerated space, were found in a highly putrefied state the next day. Inadequate cold storage facility is a recurring problem when a large number of dead bodies to be stored simultaneously, as was the case in the shipwrecks that occurred near Lampedusa on the third and 11th of October 2013, where a total number of 366 (or according to other sources 368) bodies had been recuperated (Nicolosi, 2016; Comitato Tre Ottobre, n.d.; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021; La Repubblica, 2018), or in the Sampieri accident of September 30th, 2013 where 13 dead bodies got washed ashore near the small fishing town. Airport hangars and commercial refrigerators for fish were used in these cases to temporarily store the dead. A police commander in Sicily described his conflicting feelings when resorting to storing dead migrants in a refrigerated vehicle used to transport fish:

It's not normal when 45 [dead people] arrive. You don't know where to put them. I had to find a place to put them. I [hired] a refrigerated truck, the kind they use for fish. [...] Refrigeration was what we needed. From a technical point of view [its] the same thing. To prevent the body from rotting. It's the same for fish. Nothing changes. From a technical point of view. From a human point of view, it is devastating (Roberto, police commander, Sicily, 2018).

Such logistical inadequacies have been counterbalanced by civilian community responses which typically focus on the religiously-inspired compassion and respectful treatment of the dead. In the case of the shipwreck on the third of October 2013 at least two families of the town of Agrigento are known to have accommodated two women and a child in their family tomb (Russello, 2013). In the town of Pozzallo the labour union hosted two border deaths in the *loculi* usually reserved for their members and their wives. But the union president attached a condition to this hospitality: he didn't want graves without names, since he found this to be aesthetically jarring, so, he requested that the mayor "give him two with names". In the case of Sampieri, local Catholic women were instructed in appropriate funeral preparations by an Eritrean missionary and engaged in what they referred to as "Eritrean" burial procedures by providing bed linen to wrap the bodies. According to the then mayor of the neighbouring town of Pozzallo, his own wife had donated their finest bed linen, which she had previously used to wrap up their new-born son. Anna, the guardian of the cemetery further explained, that there was a "solidarity race" to provide shrouds for the 13 deceased which eventually lead to a modification in the wrapping of the bodies: "I had only requested 13 bed sheets. And then there arrived 48 of them! So many that we decided to double wrap them in two sheets."

## 4.5 Formal and Informal Religious Practices

Priests have been called on by officials to offer prayers for the dead when they were brought to shore. Father Gino, a priest from Modica described one occasion when in between the hectic activity of the medico-legal investigative practices that dominated the scene, officials allowed him only thirty seconds to pray for the dead at the port facility before they were moved: “30 seconds. Let’s just say it’s probably the shortest funeral rite I’ve done in the history of my life as a priest. 30 seconds” (Father Gino, Catholic priest, Sicily, 2018). In other public institutions such as hospitals, other Catholic religious actors felt compelled to improvise rituals to honour the human dignity of the corpse, in the absence of formal rituals. Father Gino described a case when a social worker at the local hospital orchestrated a detour of the coroner’s vehicle that was supposed to transport a dead migrant’s body directly to the cemetery after the autopsy. Instead, the body was taken to the local Catholic church where the priest conducted a short funeral service. The detour was never authorized by the mayor as prescribed in mortuary law (cf. D.P.R. 285/1990), but was agreed on, “not secretly, but privately” between the social worker and the undertaker (Interview with Father Gino, Sicily, 2018). For this priest these humans deserved recognition regardless of faith or migration status. When asked about the importance he attaches to the prayer for an unknown border dead Father Gino explained:

It means that we accompany him anyway, we accompany him even if he didn’t make it, even if he is dead, that he doesn’t... Our concern for them is that they are children of no one [local], they come here children of no one [local], no one knows them, no one wants them, no one follows them. Okay, they are dead, we wrap them up and bury them”. He went on to describe how he wanted to see the faces of the dead in order to stress their humanity but was frequently refused because of the state of the body: “Because prayer is valid [...] even if I don’t see him. But it seemed more humane to me to be able to see his face and say: OK, brother look we are accompanying you.” (Father Gino, Catholic priest, Sicily, 2018).

In contrast to this limited but expected access to the border dead by Roman Catholic institutions and practices in the region, Muslim community representatives struggle to gain access to dead migrants. Even though the local Muslim community of Reggio Calabria specifically asked to be informed about the imminent death of a young man from Mali in the local hospital, in order to perform prayers to comfort the dying, they were called only when the body was already on its way to the cemetery. The local imam hurried to the cemetery – only to find a prepared grave which was not orientated to Mecca. This is indicative of a poor communication between local public services and Muslim communities, especially in rural areas. This poor connection can be understood at least in part as a result of class-occupation differences rather than simply as a lack of cultural integration per se. Many Muslim clerics in these migrant communities of necessity earn a living through other full-time paid work and undertake religious duties in their spare time. For example, one imam interviewed in Sicily is an agricultural worker and is not connected to port authorities or medical doctors, he thus remains at a distance from official protocols and although wishing to offer spiritual support to the dying or funeral prayers for dead Muslim migrants, is frequently rendered immobile by his work obligations and/or lack of communication from officials.



## 4.6 Evolving Burial Practices for the Border Dead

Legally the responsibility for the burial of an unidentified body lies with the town nearest to where they were found, and more than 20 people are buried in each of the coastal towns of Agrigento, Augusta, Messina, Palermo, Porto Empedocle, Pozzallo, Reggio Calabria, Siracusa and Trapani (Kobelinsky & Furri, 2020). However, over time coastal villages and towns, either unable or unwilling to accommodate additional border dead at their cemetery, try to ‘spread the burden’ (a phrase associated with refugee dispersal (Robinson et al., 2003)), through delegating the task to other towns. Requests for burial are placed with other mayors, creating a cascade-like distribution system characterised by high numbers of border dead in coastal cemeteries and decreasing numbers at inland burial sites. This distribution pattern reflects the complex coordination effort between the *Procura della Repubblica*, forensic doctors, mayor’s and cemeterial offices, coroners and cemeterial personnel. Initiatives to set up a cemetery especially designated for the border dead have started in Armo (Reggio Calabria) (see Fig. 4.2) and the small town of Tarsia but, the latter has stalled.

Cemeteries are the permanent solution to accommodating the border dead. But variation in practice at cemeteries is significant, with the border dead being either buried in *loculi*, niche graves commonly used in Southern Italy, or in the ground, with or without names (see Fig. 4.3), and typically without a priest to conduct funeral rituals. An unidentified corpse cannot be cremated since this would hinder



**Fig. 4.2** Basic graves with laminated paper signs, labelled: *Croce N. 15/2017; Qui giace LERWIN, Uomo, Ghanese, di anni 20 circa, trasportato dalla Nave “U. Diciotti CP 941” m-1-11-2017* (cross n 15/2017; Here rests Lerwin, man, Ghanese, around 20 years old, transported by the ship “U. Diciotti CP 941” m-1-11-2017). (Located in Armo, Reggio Calabria. Photo by Daniela Stauffacher)

**Fig. 4.3** Soil graves, labelled *immigrato* (immigrant), numbered, date of burial, Scicli, Sicily. (Photo by Daniela Stauffacher)



any future traceability and DNA testing; burial is also the dominant local practice, as well as being required for Muslims. The type of grave chosen often reflects time-consuming local negotiations with the cemetery officers, as was the case of an unknown recovered corpse which was been brought to shore at the city of Pozzallo, southern Sicily, in June 2018. The man's body was taken some 20 kilometres to the hospital at Modica for an autopsy; but the body remained lying in the mortuary for almost two months, because, as the cemetery officer explained: “no one wanted to pick him up” (Stefano, cemetery officer, Sicily, 2018). Coroner services had been refusing to transport the border dead since impoverished municipalities responsible for compensation have deferred payment for months, if not years. The hospital even filed a complaint with the cemetery office of Pozzallo which was, according to the D.P.R. 396/2000 still responsible for the dead. The dead had been put, as customary in Modica, into a coffin destined for interment. However, the cemetery of Pozzallo, mainly uses *loculi* (see Fig. 4.4), which requires different type of coffin, constituting a further barrier to burial. After consultation, the mayor ultimately decided ad hoc that, given bodily decomposition, it was necessary in this case to bury the dead in the ground, contrary to cemetery norms. As identified elsewhere (see Kovras & Robins, 2016 on Greece), such shortcomings in cemetery infrastructure and services are often a consequence of lack of funding. Whether in extraordinary or everyday circumstances, such inadequate services prove to be harmful to both the dignity and spiritual wellbeing of the deceased, as well as their mourners (Maddrell et al., 2021, p. 685) and can be considered as forms of infrastructural violence (Rodgers

**Fig. 4.4** *Loculo* (niche graves) labelled *sconosciuto* (unknown); Pozzallo, Sicily. (Photo by Daniela Stauffacher)



& O'Neill, 2012, p. 404), insofar as they contribute to additional “marginalization, abjection and disconnection” of the dead. This was the case for the cemetery of Sciacca (Sicily) where the remains of the migrants were removed from the *loculi* and were moved to a *fossa commune* (communal graveyard) – without informing known relatives who only discovered the removal during a subsequent visit. Although the relatives were traveling from other European countries and were unlikely to be familiar with the local cemetery system in Sciacca, they were ultimately held responsible for the unwanted transfer of what the local cemetery warden perceived as corpses “who did not have an identity, who did not have a first or last name. [...] The relatives did not communicate the name to us, so we did not know. Otherwise, we would not have done it, or rather: we would have asked for consent.” (Damiano, cemetery warden, Sciacca, Sicily).

Particular spatial regimes are evident within cemeteries. In many cases dead migrants and Italians may be buried in the same sites in southern Italy, with the same method of disposal, and in the same individually marked graves or *loculi*. This spatial integration produces a sense of the equality of the dead. The dead migrants are diffused into the existing topological order of the cemetery and local the state agencies are not interested in their spatial segregation. At first glance this can be seen as a – perhaps surprising – annihilation of group boundaries, and an expression of ‘integration’. In contrast to living migrants, who are systematically located ‘outside’ of public spaces in border regions through their transfer to so-called ‘hot spot’ facilities far away from town centres, the dead are accommodated amidst local



**Fig. 4.5** Soil graves, partly labelled *Ignoto* (unknown), numbered, partly labelled with names in Arabic writing and age at death; Ragusa Ibla, Sicily. (Photo by Daniela Stauffacher)

residents in local municipal cemeteries, and are therefore spatially ‘in’. As a consequence of this, however, they cannot be easily identified, as they are absorbed in local cemeteries, and ultimately rendered invisible through this process of assimilation.

Despite the cases of the integration of the migrant dead in existing cemeteries and family graves discussed above, there has since been a tendency in various cemeteries towards the spatial segregation of burial grounds for the border dead. A small number of the cemeteries studied have created dedicated Muslim burial areas, principally for the border dead. In the case of the Ragusa Ibla cemetery (see Fig. 4.5) where gravestones were inscribed in Arabic, the cemetery warden had no idea who had sponsored the stones, nor who was responsible for the inscriptions, and did not know the local imam. He did not want to discuss the fact that the graves were not oriented towards Mecca. The spatial separation of the border dead, for instance through creating a dedicated cemetery appears to offer an acknowledgement of collective identity and to render them more visible. However, this depends upon the location of the dedicated burial ground or cemetery: a peripheral location with poor access such as Armo or Giardina Gallotti in the hinterland of Agrigento arguably serves to further marginalise and obscure both the dead and the human cost of migration and border regimes.

Further, grave allocation can be quite arbitrary, for example cases where all of the border dead are buried in burial areas which have previously been reserved for Muslims (e.g. in the cemetery of Ragusa Ibla and in the Condera cemetery of Reggio Calabria), regardless of any known (non)religious identities. This attempt to

separate the border dead into designated areas led to confusion among the cemetery staff, based on homogenizing assumptions about dead migrants. For example, a Vietnamese woman, a long-standing resident in the city of Ragusa was buried in the graveyard reserved for the border dead – as a result of assumptions made by a cemetery worker. The “mistake” was officially documented on the map of the burial ground, which bears the title “riservato ai profughi” [reserved for refugees]. The names or numbers of 22 dead are highlighted in yellow, only one name is on blank paper and marked “NON PROFUGO” [no refugee]. (cf. field notes, Ragusa Ibla, 2018; cf. cemetery plan of campo commune n.10, dated 26.07.2014).

Another issue relates to grave markers. Throughout Southern Italy, there is no stable and consistent system for grave marking. There are different ways of numbering the tombs for the dead between different cemeteries, and even within a single cemetery. Sometimes the graves of the border dead are not marked at all, as in the cemetery of Avola, where according to the cemetery worker ‘3 or 4’ border dead have been laid to rest in anonymous graves. In other cases, unidentified bodies were given arbitrary Christian names on their tombs as it is the case in the cemetery of Favara where a *loculo* of an unidentified migrant is marked with “Samuel” and others are registred under the names “Vito”, “Emmanuele”, “Giovanni” and “Giovanni 2” . In the financially challenged city of Reggio Calabria, no money is allocated for grave marking for the border dead and information on laminated paper becomes illegible as it weathers over time. A wealthy coroner in Siracusa on the other hand, donated the gravestones for six unidentified border dead, adding the logo of his firm in a prominent position on each of the gravestones. As with impromptu funeral ritual discussed above, the absence of normal signifiers of dignity for the dead, such as names, prompt vernacular interventions. For instance, a cemetery worker in Pozzallo added a cross to each number he had to carve into the wet cement of a *loculo* in order to show respect for the dead. However, he stopped the practice when he became aware that the deceased might be a Muslim and he or his family might be offended by a Christian symbol on the grave (Interview with Giuseppe, cemetery worker, Sicily), indicating a growing understanding of and sensitivity to cultural difference (Fig. 4.4).

The ‘equalization’ of the border dead through integration in local cemeteries means taking people as individuals and rearranging them in an order that is compatible with the existing local social order. When dead migrants are diffused in local cemeteries, their deaths and presence are normalized and neutralized, and the responsibility of the state completed with their disposition.

Throughout these processes, grievability and mobility can be seen as intertwined parameters in the case of the border dead. In this context, distinguishing between “grievable” and “non-grievable” lives (Butler, 2009) can be seen to be at play, not necessarily as an explicit binary categorisation that some people merit grieving, while others don’t. Rather, the distinction is the result of the specific interests of the actors (e.g. workload, official duties) and often seemingly random flows of information, which in their interaction lead to the selection of certain lives as grievable and others as non-grievable.

This distinction can be seen in the differential treatment of two groups of border dead the Agrigento cemetery. Firstly, in the aftermath of a shipping accident on 23 November 2019, seven unidentified bodies were deposited in an unrefrigerated back room of the mortuary in the cemetery. Their burial didn't take place until they were quietly interred in February and March 2022, without any members of the public in attendance. Multiple sources indicate that at that time a public burial ceremony was not favoured by the local administration, as it would have brought attention to the all too frequent delays in the overburdened and corruption-ridden burial system (*Agrigento Notizie* 2022; DIA 2017–2021). By contrast, the bodies of another seven men, brought to the same mortuary room in January 2022, became the subjects of public grief. For them, the identification of nationality and religious affiliation prompted the Bangladeshi Consulate in Italy to organise the immediate performance of Islamic religious rituals in Agrigento and the repatriation of the dead to Bangladesh. The attribution of nationality and the cooperation of the local authorities with the consulate placed the seven Bangladeshi dead in a realm of publicly 'grievable', while the other seven remained unknown and stateless, and hence unclaimed by their kin and apparently unrieved by locals.

That system of governance also influences civic attitudes, both of which are part of a wider processes described by Yuval-Davis et al. (2019) as "everyday bordering". Bordering constitutes a form of governance that sets parameters for diversity and constructs hierarchies of exclusion (cf. Yuval-Davis et al., 2019, p. 162). Bordering processes thus "always differentiate between 'us' and 'them', those who are in and those who are out" (*ibid.*, p. 7); not only at the margins of territories and states but also within them. "Any place can become a borderland" (*ibid.*, p. 17) – and this includes morgues and cemeteries.

Through the different ways in which the dead are treated – for example ignored, assimilated or de-materialized in a narrative of transcendence – different types of lives are produced for the border dead; some of them, in Butler's (2009) terms are deemed more grievable than others. Media reports and interviews evidence the ways in which the death of children in unauthorized boat crossings remain grievable and therefore merit particular hospitality and care. One interviewee described dressing a dead youth in age-appropriate clothing she thought he might have worn or aspired to in life. Anna, a cemetery warden, provided a place for the body of a young Nigerian boy in her family tomb. The boy is understood as both a guest and a family member, made kin despite death, grieved and cared for by his host family, as well as grieved by his own family elsewhere:

And then we looked at each other in the face: Where do we put it? Where do we put him? I said: OK, he's coming with me. So he will keep us company for the whole future. So we immediately phoned the prefecture and said that Great would be a guest in the family chapel. [...] Yes, in the family chapel, where my husband is, where all the relatives are. Yes, he [my husband] would be very happy. He loved children very much and he experienced the problem of migrants firsthand as a journalist. We have followed this issue for decades. And so he would be happy to have this child and it is... it keeps him company. [...] We adopted him, it was an adoption. (Interview with Anna, cemetery warden, Sicily).

However, within European discourses national belonging and age are variables in the creation of a hierarchy of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ migrants (Stevenson et al., 2016) and at the time of data collection for this study, ‘not-Syrian’, and ‘not-refugee’ migrants were deemed to be *non-grievable* and their deaths were unproblematically obscured by assimilation in local cemeteries or secluded in a purpose built cemetery on the periphery of the town, in Kobelinsky’s (2020) terms, present yet absent.

Due to the unstable identities and records of the border dead, it is frequently impossible for relatives to trace their kin, to be sure whether they are missing or dead, and to exercise their ‘right to know’ where their loved ones are buried, leaving them with ambiguous and unresolved grief which stretches across transnational borders (Kovras & Robins, 2016). Legal implications may also ensue, for example when the absence of a death certificate obstructs remarriage or an orphan’s entitlement to state benefits. Expressions of grief for the border dead – and the assertion of their grievable lives – are only publicly expressed through forms of ritualized moments and mobilities, such as the annual memorial for survivors and relatives of the hundreds of shipwrecked dead of October 3rd, 2013. This highly mediatized event has been described as a “border spectacle” (Cuttitta, 2012), and it is within the time-space of this spectacle that grievability is ‘allowed’, and even promoted and mainstreamed.

## 4.7 Conclusion

Cemeteries can be considered as spatial fixities along the route of irregular transnational migration. During interviews, cemetery wardens referred to the border dead in their care as “*poveracci*” and “*disgraziati*”, meaning a poor, miserable person, another human who merits charity and care. Such care has been evidenced in varied accounts of the treatment of the border dead. While that spiritual and practical care for the dead evidenced by professional death care workers, clergy and local residents underscores the humanity and grievability of the border dead, some practices such as proving space in family tombs and the attribution of Christian names or symbols on the graves of the unidentified dead, however well intended, are also indicative of (un)conscious processes of assimilation. However, representing the border dead as exceptional victims – of circumstances, people-smugglers or shipwreck – is in tension with the twenty-first-century Italian (and wider European) political discourses which make a highly normative distinction between ‘refugee’ and irregular ‘migrant’, i.e., ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Perkowski, 2016; Sigona, 2018). This discourse, including labelling ‘good’ refugees as victims, places the phenomenon of the border dead in the realm of the extraordinary that can be combatted only with exceptional means (such as harsher border controls). This keeps unauthorized migrants in the liminal zone of the border and those who die as a consequence of attempting to cross that border on the margins, either at sea or in the coastal zone either side of the border. While the mass

shipwrecks and loss of life in southern Italy in 2013 and 2015 prompted widespread community and political response, the deaths of unauthorized migrants crossing the Mediterranean have not stopped.

Taking the approach of ‘following the body’ in southern Italy reveals the different and shifting ways in which borders block and divert migrant flows; and how those who die making high risk border crossings – the border dead – are viewed and treated in the particular setting of the combined Italian-EU southern border, and its associated evolving socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. Arguably, over time, the border dead, once seen as extraordinary in this region, have come to be viewed as more commonplace or ‘everyday’ deaths. Following the bodies into local cemeteries illustrates the ways in which the border dead are mediated through local culture, mechanisms of governance and the materiality of infrastructure, which frequently render the border dead, and the wider causes of their deaths, invisible. Where integrated within local cemeteries, they may be made invisible through a process of assimilation whereby they are dispersed within the resident community. This ultimately leads to an obfuscation of the structural violence of the border apparatus and the normalization of the border dead.

The lack of identifying papers on many of those found at sea is compounded by underfunded and disjointed forensic, death registry and cemetery record systems. In these cases, despite legal processes, forensic testing etc., this lack of ‘traceability’ makes it hard or even impossible for relatives to ‘follow the body’ of their loved ones, adding to their grief. In contrast, those who can ultimately be identified (as a result of papers, witnesses and/or DNA) can be traced and named, relatives and governments informed, bodies repatriated or graves located and visited. The frequent anonymity of the dead, due to the absence of information or mis-recorded identities, adds to their invisibility, and a lack of adequate and adequately-funded infrastructure can result in sub-standard care for the dead, further evidence in Agamben’s (2005) terms of the ‘bare lives’ status attributed to unauthorized migrants in many states. Italians who contest current border regimes, stress the grievability of the unauthorized migrants and seek to give them dignity and assert their visible presence in cemeteries and cemetery sections dedicated to the border dead. However, whilst these dedicated burial grounds can ostensibly render those migrants and the cost of border regimes visible, much depends on the *location* and *accessibility* of those cemeteries or burial areas, as peripheral sites can further marginalise the border dead and the cost of their constrained mobilities.

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**Part II**  
**Migrants and Minorities Past and Present**  
**in European Cemeteries**

# Chapter 5

## Dundee, Migration, and the Historic Jute Trade: Interweaving Bengali-Dundee Cemetery Practices and Spaces



Yasminah Beebeejaun, Danielle House, and Avril Maddrell

### 5.1 Introduction

In the summer of 2020, in the wake of the US Black Lives Matter movement, a series of protests emerged in cities across the world. In Britain, considerable attention turned to the material representations of the nation's imperial colonial past. The Leader of Dundee City Council, John Alexander (Scottish National Party), was said to be “‘horrified’ to learn of the city’s historic ties to the slave trade” (Dundee Courier, 2020). Alexander was specifically responding to George Kinloch, memorialised in 1872 by the first statue erected in the city of Dundee. Underneath the statue, the plaque includes a section of his address of 1831 where he stated, “I am an enemy to slavery in all its forms.” Less remarked upon was his inheritance of the Grange estate in Jamaica, a slave plantation he inherited from his uncle and later sold.

The city of Dundee is the fourth largest city in Scotland located on the northern banks of the River Tay with an estimated 2020 population of 148,820 (Scottish Government, 2021). Currently, Dundee is a city of two halves, with the wealthiest neighbourhoods rising and the poorest neighbourhoods moving downwards in the most recent Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020); a third of the city’s localities are considered amongst the most disadvantaged in Scotland, and many

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Y. Beebeejaun (✉)

Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, London, UK

e-mail: [y.beebeejaun@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:y.beebeejaun@ucl.ac.uk)

D. House

School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

e-mail: [danielle.house@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:danielle.house@bristol.ac.uk)

A. Maddrell

Department of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Reading, Reading, UK

e-mail: [avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk](mailto:avril.maddrell@reading.ac.uk)

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poverty indicators show Dundee to be below the Scottish average (Dundee City, 2019; Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2020). The city has been the home for varied groups of immigrants and refugees including a Jewish community established in the city during the nineteenth century. Whilst Dundee is a predominantly white city (94%), British South Asians are the largest ethnic minority population in the urban area. About 2.6% of Dundee's population identifies as South Asian: ethnically Indian (1%), Pakistani (1.4%) and Bangladeshi (0.2%). The Hindu and Muslim faiths are most commonly associated with Dundee's South Asian community (Muñoz, 2011). The Scottish Muslim community is about 1.4% of the national population according to the 2011 census and primarily located within urban clusters in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee.

Historically, Dundee held an active role within the British Empire, particularly through the trade in and production of jute from and with Bangladesh. The imperial networks between these two locations precipitated the two-way movement – imperial mobilities – of jute, people, and expertise. In contrast there has been an active distancing of contemporary British society, particularly within Scotland, from legacies of imperialism to the extent that a recent legal challenge from the Scottish government argued it had been a victim rather than enthusiastic protagonist in colonialism. Dundee has rarely been discussed as a postcolonial city despite the interwoven imperial past that created the wealth of Dundee “jute barons” alongside working-class deprivation (see Cox, 2013) or the development of a Bengali community in the city to work in the jute mills from the 1960s and 1970s (Jones & Davenport, 1972). Thus, to engage with Dundee as a postcolonial city is to engage with the histories of British Empire. Our chapter contributes to work that critically assesses ethnic minority experience in Scotland, casting light on questions of diverse ethnic identities, mobility and citizenship (Ansari, 2007; Bond, 2017; Davidson et al., 2018; Harris, 2018; Hunter, 2016; Hunter & Meer, 2018; Jassal, 2015; Muñoz, 2011; Saeed et al., 1999).

We draw on both postcolonial and mobilities scholarship, situating mobility and migration within a long historical context, engaging with the neglected intersections between mobilities and colonialism. Specifically, we argue this colonial legacy set the conditions for present day Bengali and other Scottish Muslims to create their understandings of home and belonging. We explore this idea through the development and negotiation of Muslim burial space in the city, and see how the claiming of rights, in this case the right to a dignified burial, is entangled with multi-generational senses of belonging, practices of faith, and experiences of bureaucracy. Whilst citizenship rights have most usually been explored in terms of legal rights, lived practices, and the right to live with dignity, greater attention is turning towards how citizenship is enacted or limited in relation to death and associated spaces and rituals (Hunter, 2016; Jassal, 2015; Maddrell et al., 2021). Our work focuses on the lived experiences of community members and how these have shaped community organisation around burial practices.

In this chapter, we first explore the legacy of colonial connections between Dundee and the Bengal Delta and outline the history of the jute trade between these regions. After a brief discussion on methodology, we secondly discuss Dundee's

Muslim communities and their histories and experiences of migration. Finally, we trace the development of Muslim burial in the city to situate ethnic difference within a wider landscape of citizenship and belonging. We argue that through situating the death practices and decision-making of ethnic minority communities within a wider understanding of how mobilities impact upon their life experiences, and within a larger postcolonial context, we understand spaces of death as part of the making of minority identities in Scotland.

## 5.2 Jute, Identities, and Mobilities

Re-evaluating understandings of the nation state, citizenship, and representations of history are complex processes. However, without critical examination of the legacy of colonialism, our understanding of the presence of ethnic minority groups in the UK remains partial. The continuing political framing of Black and ethnic minority identity as outside of the nation state has acted to place their needs as outside those of commonplace Britishness (El-Enany, 2020; Gilroy, 1987). Despite the various reformulations of a visible minority population through multiculturalism to integration and cohesion, minorities have struggled to have their claims recognised as full members of British society (Worley, 2005). In the wake of rejecting forms of state multiculturalism, British South Asian communities in particular faced stigmatisation for their failure to integrate and the living of “parallel lives” (Cantle, 2001). Islam in particular has been subject to ongoing criticism within Europe as incompatible with asserted ideas of European culture (see Kundnani, 2007 for a discussion). Yet Muslim communities, particularly through colonial legacies, have been part of British culture for centuries.

The “horror” John Alexander, Dundee City Council’s Leader, expressed to learn about Scottish, and specifically Dundonian, lineages to slavery reflects a wider political denial of Scotland’s involvement in the British colonial project. Dundee’s place within imperial networks is clearly indicated in the city’s place identity captured in the alliterative phrase “jute, jam, and journalism,” coined as a reminder of the three principal industries that established the city’s wealth in the industrial era. Historical evidence shows Scotland’s extensive active participation in colonialism (MacKenzie & Devine, 2011), such as large proportions of Scottish civil servants in some sectors in the British Bengal (Devine, 2003, p. 250), and large numbers of East India Company trade permits given to Scottish merchants (Linpää, 2018). Given that the ideal growing conditions for jute are “tropical rainfall, warm weather, and high humidity” (GoJute, n.d.), its connections to Dundee are through colonial trade routes. The Bengal Delta is intertwined with Dundee and British colonialism, with samples of jute taken from there and sent to Kew Gardens as part of the accumulation and scientific sorting of the resources of the British Empire (Cox, 2013). It was in the 1850s that jute became central to the British textile industry, and in the ensuing decades, jute weaving became one of the principal industries in Dundee and the Bengal Delta, deeply linking these two places (see Lenman & Donaldson, 1971).

In addition to local labour exploitation, the jute trade held an even more disturbing dimension in the wider framing of its production; the woven jute cloth that Dundee is famous for is directly connected to practices of slavery. Although commonly known for its usage for ship sails and sacks, one of the other main usages of this rough and uncomfortable cloth, that required the addition of whale oil to make it flexible enough to weave, was to clothe enslaved people. In this way Dundee directly benefited from slavery and the mill owners of Dundee strongly opposed abolition: “The linen manufacturers were ardent supporters of slavery, which they viewed as integral to their trading relationship with the plantations, and they fought furiously against its abolition” (Cox, 2013, p. 16). Although both at that time and in the present time there are significant inequalities in the wealth distribution in the city (see above), Dundee’s industrial era wealth, which has legacies that stretch into the present is, to a large extent, built upon colonial trading and exploitation of the Bengal region through jute mills and the movement of individuals, capital, and expertise mobilised within the nexus of slavery and wider colonial exploitation.

Given these very direct and wide-ranging connections to the jute trade, the lack of knowledge of Dundee’s imperial history of colonial exploitation seems more than an oversight or the vagaries of an obscure history. It enables a continuing narrative of British history that downplays the brutal dimensions of colonialism. Moreover, ethnic minority groups with ties to former colonial territories are framed as ‘arrivals’ rather than intermeshed with and territorially connected to the British metropole through colonialism. The current trend of placing of ethnic minorities as recent arrivals with uncertain relationships to Britain, denying those postcolonial ties, acts to frame their inclusion as a problem or challenge to the ordering of the nation state. Such a temporal-geographical framing separates the past and the present, and the metropole and the colony, which in fact have developed as connected fields of operation for centuries (Ogborn, 2007). Whilst there are varied definitions of postcolonialism and postcolonial cities, the historian Anthony King (2016) reminds us that one type of postcolonial city is one that is situated within the former colonial metropole. It is precisely these historical connections through the jute industry that contributed to the Bengali community that has settled in Dundee from the 1960s and 1970s, even during the decline of the Scottish textile industry, as political unrest unfolded in postcolonial South Asia.

Englishness, particularly under the Conservative governments that have put Theresa May and Priti Patel in the Home Office and have encouraged a “hostile environment” for migrants (El-Enany, 2020), has become associated with toxic forms of nationalism and far-right activity. In contrast, Scottishness has been politically embraced as a form of identity considered more racially tolerant than the English. Yet there is a need for caution in these representations and how their interrelationship with Scottish nationalism has been considered a progressive force. The basis for such claims are unclear and raise questions about the narrative that is being crafted (see Valluvan, 2019). Harris explains:



There are various social and political factors that have contributed to such an attitude, for instance historical ‘amnesia’ regarding Scotland’s role in British colonialism and imperialism, and the centrality of sectarianism and nationalism in Scottish politics, which some have argued has pushed racism off the political agenda. (Harris, 2018, p. 115)

The obscuring and distancing of Scottish imperial history has enabled the promotion of claims that there is less racism in contemporary Scotland than in England. More recent interventions have challenged the claim that Scotland has managed to create a non-racist society north of the border with England and that Scottish Asians can experience a life relatively free of racism (Davidson et al., 2018). On the other hand, scholars note that less research has engaged with racism and discrimination in Scotland compared to England and Wales (Hunter & Meer, 2018). Our work thus contributes to these wider debates around ethnic minority experiences in Scotland.

The mobilities turn within geographical and social science has generated an extensive literature. As we see throughout this volume, a key focus has been migration, with the argument that mobilities work aids in disrupting ideas of the nation state as a bounded and fixed territory (Hannam et al., 2006). It also considers how the experiences of mobile people or migrants vary and are infused with power relations not restricted to gendered and racialised identities and “this implies attending to obligatory as well as voluntary forms of travel” (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 10). However, less work has considered how mobilities might illuminate our understanding of the (post)colonial as an interwoven trajectory of peoples, materials, ideas, and expertise.

Established accounts of ethnic minority presence in Britain often turn to post-war migration as the starting point of ethnic change; the 1948 Windrush generation onwards – people who arrived to the UK from former British colonies in the Caribbean between 1948 and 1971 to fill post-war labour shortages (see British Library, 2021) – are often situated as the first point of British immigration. This is despite growing calls for Britain to engage with the longstanding Black presence in Britain and Europe (Olusoga, 2019) and to engage with its colonial history, including historical migrations and mobilities across the British empire (Ansari, 2007; Cresswell, 2010). Lakbir Jassal’s (2015) work has been significant in linking death studies with mobilities. Focusing on non-Abrahamic Indian and Chinese minorities, she notes how bodily remains can be mobilised in different ways and that these mobilities can be a ‘spatial tactic’ for negotiating unsatisfactory necroregimes.

Other recent work has engaged with how Muslim communities’ changing preferences to be buried in the UK are entangled with ideas of citizenship. Alistair Hunter’s work in Glasgow showed how the search for a burial site for the Muslim community was met with hostility, with some opponents calling for bodies to be buried in Pakistan (Hunter, 2016). As Hunter (2016, p. 254) notes, “such discourse clearly expresses the governmental mode of belonging ... a managerial attitude about what forms of otherness are to be permitted on national soil.” For many people holding the Muslim faith it is important for a body to be buried as quickly as possible. Here mobility sheds light onto the multiple and complex attachments to a variety of places, and that burial intersects with closeness to living family members,

particularly children. The mobility of former migrants differs to those of British born children or those who have lived most of their lives in the UK. Both groups may be connected to an ancestral home but these ties are different. Yet these complexities are often lost in discourses of belonging and exclusion. Restrictions on mobility have often been deployed in relation to perceived racially different populations, particularly as a response to the immigration of former colonial subjects to the metropole (Miles, 1993).

The sociologists Gurminder Bhambra (2017) and Anne-Marie Fortier (2006) have both critiqued contemporary understandings of European identity. A contradiction emerges between the geopolitical project of Europe as one where those already within the EU have rights of movement and those without have no right of entry. Fortier raises a series of concerns about the project of Europe and how mobilities become fixed in place. She considers the emergence of an incompatibility for those with “diasporic connections” and a project that centralises local space and place attachment:

‘Active citizenship’ is defined through a scaled definition of practices: it requires the full presence of local residents so that their identities and attachments will be place-based; place of residence and place of belonging are aligned as coterminous, shutting down the possibilities of diasporic belongings that include, but are not bound to, the immediate place of residence. Consequently, migrants’ multilocal ties deem them out-of-place because they are not ‘here’ although they should be. (Fortier, 2006, p. 316)

Mobilities do not flow in the same ways for all people but former migrants are a locus of suspicion or evidence that they can only ever partially belong in their place of settlement. European migration debates have tended to contrast a pre-existing imagined community (Anderson, 1983) with some form of homogeneity that is changed or disrupted through post-war migrations. In contrast, majority white communities are often considered static rather than mobile subjects, with their identity linked directly to local sites and the right to stay. Of course, other Muslim communities live in Europe, such as Turkish ‘guest workers’ who arrived in Germany and the Netherlands to assist in the post-war European construction. Postcolonialism provides a useful lens here, given the weight of Eurocentricism and the racist hierarchies that undergird colonialism (see Beebeejaun, 2022). European nation states have valorised whiteness and “othered” people of colour within racial grids that have drawn on colonial antecedents (Bhambra, 2016).

Dundee’s historical jute trade, a part of the city’s identity, has created deep ties between the city and the Bengal Delta, but the people that moved alongside the jute are often disconnected from this long and complex legacy. The contemporary manifestations of English and Scottish identity can work to portray Scotland as detached from the British imperial project, and mobilities work can also overlook postcolonial trajectories. In the next sections of this chapter, after a brief discussion of our methodological approach, we turn firstly to our biographical interviews to open up how some of the Scottish Muslim community arrived in Dundee. We then trace the development and negotiation of Muslim burial space in the city to demonstrate how the colonial legacy set the conditions for a sense of belonging in the Bengali community.

### 5.3 Methodological Approach

The research was conducted as part of an EU funded project researching cemeteries and crematoria as public spaces of inclusion within Europe (CeMi, see Introduction to this book). This research consists of qualitative fieldwork conducted in Dundee with a range of respondents including funeral directors, local government officials, staff within the burial service, community and religious representatives, and individuals from ethnic minority groups. In addition to semi-structured interviews with the aforementioned stakeholders, we conducted biographical interviews with community group members. Our first phase of research was conducted in Dundee in late 2019 and we followed up with online work between March to December 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This phase included virtual focus groups and telephone and Zoom interviews. In total, we conducted seventeen stakeholder interviews, eight biographical interviews, and one focus group, of which four biographical and four stakeholder interviews were with the Muslim community. The majority of these people were of Bangladeshi heritage (born, or Scottish Bangladeshi). Others were Scottish Pakistani and of African Asian heritage. The majority of stakeholder participants were white Scottish. Like many researchers our work was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and our planned second phase of work had scheduled focus groups which we were not able to convene. Due to this change of events, our second stage of research addressed the impact of the pandemic on experiences of bereavement and death management, although this is not the subject of this chapter.

We used topic guides for stakeholder and biographical interviews. For the former we asked respondents to discuss their background and their role, then moved to understandings of migrant and minority communities and their specific needs, and the usages of cemeteries and crematoria as a form of public space. The biographical interview guide addressed questions about the respondents' lives, their experiences related to death remembrance, and their usage and perceptions of cemeteries and crematoria. The use of biographical interviews has been considered an effective mechanism to understand migration and identity precisely because they bring together wider societal understandings or stereotypes of migrants with the diverse lived experiences and reflections of individuals. Elise Pape and colleagues note there are limited empirical studies of migrants that draw upon biographical studies, but that these offer the opportunity to gain nuanced perspectives on lived experience:

Biographical analysis allows for an exploration of migration and integration processes by focusing on how they are formed, experienced, and interpreted by involved migrant subjects themselves ... Biographical approaches further underline the need to understand how individuals – when confronted with challenging political circumstances – react by adapting and developing their (more or less strategic) agency. (Pape et al., 2021, p. 372)

Through engaging with biographical interviews, there are opportunities to understand the everyday negotiation of identity and incorporate the voices of minority communities.

The material was transcribed verbatim by the researchers and then coded inductively in Atlas.ti. These codes were then developed in dialogue with other research associates working across the CeMi project. All transcripts in the CeMi project were additionally coded for comparative analysis. In this chapter we only use transcripts from Dundee that specifically mention Muslim burial or community needs.

## 5.4 Dundee's Muslim Communities: Trajectories and Mobilities

As noted earlier, around 2.6% of Dundee's population consider themselves to hold a South Asian identity. Much of Dundee's South Asian population arrived from the 1950s onwards with significant arrivals in the 1970s and the 1980s. The city also has a substantial international student population. The Dundonian ethnic minority population is a complex one that has followed many different trajectories. Ibrahim,<sup>1</sup> a local imam we interviewed, noted that his mosque had over twenty nationalities in attendance with many of their congregants studying at the university or associated with the oil and gas industry. However, these congregants represent a changing demographic compared to the 1950s when many of the arriving migrants came from South Asia, often studying and working in the jute industry.

Mobilities are often divided in the literature between choice and necessity, however, forced migration does not provide an adequate lens to discuss South Asian migration to Britain. Our biographical interviewees engage with the complexities of this decision-making. The ongoing political conflict and violence in former East Pakistan (contemporary Bangladesh), resulting first from the British withdrawal from India and the country's partition and then from the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War gaining independence from Pakistan, combined with the post-colonial connection between Bengal and Dundee and opportunities for study, were given as reasons for migration to the city. Ansha, a Muslim Bangladeshi woman in her 60s, notes the personal difficulties she and her husband faced, and his brother's murder during the 1971 war:

My husband came to Dundee in 1969 to study jute engineering. Most of the senior citizens from Bangladeshi origin in Dundee came to the UK to study or work in the jute industry. Then the chaos had started in Bangladesh prior to the liberation war. . . . My husband wanted to go back after finishing his studies, but his brother's assassination had changed everything. He did not go back until 1976 for safety because he was politically connected in Bangladesh. He got permission to stay in the UK because of the war situation in Bangladesh.

Yet the connections are manifested within the physical landscape of both Dundee and Bangladesh. Ansha continues:

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<sup>1</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant.

There were more than 35 huge industrial jute factories in Dundee which had remained abandoned for many years. I saw big ships full of raw jute come from Bangladesh to Dundee port. When I came in 1976, I saw those empty and dilapidated industrial structures, most of them are now demolished and replaced with residential flats. After the liberation war of Bangladesh, the supply chain was disrupted and gradually all factories were closed down. Narayanganj [a city near Dhaka, former home of the biggest jute mill in Asia] is still known to some people as Asia's Dundee.

South Asian migration to Dundee occurred in the face of a declining industry in the post-war period. The material legacy of the jute industry in Dundee is evident in the urban fabric. During the interview with imam Ibrahim he gestured towards the area surrounding the mosque: a landscape of abandoned warehouses of the industry – some being converted.

Another of our respondents, Shrivali, told us that her husband had come to Dundee in the 1960s before returning to Bangladesh to get married. She arrived with him in the late 1970s and her experiences point to the treatment of minorities as well as the severe deprivation in the city. Firstly, she notes that while in principle Bangladeshis had the right of full British citizenship, meaning they had historical rights of settlement, their everyday experiences were different. For her, a Muslim Bangladeshi woman now in her 60s, the ways in which her husband was excluded from many industries emphasises the structural racism they experienced:

Bangladeshis in Dundee did not get other opportunities [besides accommodation] to enjoy full citizenship in Britain. The Bangladeshis are considered as outsiders and government did not help them in employment, financial support etc. and they remained disadvantaged and excluded in various ways. My husband tried decent jobs, but he was not successful. He did restaurant jobs, later started a restaurant business with Bangladeshi people.

Shrivali notes that they had emphasised the importance of education to their children in order to improve their opportunities and how they were all now professionals in their adulthood.

Ranesh, a Muslim Bangladeshi man in his 60s, also reflects the complexity of mobilities. Beyond the transnational journey, the interviewee talked about the various places he had lived following work opportunities and then through marriage:

There was labour shortage in the factories and so I got opportunities to work in factories across the English cities, first Manchester, then London, Bristol. Later I moved to Glasgow for work and I met my wife there. We got married in 1974/1975. My wife is white-Scottish, and she is originated from Dundee; she wanted to be around her extended family and so we moved to Dundee in 1978. I started to work in a jute factory in Dundee, but the jute factory was closed afterwards. Then I started to work in restaurants and also have started my restaurant business.

Many of the people that migrated to the UK from Bangladesh struggled to find good economic opportunities and faced forms of direct and structural racism, and research shows Bangladeshi groups are one of the most economically disadvantaged minorities in the UK (e.g., Li & Heath, 2020). Experiences, such as being informally barred from professional work or work controlled by trade unions, had profound impacts on life choices.

There is, therefore, a long-standing connection between jute and the Bengali community in Dundee, and mobilities have impacted upon their life experiences within this larger postcolonial context. Our respondents' experiences of exclusion and discrimination when they migrated in the 1960s and 1970s to work in the jute industry are an important frame to understand the claim making process of burial we explore in the next section, because the colonial legacy set the conditions for present day Bengali and other Scottish Muslims to create their understandings of home and belonging. We now, therefore, turn to explore the development and negotiation of Muslim burial space in Dundee, and see how the claiming of rights, in this case the right to a dignified burial, is entangled with generational senses of belonging, practices of faith, and experiences of bureaucracy.

## 5.5 Changing Muslim Burial Practices in Dundee

Death rituals and practices are situated within religious, ritual, family, and personal preferences but they cannot be understood outside the individual life experiences and journeys of Dundonian Muslims. To call a place home is complicated and revolves around contingent as well as strategic choices. Formal Muslim burial in Dundee dates back to 1967 (this is the earliest date of a burial in the Muslim section in the Eastern Cemetery lair book which holds the records for the cemetery manager) – where a small section of a municipal Victorian cemetery was dedicated to Muslim burial – and develops through to the establishment of a private Muslim cemetery in 2014. Tracing the changes in Muslim burial in Dundee from this first known burial to the current day enables us to see how citizenship and belonging are experienced and develop through burial. It is the colonial legacy that shapes the possibilities and challenges of belonging in this context, and Muslim, or specifically Bengali, burial is one way in which we can see and explore this.

The history of Muslim burial in the UK more broadly dates back to the nineteenth century. Lascars, South Asian seamen, settled and passed away in British port cities, including London, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Yet others passed away on ships and those left responsible for the deceased struggled to bury them due to a lack of provision for Muslim burial. The burial of lascars within local communities is part of the lineage of Muslims who died away from ancestral homelands. Many of the early graveyards provided for lascars were lost and their graves unmarked (Ansari, 2007, p. 565).

In Dundee, Muslim migration centres around the 1960s and 1970s, when people from Bangladesh came to work in the jute industry. Amir, a member of the Muslim community, explained the context of the first known Muslim burial, which created the first Muslim cemetery section in Dundee:

I'm gonna go back into the history of it a wee bit if you don't mind? So it gives you an idea how [Muslim burial] started up in Dundee. We used to get ships in from Bangladesh ... for jute. And one occasion there a ship came across and a Bangladeshi or a Muslim passed

away, that came up on the ship. And when they came and docked up here someone from the Council or the port actually said look who do we get in contact with. In those days there were very few Muslims working in the city but they got a hold of someone working in the factories and they said look we've got a Muslim person who's passed away, what shall we do? And that's where it came from, the area for Muslim burials. (Amir, Scottish Bangladeshi man, 50s)

The area Amir is referring to is a small section of Eastern Cemetery, a Victorian cemetery in the East of Dundee, opened in 1863. The earliest burial recorded at this section dates to 1967, who we may assume was the man referred to by Amir in the story above. There are now 94 graves in this section. The costs of burial for this man were covered by the Muslim community that was present in the city at the time, and the culture of mutual financing soon established itself:

And what stemmed from that [the death of the Muslim man and the provision of a Muslim section] was that the [Muslim] people who were working, they actually contributed towards the cost of that burial basically. And from then, after some years it was: 'Why don't we have an organisation where we put money in each year, a small amount, in the pot, and if any burials come about we can pay for any members that are there or anybody else that comes about.' (Amir, Scottish Bangladeshi man, 50s)

The establishment of support through burial councils or mutual community organisations is a connecting dimension of Muslim provision for death (see Beebejaun et al., 2021). As Ibrahim, the imam we interviewed, explained:

There are some elder people in the community they have this pot that every month they put some money in it, and then anyone from the group of friends who donate to it passes away, then they use it from that pot. And this is quite traditional. If you go to Pakistan it's very common there, and some even, not just for burial but for everyday life, you get together friends maybe 15/20 of them every month they put in £100, and then once a month everyone gets the chance to draw down on it if they need it.

By the 1980s the Muslim burial section at Eastern Cemetery was largely full, and the Muslim community in the city had grown and was in need of further burial provision. More recent work has shown a growing desire to be buried in England as British Muslim identity has strengthened and children and grandchildren are born in Britain (Ansari, 2007; Maddrell et al., 2021), although repatriation was a common practice in the past. In the 1980s the City Council built Birkhill cemetery, a large cemetery on the northern outskirts of the city, which was designed to provide a variety of burial and dispersal needs such as cremated remains sections, ash scattering, family plots, and semi-private plots (what would have been known as social or paupers' graves), reflecting changes in trends around desired burial. Records show that in 1999 a section at Birkhill was designated for Muslim burial, and then in 2003 a further section was designated, doubling the provision (according to Graham, a cemetery manager we talked to).

These sections came about through processes of claim-making and negotiation between the Muslim community, via Mosques, and the City Council (interview with David, a burial service manager). Amir, who grew up in Dundee, explained the section at Eastern cemetery "got used up way back in the 1980s, so the City Council [had] opened up the cemetery in Birkhill and they gave us a large section of the

ground for Muslim burials.” Around half of the provision at Birkhill has been used, but there has been an issue with groundwater in the lairs which has been a problem for the community. Amir continues:

Underneath the ground there is actually a burn that springs beneath the ground. And every time you opened up a lair you’d have water sitting in the bottom of the lair. This went on for a number of years, you’re talking I don’t know fifteen or twenty years. [...] Occasionally you’d have maybe an MP [Member of Parliament] or someone come in and you’d say something to them, but nothing really got done. (Amir, Scottish Bangladeshi man, 50s)

Responding to the inevitable need to plan for further future burial space, and the issue with the waterlogged lairs, in 2013 the Muslim community, through organising within and between the Mosques, purchased land and created a private Muslim cemetery which opened in 2014. Imam Ibrahim explained:

There was need for future [burial space] as well. The lairs or the ground there [Birkhill] was being used up, so they thought you know what we might as well start discussing it and getting our own space. Because most cities around the UK they’re also having their own space. So if we have the space from now it will last for a long time in the future. In the next ten years anyway we’d have had to get new space so we can start the process, the earlier the better.

Before purchasing the land, the City Council advised the community to set up an independent organisation that could negotiate with the Council and represent the whole community across all the Mosques in the city. They established the Dundee Muslim Cemetery Trust, with six representatives chosen by the three main Mosques. The Trust then set about to work out a financing plan and negotiate with the City Council. Amir, who is a member of the Trust, explains:

We were lucky because [name] who was the Chief Exec of the City Council, he understood the problem and he understood it many years ago. And he kind of agreed, okay, something has to be done, so from the top we had someone who understands the problem. (Amir, Scottish Bangladeshi man, 50s)

Ultimately, the Trust purchased land off the Council that was an underused football pitch adjacent to Eastern cemetery. To fund the purchase of the land, as well as accepting donations the Trust sold lairs ‘off plan’: “People would pay that amount and reserve a lair. Not an exact space but just a place there” (interview with imam Ibrahim). In this initial fundraising, to encourage purchases, the lairs were sold at £600, similar to the cost of a lair in a Council cemetery which is currently £656 for the lair and £69 for the title deed. But after 3 months they increased the cost to £800. They did not want to sell all the lairs in advance, to have at least 50% of them available for purchase into the future. In addition, for burial in the private Muslim cemetery people still need to pay the Council’s ‘perpetuity fee,’ a one-off cost of £632 to cover the maintenance of the lair and wider cemetery (interviews with Amir of the Muslim Cemetery Trust, and David, burial service manager).

The Dundee Muslim Cemetery Trust established a constitution for the management of the cemetery. They own the land and are able therefore to regulate it as they see fit, including on issues such as memorials, lair purchasing, and as we have seen,



price. They have placed greater restriction over headstone and memorial style than in Council cemeteries, creating a uniform design through the colour of stone, limited choices on font colour, and on headstone height and shape. They also do not allow people to choose the location of their lair, even if bought in advance people are given the next available lair for immediate burial. These regulations are seen by the Trust as a way to make the cemetery fair and equal:

Anyone wants to put a headstone up it'll be the same size and the same colour now, and that way it looks the same no differences. [...] Islamic teaching is basically simplicity, and equality, so that's how it formed. (Amir, speaking as a representative of the Muslim Cemetery Trust)

Imam Ibrahim who was involved in establishing the Trust explained:

We all came together and said, because obviously you're going to have some want a very small one some want a big one. And it kind of doesn't create a balance. So we said ok come together, and we'll have a standard set, headstone regulations, so that it's all equal. And it works, obviously sometimes there are minor differences according to what people want, but it's something which is set and everyone just follows that. It's actually better like that. It makes it look nice as well, I think.

The Trust chose to establish itself as a charity, with charitable status, because central to their aim is to fund the burial costs for members of the community who cannot afford it or have no relatives. The Trust then pays the Council to maintain the cemetery through the perpetuities fees, which cover costs including grave digging, grass cutting, and other maintenance work. As Amir explains: "In Islamic religion it's the community's responsibility for the community's deaths." He continues:

We were always thinking if we had someone here who came from abroad and didn't have any family here, lot of students nowadays, if anything happened and a burial was needed, we the Trust would fund it. Also the fact that the Trust would also fund, what we have in our constitution now is any children under 16, then we pay for the burial costs for that. And maybe sort of any NVF, non-viable foetus, deaths, or any baby deaths as well, and all that is basically covered. Because it's quite stressful for families. We also look at circumstances where the family is in a poor financial situation, and if they can't pay for the full cost of the burial, we'll certainly give the lairs, which is a big cost. (Amir, Scottish Bangladeshi man, 50s)

And imam Ibrahim described:

There are some lairs which have been donated by the community for those who can't afford them, or those who are students, or visitor's who've just come here and then they need to be buried. So we don't have to worry about raising money, we can just bury them, and then look to see if they can afford it, fine if not, it goes through the donations that have come before.

Yet this current iteration of Muslim burial in Dundee in the private Muslim cemetery will not be the final version of burial here. Younger members of the community have expressed a desire to take other aspects of the burial service under community control, such as the management of the cemetery, and to run funerals without needing an external funeral director:

We're now, the thirty and forty-year-old guys we're the next ones coming up right, so we're trying to make things better. Where, if there's not a grave dug up we don't need to go straight to the Council, the only thing we'll need from the Council is the death certificate. We don't need them to dig a grave. We want to train guys, well this is our view but the younger guys that I've spoken to, they want to train our own guys to be able to dig a grave, and to be able to handle a funeral start to finish. (Tariq, Scottish Pakistani male, 30s)

Robert, a funeral director we interviewed, has worked with the Muslim community for around 40 years. Whilst Muslim practices differ from the Christian majority, he talks about how they have worked together over the past decades: "And you know we're a family business, we're very flexible, and using one funeral director probably was easier for them because the practices are different, and if we know what's expected then it just makes things smoother." However, Robert then turns to the growing Muslim community and the need for changing death provision:

I think there's about five Mosques in Dundee now, so you're looking at a growing community as well, and perhaps some Mosques might favour a different funeral director ... So yeah they've got their own cemetery now, ... it's not a cheaper option to use their own cemetery, but they just wanted somewhere, not necessarily that's owned, ... it was just the right thing for them to do moving forward. So they've got that place now and we know they need things done quick.

Within the quote we see an acceptance of the idea that the needs of Muslim burial might require a different approach. One where burial can happen quickly, in line with Muslim needs.

The declining preference for the repatriation of bodies to ancestral homelands has resituated death within adopted homelands for migrants. In this and other work we find that people also decide they want to be buried in the UK so that they are near to their British children (see Hunter, 2016; Maddrell et al., 2021). As Labha, a Muslim Bangladeshi woman in her 60s, explained to us:

It is good to be buried here in Dundee as the cemetery [Birkhill] is clean and tidy. I think the deceased feel good here as the place is taken care of and doesn't become abandoned or overgrown. I do not think the [Council] will destroy or relocate the graves because the graveyards which are full the Council blocked further burial, and so I am hopeful that my grave will remain in Dundee for thousand years, no one will destroy it, and I will find peace in the grave that I deserve [...] I want to be buried wherever I die. If I die in the UK, I told my son to bury me in Dundee because my sons live in Dundee, my husband's grave is in Dundee ... If I die in Bangladesh, I want to be buried in our family graveyard. My father and other family members were buried in that family graveyard. It's a walled graveyard (not open), very peaceful to rest after death in Bangladesh.

Here Labha demonstrated her connections both to Dundee and the idea that she would want to be buried there if she died in Scotland to be near to her immediate family. However, in Bangladesh she would be near to her father and other family. Far Right politics has continued to question multiple place attachments and present them as a form of divided loyalty, undermining British minority identity. However, we are all connected to different places through our own and our family and friends

mobilities reflected in transnational and translocal identities (Conradson & McKay, 2007). Participants in this study expressed ongoing ties to Bangladesh but also see themselves as Dundonians.

## 5.6 Conclusions

By situating Dundee as a city connected to the Bengal for over 170 years, more sophisticated understandings of postcolonial citizenship and belonging are revealed. Tracing the development of Muslim burial in the city we can see how citizenship rights, at the national and local level, are mediated through making space for death. Without the exercise of citizen rights in death, citizenship can only ever partially be achieved. The recently established Dundee Muslim Burial Trust connects their work to a longer trajectory of care and provision in the Muslim community through time to the current practices of Muslims coming together to bury community members, demonstrating how the colonial legacy from the jute trade frames the conditions for the Bangladeshi community, in death, to feel a sense of belonging and being 'at home' in Dundee.

The making of space for Muslim and other minority burial is uneven in the UK. British Muslims have grown as an established community and where cemetery provision is suitable to their requirements there is less need for bodily remains to be repatriated to another 'homeland.' Having Muslim burial provision in Dundee reflects the need for a multi-ethnic British society to have diverse death services. However, these limitations, in part, denote a wider lack of attention to provisions for death as part of state services in Britain. Thinking about Dundee as a postcolonial city, connected through the trade in and production of jute, is not only illuminating to its history and the silences of colonialism, but also opens up space to think about the city as connected to the Bengal. The mobilities of the individuals arriving and making a new life in Dundee creates an imaginative territory which brings together Scotland and the Bengal Delta in a longstanding connection that might see Dundee's Muslim community as more than simply migrants.

The efforts of the Muslim community and the desire of the city to work with them has, over the years, co-created several iterations of Muslim burial space, leading most recently to the creation of a private burial ground. These efforts demonstrate the positive dimensions of community organisation and citizenship. Tracing the developments of Muslim burial in Dundee also demonstrates the evolving sense of belonging and home as successive generations settle and/or are born in the city. The longstanding Muslim community has mobilised religious practices bringing together religious requirements within Dundee to shape the deathscapes of the city. We argue that through situating the death practices and decision-making of ethnic minority communities within a wider understanding of how mobilities impact upon their life experiences, and within a larger postcolonial context, we understand spaces of death as part of the making of minority identities in Scotland.

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# Chapter 6

## Minorities In, Minorities Out: Cemeteries, Religious Diversity and the French Body Politic in Contemporary and Historical Perspective



Alistair Hunter

### 6.1 Introduction

Until recently, France's Muslim population – the establishment of which was largely due to migration and subsequent family formation of North and West African workers from the 1950s onwards – expressed a clear preference for repatriation in the event of death (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2005; Chaïb, 2000; Godard & Taussig, 2007). Yet research for this chapter indicates that Muslims' attitudes in this regard are changing: the numbers opting for local burial in France are steadily increasing. This trend among Muslim populations of migrant background has been documented in certain European countries (Balkan, 2015 for Germany; Hunter, 2016a for the UK), yet in others repatriation remains strongly favoured (Ahaddour et al., 2019 for Belgium; Kadrouch Outmany, 2016 for Belgium and the Netherlands; Moreras & Tarrés, 2012 for Spain). In France, as elsewhere, the shift to local burial has particular ramifications for the management of religion in public space (Afiouni, 2018), in a context which increasingly favours a restrictive interpretation of France's secular (laicist) framework.

At issue is the creation of separate confessional burial sections (*carrés confessionnels*), which many Muslims (and Jews) view as an essential element of religiously respectful burial practice, along with eternal grave rights and orientation to Mecca, among others. Lacking a singular centralised authority in Islam, there are nonetheless many interpretations of what is or is not acceptable in terms of burial practice. French law regarding the management of burials and cemeteries is also open to interpretation. While *de facto* separate burial sections may be granted at the discretion of municipal authorities, such decisions are arbitrary, subject to the

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A. Hunter (✉)

University of Glasgow, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Dumfries, UK  
e-mail: [Alistair.Hunter@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alistair.Hunter@glasgow.ac.uk)

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vagaries of local politics, and have a shaky legal foundation. Because of this, many municipalities (*communes*) have hesitated to create *carrés musulmans*, leading to an alarming lack of Muslim burial space to meet the coming demand. Muslims in France therefore face a distressing dilemma: either to choose a local burial in France which may contravene deeply-held religious beliefs but keeps families together, or the involuntary repatriation of the deceased to their ancestral homeland, ensuring a ‘proper’ Islamic burial yet at the expense of continuing bonds (Benbassa & Lecerf, 2014). The latter option constitutes an “infrastructural violence” (Maddrell et al., 2021; see also the Introduction to this volume), separating families geographically as well as impeding a process of integration which becomes perceptible not only through the standard economic and socio-cultural indices, but also through memorialisation and bodily incorporation in the soil of France itself (Chaïb, 2000; Nunez, 2011).

In developing these lines of analysis, I draw on qualitative fieldwork undertaken in France in 2016, consisting of 14 semi-structured interviews with religious representatives, funerary professionals, and politicians at local and national levels. Interview topics included burial location preferences, the availability of confessional sections, the extent to which ritual adaptations are possible, and the diversity of funerary practices among Muslims in France. Interviews were transcribed and analysed according to the principles of thematic coding analysis, with the support of N-Vivo data analysis software. Supplementing the analysis of interviews are visits and observations of Muslim burial spaces in the Paris region. This contemporary research data is combined with an analysis of secondary sources detailing the history of burial space for earlier religious minorities in France. This historical perspective is considered in the first part of the paper. Under the *Ancien Régime*, religious minorities such as Jews, Protestants and free-thinkers were regularly denied burial as equals in French cemeteries, and sometimes rejected entirely from cemeteries (*refus de sépulture*). Legislators in the nineteenth century intervened to ensure civil harmony and equality, and by extension full membership of religious minorities in the French body politic. The outcome these policymakers sought, at both local and national levels, was to reinstate social peace to the public space of the cemetery, idealised as the one institution where the Republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity might reign (Kselman, 1993).

The second part of the paper argues that today’s refusal to create Muslim sections in French municipal cemeteries constitutes a modern-day *refus de sépulture* which harms social harmony and cohesion. Nonetheless the scale at which this rejection takes place is of a different magnitude: not removal from the consecrated part of the cemetery, but potentially complete ejection from the national territory, with perverse effects for the integration of migrant-origin communities. In the contemporary period, as we enter what appears to be a new phase of conflict – specifically over the place of Islam and Muslims in French society – it is incumbent on legislators to once again intervene as guarantors of equality and freedom of belief for all citizens.

## 6.2 Cemeteries as Sites of Religious Conflict: From the Wars of Religion to the Law of 14 November 1881

Burial practices in France in the early modern period were marked by two key characteristics, namely (i) the near-monopoly of the Catholic Church over funerary matters, and (ii) the preference for *intra-muros* churchyard burial, even within the church, or adjoining it. The latter feature was a consequence of Catholic belief in the power of intercessory prayers for the dead. The closer one was buried to the source of those prayers, i.e., the church, the better (Harding, 2002; Roberts, 2000). In the nineteenth century, the authority of the Church and the preference for *intra-muros* burial came to be challenged by the civil authorities who were compelled to legislate on burial practices due to public health concerns (Trompette & Griffiths, 2011) and conflicts over the role of religion in French society.

The cemetery reforms of the nineteenth century cannot be isolated from the problematic treatment of the dead along confessional lines in earlier times, particularly the hostility which arose between Catholics and Huguenot Protestants in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (Roberts, 2000). As Keith Luria writes, “[i]n the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, and in the memory of those wars nurtured by polemicists on both sides, corpses and cemeteries became focal points for some of the most bitter strife” (Luria, 2001, p. 186). Desecration and disinterment of dead bodies was common (Harding, 2000; Roberts, 2000), a ritual violence in which each group proclaimed its purity by targeting the polluting presence of the heretical ‘Other,’ both the living and the dead (Roberts, 2000). The refusal of Catholic priests to bury Protestants in parish burial grounds led to royal edicts in the late sixteenth century commanding that Protestants should be buried separately from Catholics.

Such royal interventions initiated a weakening of the control of the Catholic Church over burial matters, a trend which accelerated during the Revolutionary period, set in motion by the Decree of 2 November 1789 which put all Church property under the nation’s ownership (Kselman, 1993). Henceforth, responsibility for cemeteries lay with secular authorities – the municipalities – not the Church. However, given the chaos of the Revolutionary period, the local authorities were poorly placed (in terms of human and financial resources, notably) to fulfil their new responsibilities in the cemeteries (Ligou, 1975). Indeed, the chaos of the Revolutionary period witnessed widespread neglect, even negligence, towards the dead. As Trompette and Griffiths (2011) write, “[U]nder the *Terreur*, the burial service is a disaster, the fields of rest receiving the bodies pell-mell, thrown one on top of the other in mass graves” (p. 36, n. 16, author’s translation). Some prominent Revolutionaries went as far as to propose the complete de-Christianisation of cemeteries (Kselman, 1993), but such proposals were never acted upon, and burial matters operated in a “legal vacuum” during the Revolutionary period up until 1804 (Meidinger, 2002).



Nonetheless, the neglect of the cemeteries in the aftermath of the Revolution is consistent with a de-Christianised materialistic view of death, as a biological fact of life to be rapidly disposed of. However, such a view proved socially unacceptable, as increasing public outrage at the state of cemeteries in the final decade of the eighteenth century attests (Kselman, 1993; Trompette & Griffiths, 2011). For some, the materialist religious perspective was symptomatic of a more general moral crisis of the Revolution, bordering on nihilism: disabusing the citizenry of the consolation afforded by belief in an afterlife, however illusory that might be, risked undermining the whole social order (Kselman, 1993). Discussing post-revolutionary France, Laqueur argues:

In a new world the despotism of the Church would be overthrown and mankind's natural feeling for the sacredness of the dead would be directed toward a better purpose. It was needed; without it there would be no love of country or of family. (Laqueur, 2015, p. 306)

It was in this ideological context that the Decree of 23 Prairial Year 12 (1804) was drafted, a piece of legislation so central that it continues to largely underpin the governance of cemeteries in France and adjacent countries to the present day.

### **6.2.1 *The Decree of 23 Prairial Year 12 (1804)***

The 1804 law heralded the “foundation of a new cult of the dead” (Ariès, 1977, p. 226, author’s translation). In particular, the innovation of an individual grave for each citizen for a minimum period of time was the cornerstone of the new cult. Not only did this measure ensure a certain threshold of equality among citizens in death (Trompette & Griffiths, 2011), it facilitated new modes of continuing bonds between the living and the dead (Kselman, 1993), which Catholic practices of intercession had previously sustained. As noted, the Republican authorities were keen to support such attitudes, believing that the cult of the dead was essential to the maintenance of social order and peace. To prevent the re-occurrence of heretical dead bodies being fought over by the living, the 1804 law sought to minimise the scope for conflicts. Thus, the different religious traditions were to be separate but equal in terms of burial space. Article 15 of the Prairial decree granted the right to a separate cemetery, or enclosed section (*enclos*) within the communal cemetery, to each religious denomination practised in the locality concerned. This gave religious minorities in particular new guarantees and rights. Rather than being an attack on religion (although this was how it was experienced by some Catholic clergy at the time: see Kselman, 1993), the law of 1804 sought to cultivate toleration of and between religions.

The principles of tolerance and pragmatism were particularly in evidence with regard to the two recognised religious minorities, Protestants and Jews. In her analysis of Jewish burial space in nineteenth-century France, Isabelle Meidinger argues that “since [Judaism and Protestantism] were minority cults and were not in direct opposition to State or civil structure, as was Catholicism, the State developed a model of regulation which was more conciliatory and open to religious particularities” (Meidinger, 2002, p. 37).

Jewish burial space expanded rapidly in the nineteenth century, at a time when parish burial grounds previously under the control of the Catholic Church were being dug up and transferred to new sites under municipal control (Kselman, 1993). More or less tacit agreements were concluded between municipalities and Jewish congregations stipulating that their dead would not be liable to exhumation, a key requirement of Jewish burial practice. That such agreements were unproblematic is especially surprising given that “the Napoleonic legislation built the entire administration of cemeteries on [the] principle [of grave reuse]” (Meidinger, 2002, p. 38).

However, the 1804 law heralded complex administrative arrangements insofar as municipal authorities were in overall charge of the new cemeteries, but with each religious authority having oversight of who was buried in its particular burial space (Kselman, 1993). The ambiguities of this mode of governance led to a particularly sensitive situation for those not considered deserving of burial – or not wishing burial – according to the rites of the faith in which they were born. The law said nothing regarding the fate of those baptised as Catholic who were non-practising, free-thinkers, ex-communicated, had not receive the last sacraments, or who died in what were considered to be ‘scandalous’ circumstances (Lalouette, 1997; Nunez, 2011). The inclination of many parish priests was to refuse burial (i.e., burial in consecrated ground) to all such cases. *Refus de sépulture* was thus a frequent and highly potent clerical sanction of immoral lifestyles (or life-endings). Historically churchyards had set aside unconsecrated (and poorly maintained) areas for these unfortunates, and burial there was widely deemed to be shameful and bring dishonour to families (De Spiegeleer & Tyssens, 2017; Kselman, 1993). By delegating to clerics the power to decide who to bury in the consecrated parts of the cemetery, the French State was effectively complicit in the Church’s stigmatisation of these citizens, and those affected were not slow to make their outrage known. Moreover, this situation was not unique to France. While the European culture wars of the nineteenth century were fought in several domains, cemetery disputes were among “the most emotionally charged” (De Spiegeleer & Tyssens, 2017, p. 15) and were recorded in several European countries (Clark & Kaiser, 2003). The 1860s and 1870s, in particular, witnessed a great deal of civil unrest in cemeteries which escalated into national scandals (De Spiegeleer & Tyssens, 2017; Lalouette, 1997; Ligou, 1975). In France the legislators were yet again called to action.

### **6.2.2 *The Law of 14 November 1881 and the Emergence of Confessional Sections***

The Law of 14 November 1881 repealed Article 15 of the 23 Prairial Year XII Decree, thereby abrogating the ‘separate but equal’ principle which had governed confessional burials after 1804. Henceforth, cemeteries were to be laicised, meaning that the system of separate sections for each faith group was abolished. Accordingly, the walls and hedges which separated the *enclos* were to be removed, and the same

applied to religious symbols such as crosses and chapels in the collective parts of the cemetery. Furthermore, the existing privately-owned community cemeteries were to be closed. Jews, Catholics and Protestants would from now on be buried side by side, without distinction, with the mayor deciding the emplacement of graves rather than the clerics.

Despite the letter of the law stipulating a religious ‘neutralisation’ of cemeteries, the way in which this was implemented – particularly with regard to religious minorities – once again testifies to the flexibility and tolerance of officials at both national and local levels. Regarding the pulling down of hedges and walls demarcating Jewish and Protestant *enclos*, the Minister of Interior sent explicit instructions that these should not be touched until such time as the reorganisation or enlargement of the cemetery occasioned their removal (Meidinger, 2002). In place of the legally sanctioned *enclos*, a patchwork of de facto confessional sections (*carrés confessionnels*) gradually emerged in municipal cemeteries. This first occurred in 1882 in Paris, where the anti-clerical city authorities removed the hedges and walls demarcating the seven Jewish *enclos* in the city’s cemeteries (Nunez, 2011). However, as a point of compromise, a de facto separation was instituted for Jewish burials in Paris. This compromise solution was possible due to the mayor’s prerogative to allocate each burial plot, as enshrined in the *Code général des collectivités territoriales* (CGCT, 1996). It was therefore possible to group together those Jews who requested burial together in a particular section or *carré*. Copied in other locations, this new funerary framework enabled municipalities to reconcile the 1881 law with the religious needs of local constituents, but “without requiring the administration’s full endorsement of religious groups” (Meidinger, 2002, p. 42).

These particular cases of flexible treatment vis-à-vis religious minorities should not be viewed as anomalous but rather as being in accordance with the broader spirit of the municipalisation of the cemeteries. Rather than an attack on religion, as the 1881 law was interpreted by the Church (Lalouette, 1997), the authorities were seeking, through neutralising the cemeteries, to once again bring back civility and respect in a context where dead bodies had become a key battleground in the Culture Wars (Kselman, 1993; Meidinger, 2002), much as the 1804 reform was about bringing peace to the cemeteries after the excesses of the Revolution and, before that, the Wars of Religion. As Kselman (1993, p. 199) puts it: “The cemetery thus took on for Republicans a utopian aspect; it was a projection, a kind of heaven where French men and women all slept peacefully, undisturbed by the quarrels of the living.”

The possibility of creating *carrés confessionnels* continues to the present day, in a context of religious diversity which is rather different to that known at the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, Islam – a religious tradition lacking any substantial presence or official recognition when the above reforms were instituted – is now firmly established in France. What then of the place of Islam in the contemporary French cemetery? Does the flexibility which over time characterised the Jewish and Protestant experiences also extend to Islam? As will be shown in the next section, the history of Muslim burial in France oscillates between phases of special treatment and more intransigent implementation of *laïcité*. The phases of

special treatment mirror the patterns observed for the earlier established religious minorities, whereas in the present period Muslim communities face significant barriers to accomplishing confessional burial in large swathes of the country.<sup>1</sup>

### 6.3 Placing Islam in the Municipal Cemetery

In earlier times, as with Jewish and Protestant communities, Muslims had their place at that most iconic and romanticised of all French cemeteries, Père-Lachaise in Paris. A Muslim *enclos* was inaugurated there in 1857, at the behest of the Ottoman Embassy. The provision of this facility, strongly supported by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior, was framed as a “reciprocity of tolerance,” since under the Ottoman *dhimmi* system French Christians in Ottoman lands had a right to burial in their own cemeteries (Nunez, 2011, p. 19, author’s translation). However, the *enclos musulman* at Père-Lachaise was used but rarely (two burials per year on average between 1857 and 1881), and – as in other European countries – it was only during WWI that the question of Muslim burial started to be urgently posed in France (Haapajärvi et al., 2020). The archival record on the topic of the Muslim soldiers from France’s colonies who died in WWI, some 100,000 in total (d’Adler, 2005), attests to the care which the military authorities took to facilitate Islamic funerary rites and observances (Nunez, 2011). Most crucially, the writ of the newly laicised burial legislation did not extend to the military cemeteries. Thus it proved entirely possible to establish separate *carrés* for Muslim soldiers, oriented towards Mecca, in which shroud burial was envisaged (*ibid.*).

More debatable, however, was the sensitivity of the authorities to burials of Muslims in the municipal cemeteries. This principally concerned male migrant workers from North Africa who began to arrive in large numbers from around 1910 onwards (Sayad, 2006). Paris and its surrounding suburbs were particularly concerned, as this region was (and would remain) the most important destination for migrant workers from France’s (former) colonies in North and West Africa (d’Adler, 2005). The impression given in the archival record is that there was a reluctance on the part of mayors to create *carrés musulmans* in conformity with the 1881 law (Nunez, 2011). For one, space was at a premium in the existing Parisian cemeteries (*ibid.*). But beyond the question of available land, officials at the *Département de la Seine* (in which Paris was then situated) were in favour of a more specific, indeed exceptional, treatment of the issue.

Plans for a Muslim-only cemetery were developed from 1924. Although such a project – built with public funds – would be in utter contradiction with the law of 1881, its backers argued that a Muslim cemetery – like the Grand Mosque of Paris, which opened in 1926 – was nonetheless squarely in the national political interest,

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<sup>1</sup>The Alsace-Moselle region was annexed by Germany between 1871 and WWI. For this reason, the law of 1881 does not apply in this part of France, and a Muslim cemetery was opened at Strasbourg in 2009.

in order to demonstrate to Muslims in the colonies that France accorded the highest respect to their faith and was deeply grateful for the ultimate sacrifice paid by their co-religionists during WWI (d'Adler, 2005). A decree was signed in 1934 by none other than the President of the Republic, Albert Lebrun, which made the future cemetery a private annexe of the 'Franco-Muslim' Hospital at Bobigny, north-east of Paris. This 'privatisation' took the cemetery outside the writ of the 1881 law, thereby enabling the creation of an authentically Muslim burial ground in which all the customary rites could be observed, while respecting the diverse backgrounds of those buried there in terms of geographic origin, migratory motive, denomination, and rank (Debost, 2011; El Alaoui, 2012).

The Muslim Cemetery at Bobigny opened in 1937. It had space for 6000 graves and it was estimated that it would meet the demand for Muslim burial over the next three decades. However, as early as 1952 it became apparent that space was running out (Nunez, 2011). Observation of headstones at the site by the author attests to the frequency of premature death among those buried there, due to the dangerous working conditions and accidents to which the migrant workers were exposed (see also El Alaoui, 2012). A new location for Muslim burials was therefore necessary from the mid-1950s. A solution in conformity with the 1881 law was implemented at the huge necropolis of Thiais, to the south of Paris. Covering 103 hectares, several divisions were tacitly set aside for Muslim families in 1957, at the request of the Grand Mosque of Paris (ibid). The *carrés musulmans* at Thiais would in time expand to cover some 15 divisions, out of 130 in total, thereby constituting what is presently by far the largest Muslim burial space in France (Aggoun, 2006).

### ***6.3.1 The Spectre of Involuntary Repatriation: A Legal Framework No Longer Fit for Purpose***

The graves at Bobigny, Thiais and the *carrés musulmans* created subsequently represent a small fraction of the total number of Muslim citizens who have died in France. Instead, most have been repatriated to countries of origin for burial. Indeed, until recently, a large majority of Muslim families had tended to repatriate their deceased: Godard and Taussig (2007) calculated that in 1997, some 95% of Muslim bodies were repatriated. By 2007, this proportion had fallen somewhat, but was still in the order of 85%. Godard and Taussig's figures must be treated with some caution, given the difficulty in procuring reliable data on repatriations (Afiouni, 2018) and the impossibility of statistically describing the country's religious make-up. The French census does not ask questions about religious affiliation, and estimates are instead generally based on the proxy of nationality or parental nationality. Beyond the specifics of the French debate on ethnic statistics, traditional survey instruments rarely seek to distinguish practising from non-practising Muslims, which further complicates efforts to understand the reality lived by Europe's 'sociological Muslims' (Bowen, 2011). That being said, the importance of a religiously 'proper'

burial seems to be shared by both practising and non-practising Muslims, as research by Milewski and Otto (2016) has described. They show that an Islamically proper burial is nearly as important to Turkish-origin individuals in Germany who otherwise do not have a strong religious orientation, as it is to those for whom religion is important in all aspects of life. Yet for others, to be buried in the mixed part of the cemetery would be welcomed – but this choice is sometimes not offered by the authorities, assuming that all those identifiable as ‘Muslims’ would wish to be in the Muslim-only section (Kmec, 2021).

The precision of Godard and Taussig’s figures notwithstanding, the interviews conducted just 10 years later for this chapter suggest that Muslim preferences regarding burial location are in a phase of major reorientation, albeit perspectives on the pace of this transition vary widely. According to a senior representative of a Muslim representative body, as many as 80% of Muslims are now buried in France (Hakim, imam of Algerian background),<sup>2</sup> which would constitute a remarkable shift in the space of a decade. By contrast, many of those with a commercial interest in the question observed a more modest change in preferences. One Paris-based Muslim funeral director (FD) with long experience in the industry observed that whereas in the past 95% of his clients opted for repatriation, these days it is “almost 50–50” (Adil, male FD of Middle Eastern background). A second funeral director concurred: “One out of every two people wishes to be buried in France” (Basem, male FD of Algerian background). Most other Muslim funeral directors whom I spoke to in the Paris region contended that a majority of their clientele still prefer repatriation, but in lesser proportions than before, around 70% (Deniz, male FD of Turkish background; Gazala, female FD). Basem and Cemil (male NGO worker of Turkish background) also underlined that the continued preference for repatriation was dependent on the nationality of origin, with some sending states such as Tunisia and Turkey facilitating or subsidising repatriation.

While there was a lack of consensus on the pace of the shift from repatriation to local burial, there was unanimity on the generational and family factors driving this trend. Recent quantitative evidence from France (representative of all foreign-born residents (and their descendants), not just those from Muslim-majority countries) confirms this generational shift from repatriation to local burial (Safi, 2017). “Repatriation is on the way out,” Gazala explained. She argued that this was a generational shift. Amongst the first-generation, the great majority favor repatriation. Yet the second-generation – French citizens of North African background – don’t have the same link to the country of origin. They go there on holiday every 2 or 3 years but the connections to the “old country” are not the same. Also crucial was the strength of transnational family connections, as this author has observed in other migratory contexts (Hunter, 2016b):

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<sup>2</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant. All direct quotations from interviews have been translated from French into English by the author.

The whole family is here in France. People say: ‘[The deceased] has to be close to us.’ Before, families didn’t imagine that they would remain in France. (Adil, male FD of Middle Eastern background)

Often, and I hope it stays that way until I retire (laughs), the first generation wants to return and they want to be repatriated. But their children who are born here, who have their family here, who haven’t really got to know the country of origin, they find it difficult to accept repatriation. (Amadin, male FD from West Africa)

In the next 20 years, they are going to want to be buried here because the coming generation, they don’t have relatives in Turkey. All their relatives, their friends, are here. So in the next 20 years, it’s surely going to change. (Cemil, male NGO worker of Turkish background)

It’s quite expensive to repatriate, firstly. And secondly, many people have few relatives back home to look after their graves. Why send a dead body over there? The families aren’t going to travel to see it. (Hakim, imam of Algerian background)

Coupled to this change in funerary norms, demographic patterns mean that more and more first-generation migrants originating from Muslim-majority countries (particularly in North and West Africa) will reach older age in the coming decades (Rallu, 2017). By extension, we will see increased numbers of deaths in this cohort of the population.

The research conducted for this chapter indicates that the supply of burial space has not expanded to anticipate these coming trends in demand: mayors are still reluctant to allow *carrés musulmans* to develop in the cemeteries under their control. As Hakim, a leading representative of Muslims at the national level put it: “The municipalities accept [the creation of *carrés musulmans*] with a lot of difficulty ... even now there are efforts made to turn away from [this idea].” In certain parts of France the situation is concerning, for example in the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis north-east of Paris, which is estimated to have the largest proportion of Muslims in France, at around 40% of the population. Despite the potential electoral weight of the Muslim population, “there is a major lack of *carrés musulmans* in Seine-Saint-Denis (...) A few communes, a small minority, where there are *carrés musulmans*,” states Karim (male NGO worker and former local politician of Algerian background).

Nationwide, no accurate statistics exist on the number of cemeteries possessing a *carré musulman* and, as with the proportion of repatriations to local burials, estimates vary quite widely (Afiouni, 2018). In the early 2000s Aggoun (2006) reported that around 70 communes throughout France had instituted *carrés musulmans*. Even accounting for the fact that many communes do not have a significant Muslim presence, this is still a tiny fraction of France’s 36,538 communes, each of which is required to provide burial space (either singly or in partnership with neighbouring communes). In April 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the suspension of international repatriations, the former president of the ‘French Council of the Muslim Faith’ (*Conseil français du culte musulman*), Anouar Kbibeche, decried the lack of Muslim sections in French cemeteries, estimating their number at about 200 (France Info, 2020). That same month his successor Mohammed Moussaoui – also highlighting the lack of Muslim burial space – claimed the figure was around 600 (France24, 2020). The lack of clarity from Muslim umbrella

organisations suggests a lack of priority given to this dossier, and indeed this was confirmed in interviews. Mosque construction, religious education for school-age children, and halal food certification are all viewed as higher priority issues, according to Farid (male NGO worker of Algerian background). The ex-president of one umbrella organisation acknowledged that “we haven’t put in place a service which monitors [burial issues]” (Hakim, imam of Algerian background).

There are various reasons for the reluctance of local authorities to create designated Muslim areas in the cemeteries under their control. The first reason is the insecure legal basis for their development. While de facto confessional sections have been in existence since the early 1880s, their legality has never been explicitly codified. The Ministry of Interior has at several points reminded mayors about the prerogative they hold to create confessional sections, and specifically *carrés musulmans*, in their cemeteries. A ministerial circular to that effect was published in 1975, reiterated in circulars of 1991 and 2008, setting out more explicitly the possibilities for Muslim burial sections. The circular of 28 November 1975 stipulated that any grouping by confession must necessarily be a de facto grouping and that the neutrality of the cemetery as a whole must be preserved. The circular of 14 February 1991 further stipulated that the resulting section must not be separated by any material means (e.g., a wall, hedge or ditch). Nonetheless, a 2006 report by Senators Sueur and Lecerf noted that even if the practice of confessional sections is encouraged by the Interior Ministry through these circulars, the final decision rests with the mayor, and his/her interpretation of the existing legislation. Their report further noted that mayors find themselves “in a situation of relative legal insecurity” (Sueur & Lecerf, 2006, p. 89, author’s translation), since confessional sections are the “outcome of de facto situations without any legal recognition” (Dutrieux, 2014, author’s translation). This shaky legal ground is sure to be tested if ever the decisions of mayors on this matter are subject to legal challenge: “the [technical] illegality of the confessional section nonetheless remains certain” (ibid.).

In addition to the legal insecurities which may cause mayors to think twice before acceding to demands for Muslim burial space in their communes, the vagaries of local politics also impede the creation of *carrés musulmans*, as is the case with Islamic places of worship in France (Hancock, 2020). This politicisation of Muslim cemeteries seems to be a rather recent development. Up until the start of the 1980s the place of Islam in French municipal politics did not arouse many debates. The role of the central government in facilitating the incorporation of migrant workers at local levels (for example in developing specific housing for them: see Hunter, 2018) meant that local politicians essentially played a supporting role, such as in discretely funding prayer rooms and in initiating *carrés musulmans* in local cemeteries (Geisser, 2001). These actions were both pragmatic and technocratic. It was not until what Geisser (2001) calls the ‘triple crisis’ of the central State of the 1980s – in cultural, social and economic terms – that Islam began to be instrumentalised in local politics by the different actors involved (mayors, municipal opposition, neighbourhood associations, trade associations). As one of my respondents, Jean-Philippe, a politician at the national level, put it:



There were some fights [over cemeteries] at the last local elections. I am thinking of a commune like [name of commune] – it had been Communist forever but swung this time to the centre-right, by a very small margin of votes, and where my centre-right colleagues had promised, effectively, a *carré confessionnel* for the commune. And the weight of the population of North African and Muslim origin there certainly contributed to this swing. So you have a problem which is becoming a political problem, and as you know France is also a country where the far-right scores particularly highly. It goes without saying that this theme is seized upon by the far-right so as to say: ‘Especially no *carrés confessionnels* here!’

Continuing in this line, for other observers the hesitation of mayors is ascribed to racist motives, pure and simple (Farid, male NGO worker of Algerian background). Attmane Aggoun decries a situation in which “the opening of a confessional section continues to occur at random and cannot be subsumed to any political logic” (Aggoun, 2009, p. 35, author’s translation). According to Farid, this was evidenced in comments that confessional sections are sometimes created following a collective trauma (e.g., a racist killing) or the death of a local celebrity who happened to be Muslim.

In summary, legal vulnerabilities and politicisation of the issue have discouraged communes from inaugurating *carrés confessionnels*. This is additionally compounded by administrative restrictions on where one can be buried: either in the commune where one is habitually resident or in the commune where death occurs (CGCT, 1996, Art. L. 2223–3). It is these restrictions which lead to the distressing scenario noted at the start of this chapter, namely the prospect of involuntary repatriation. If the commune in which residence is established or where death occurs does not have a Muslim burial section, families must either choose local burial in the religiously-mixed part of the cemetery, which may contravene the religious beliefs of the deceased or their family; or repatriation to the ancestral homeland, ensuring a ‘proper’ Islamic burial yet separating the bereaved from the deceased. The infrastructural violence inherent in this dilemma is captured eloquently by two senators, Esther Benbassa and Jean-René Lecerf, in a parliamentary report of 2014:

A deceased person and their family are not given the capacity to proceed to a burial in conformity with their religion if the cemetery in the commune where the deceased resided or died does not dispose of a confessional section, insofar as the funerary legislation only permits burial in these two places. Consequently, the choice is reduced to the alternatives of foregoing the confessional section or of opting for expatriation of the body. (Benbassa & Lecerf, 2014, p. 50, author’s translation)

A politician interviewed for this project concurred with this view, and noted the counter-productive effects of the current burial legislation from an integration perspective: “To know that after your death, your body will effectively quit a country which you consider as your own and which in most cases you have citizenship rights is a particularly perverse factor for the integration of this population” (Jean-Philippe, male French politician). Similar arguments relating preferred burial location to integration have been discussed elsewhere in the literature (Chaïb, 2000; Hunter, 2016b; Oliver, 2004).

The last decade has witnessed the development of certain trends which could force families into involuntary repatriation, namely the attitudinal shift from repatriation to local burial and the lack of communes disposing of Muslim burial sections. In the Paris region, where the situation is perhaps most pressing, the only reason that this situation is yet to become scandalous is that a few municipalities possessing Muslim sections with ample spare capacity have relaxed their eligibility criteria so that people who do not pass away or reside in that area may be buried there, subject to an additional fee. In effect this is a way for the municipalities concerned to generate additional income, as well as soaking up the pressure generated by intransigent mayors who refuse to create *carrés musulmans*. Several of the Parisian funeral directors whom I interviewed mentioned this “solution,” which moderately increases the options and agency available to bereaved families intent on local burial. That said, such cemeteries are often in more peripheral parts of the greater Paris region, often an hour or more away from central Paris by public transport. This makes regular visiting of a relative’s grave – a practice considered to be virtuous by many Muslims – more expensive and time-consuming than burial in one’s own commune. This is a further example of the “infrastructural violence” inherent in the present system (Maddrell et al., 2021), perpetuating a “systematic discrimination in and through space” which migrants in France have long suffered (Bernardot, 2008, p. 68; see also Hunter, 2018; Sayad, 2006).

In all other cases where there is no local connection, the permission of the mayor is required for burial in a commune with a Muslim section. “Sometimes they refuse, other times they accept” (Adil, male FD of Middle Eastern background). The national-level politician whom I interviewed has received lots of correspondence from Muslim citizens who are not able to access a *carré musulman*, complaining of the ‘postcode lottery’ of Muslim burial in France. Yet he has also discussed this at length with mayor colleagues “who have confessional sections and who tell me ‘I have stopped permitting anyone without a local connection from being buried in my commune because I don’t have enough places for the people from my own area’” (Jean-Philippe, male French politician). A similar line was taken in Clichy-sous-Bois, north-east of Paris: “[People from outside] would love to be buried in a *carré musulman*, for example at Clichy ... Since it’s a small one, here we have said it’s only for *les Clichois*” (Karim, male NGO worker and former local politician).

Clearly, recourse to burial in peripheral communes for those without a local connection is not a sustainable solution, and my interviewees noted that already some of the peripheral *carrés musulmans* were close to saturation. This ‘sticking plaster’ approach to what is a systemic problem has only become more inadequate in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the international repatriation of bodies was suspended. The research for this chapter was conducted well before the pandemic intervened. However, headlines in the national media such as “COVID-19: The distress of Muslims faced with the lack of places in French cemeteries” (France24, 2020) indicate a problem which remains unresolved, with deeply painful consequences for those concerned.

## 6.4 Conclusion

The lack of *carrés musulmans* in France potentially produces an infrastructural violence – the dilemma of either involuntary repatriation or local burial contravening religious beliefs – which is every bit as damaging for civil harmony as the Catholic clergy’s *refus de sépulture* was to free-thinkers and Protestants in the nineteenth-century. Back then, alarmed by clerical denial of a dignified burial for all citizens, the secular State intervened on several occasions to reform the management of cemeteries. This chapter has argued that the current mode of managing Muslim burial in the cemetery runs contrary to the spirit of these legal reforms. Most crucially, the secular cemetery reforms of the nineteenth-century should not be read as an attack on religion. Rather they aimed to reinstate civil peace and harmony, via measures which revealed both Republicanism’s Catholic inheritance and the State’s favourable treatment of religious minorities. As we enter what appears to be a new phase of conflict – specifically over the place of Islam and Muslims in French society, including in the municipal cemetery – history teaches us that the management of cemeteries must once again be reformed. In the interests of civil harmony, equality and freedom of belief, it is incumbent on the secular legislator to intervene.

Unfortunately, the prospects for legal change are far from clear. A small number of contemporary lawmakers have sought to raise awareness of the above issues. A 2006 parliamentary report by Senators Jean-Pierre Sueur and Jean-René Lecerf on funerary legislation concluded that the Interior Ministry circulars of 1975 and 1991, inciting mayors to create *carrés musulmans* in the cemeteries under their supervision, were sufficient to resolve this question and that new legislation was therefore not required. All that was required was “more profound dialogue with mayors” in order to convince them of the social utility of implementing *carrés musulmans* (Sueur & Lecerf, 2006, p. 92; author’s translation). However the continuing paucity of Muslim sections later led one of the authors of that report to reconsider this position. Thus in his subsequent 2014 report co-authored with Esther Benbassa on the fight against discrimination, Lecerf noted that mere dialogue and cajoling of mayors “seemed to have reached its limits” (Benbassa & Lecerf, 2014, p. 49; author’s translation). Benbassa and Lecerf therefore recommended conferring a legal basis to the creation of confessional sections in cemeteries, judging that it “behoves the legislator to guarantee a real choice to the deceased and their families in order to permit them to freely exercise their religion, including in death” (ibid., p. 50; author’s translation). Yet until now such recommendations have provoked fierce resistance from politicians, and mediatised polemics (see Afiouni, 2018). While families of Muslim origins do have a degree of choice – between burial in the commune of residence, in a more distant commune if space is available, or repatriation and burial in the ancestral homeland – each choice implies a potentially intolerable transgression of religious convictions or family togetherness.

The quest for equality and freedom of belief goes hand in hand with a broader mission of social cohesion. The cemetery reforms of the nineteenth-century promoted social cohesion in three ways. Firstly, they made it possible for each

citizen, even the poorest, to have his or her allotted place in the cemetery. Secondly, the equal recognition of all the main religious communities in the unique space of the cemetery was a material proof of the neutrality of the state while facilitating the spiritual assistance which the deceased and the bereaved required. Thirdly, denying the clergy the right to refuse burial in consecrated ground put an end to the shameful treatment of citizens who died in what were then deemed immoral circumstances. Today the refusal to create *carrés musulmans* constitutes a modern-day *refus de sépulture* which similarly destroys social cohesion. Nonetheless the scale at which this rejection takes place is of a different magnitude: not removal from the consecrated part of the cemetery, but potentially complete ejection from the national territory. This not only constitutes an infrastructural violence which separates families geographically. It also – perversely – blocks a process of integration for migrant-origin communities which can be read not only in the standard economic and socio-cultural indices, but also in the act of memorialisation and incorporation in the soil of France itself (Chaïb, 2000). Granted, integration should not always be viewed in such binary terms, and many will seek to honour ties to more than one *patrie* in death – both the ancestral homeland and France. However, negotiating these different impulses to mobility in life and death, from the local to the transnational, is a complex affair, especially in the Islamic context of eternal grave rights, signifying perhaps the ultimate form of immobility.

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# Chapter 7

## Jewishness and Space: Negotiating Jewish Identity and the Jewish Cemetery in the Local Context of Trondheim, Norway



Ida Marie Høeg

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the connection between Jewish identity and place in a Jewish community. The focus is on the Jewish cemetery in Trondheim and the aim is to explore how Jewish identity affects preferences for cemetery space. The way the Jewish cemetery may mobilise or immobilise Jewish identity and belonging to the Jewish community is a multifaceted topic that relates to such wider experiences as mobility, relations to places of origin and Jewish networks. As discussed in this chapter, several aspects, religion, the Holocaust and their Jewish kin relations are in play for the participants.

The Trondheim Jews, together with the rest of the Jews in Norway, constitute a small part of the Norwegian population with almost 170 years of residence in Norway. Despite being a small minority, they are an active and established minority that has managed to continue Jewish life after the Holocaust – in a cultural-religion sense within national regulations, norms and practices. Approximately 1400 Jews live in Norway (European Jewish Congress, 2022), and most live in the Oslo area. They run several Jewish cultural institutions which attract much attention and are attended by Jews and non-Jews, including festivals, museums and Holocaust memorial days.<sup>1</sup> A total of 741 Norwegian or foreign-born Jews are affiliated with one of the two Orthodox congregations, the only congregational alternatives in Norway.

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<sup>1</sup>The Jewish Museum in Trondheim (established 1994), the Jewish Museum in Oslo (established 2008) and the Centre for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities organise an annual cultural festival in Trondheim (since 2010), a Jewish film day in Oslo, and mark the International Holocaust Day and the deportation of Norwegian Jews.

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I. M. Høeg (✉)

Department of Religion, Philosophy and History, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway  
e-mail: [ida.m.hoeg@uia.no](mailto:ida.m.hoeg@uia.no)

Delays in establishing families, having fewer children, intermarriage and weaker bonds to the Jewish culture have made it difficult to preserve a cohesive community based primarily on Judaic tradition. However, Jews in Norway have proven to manage various social networks that maintain Jewish belonging in different ways (Banik & Høeg, 2022).

The Jews in Trondheim are a tiny but established minority with 140 years of history in the city. Their cemetery is located in Trondheim at the Lademoen Cemetery, one of the twenty-two cemeteries in the municipality, and is considered to be a community cemetery, bought and owned by the Orthodox congregation, *Det jødiske samfunnet i Trondheim*. Modern Orthodox Judaism is the official religious line of the tiny congregation with its 132 members (see Regjeringen, 2022). As the members' worldviews range from religious to secular, the congregation can be described as a community congregation where the members' different levels of observance are accepted. Even though most of the members are secular, they maintain the traditional funeral practices at the Jewish cemetery in Trondheim.

The Jewish response to death and dying reveals a story of cultural change and continuity. Mobilities and adaptation to changing communities with diverse needs impact the heritage of the Jewish burial culture (Golbert, 2006, p. 65). Mobility in a Jewish context is not a new phenomenon. Jewish history is full of upheavals, wanderings and new beginnings. International relations have brought Jews to Trondheim but have also taken them away (Reitan, 2005). The Jewish minority community in Norway and Trondheim encompasses the mobilities of a historic diaspóra, influx of refugees during the interwar years, Holocaust transport, and more recent international migration; different trajectories have resulted in Jewish residents in Trondheim encompassing a diverse range of perspectives deriving from national backgrounds, a history in Norway, and for some, also strong connections to Israel (Høeg, 2022). Thus, the Orthodox congregation in Trondheim is a diverse national community with Norwegian-born and foreign-born Jews. Almost all Norwegian-born Jews, converted Jews and Jews who are married to Norwegian-born Jews who live in Trondheim and the central and northern part of Norway (Nordenfjellsk) are affiliated with the congregation. Many Jews who have immigrated in the last decades are also affiliated. In a globalised world, the creation of sites of belonging and the association with people's roots in both their new home and place of origin are vital themes in the discussion of migration (Halvik et al., 2018, p. 1). Migration raises questions relating to family division and transnational communication but also about where to find a place of burial, comfort and remembrance (Maddrell et al., 2018). In this context, cemeteries are contemporary meeting places for mobile and non-mobile people of the same race, ethnicity, religion and native place.

Transnational migration extends social relationships beyond the local one. In the same way, transnational activity links migrant communities with places of origin (Kivisto, 2014). Alternatively, the host country can be continuously produced by the very fact of being and becoming a part of the migrants' specific location (Hunter, 2016). Many Jews also have a strong social link to Israel, having lived there for a while themselves or having relatives and friends living there permanently. Thus Israel becomes a central location for providing ties to their Jewishness. Place is thus

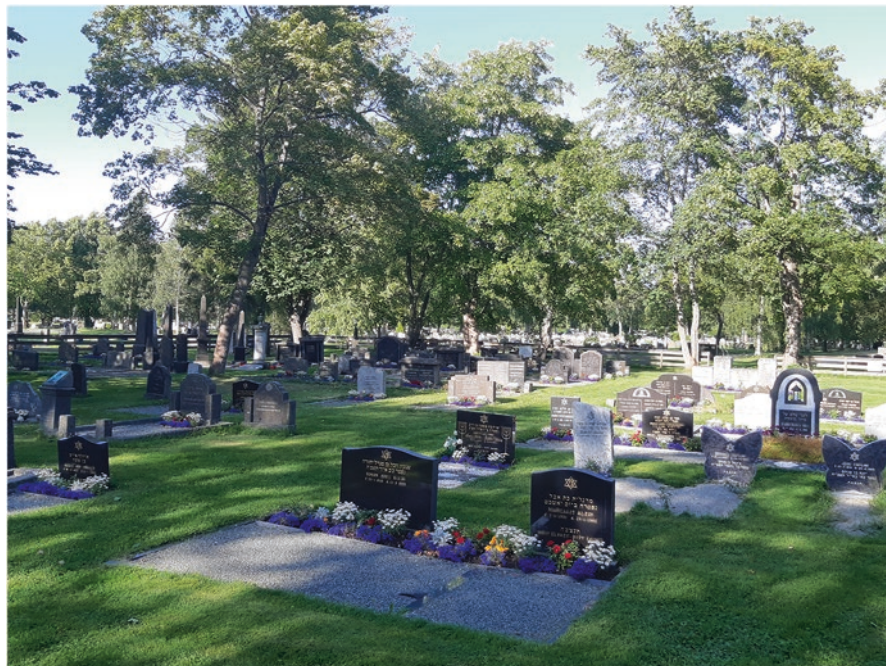


subjected to revision as it is vulnerable to changes relating to the person who embodies it, both on personal and community levels. In the complex interrelation of places, a place of origin can be exchanged with a new homeplace, or the homeplace may not be permanently fixed in a single location (Ahmed et al., 2003). Cemeteries of both minority and majority groups convey history and signs of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, burial grounds reflect and preserve cultural and collective identity, as well as create a way to claim belonging or stability in a new country (Saramo, 2019, p. 8). Death rituals and other mortuary practices related to death often solidify the attachments to place held by those who have died and also those who mourn them (Høeg, 2019, 2023a). In one way, death may be the occasion for what Alistair Hunter describes as the deepest foundation for homemaking in the diaspora, through funeral rituals and memorialisation (Hunter, 2016, p. 249). At the same time, the cemetery may serve as the site for working out interethnic conflicts, while the invisible and visible borders built around the group suggest the negotiation of differences (Amanik & Fletcher, 2020, p. 4).

Taking all of these aspects of ethnic minority, space, migration and mobility into account, the guiding questions for this chapter are: How do the Jews in Trondheim negotiate the decision of being buried in the fixed space of the Jewish cemetery? How does belonging to the Jewish community and changes and variations in Jewish identity affect the wish for or wish against being buried in the Jewish cemetery? Do the physical boundaries in the burial space coincide with conceptions of what a Jewish community is or should be? Using qualitative studies of Jews living in Trondheim, or who have grown up in Trondheim, this chapter will focus on the informants' narratives of burial preferences for the local Jewish cemetery or elsewhere. As some background is needed to apprehend these questions, the following section provides an outline of the history of the Jewish community in Trondheim. Second, the chapter provides an overview of the history of the Jewish cemetery. Subsequently, I describe the site and how, in the cemetery's physical layout, the short history of Trondheim's Jews is visible in several respects, and I analyse in-depth life-story interviews about the role of the cemetery and negotiations around informants' attachments to the cemetery and burial decisions.

## 7.2 The Jewish Community

In a small quiet corner of the Lademoen neighbourhood one will find Trondheim's Jewish cemetery and burial chapel. The elderly people and infants who found their resting place here were among the first generation of Jewish immigrants to Trondheim and the surrounding area (the west-central region of Norway) in the late-nineteenth to early twentieth century. After the Norwegian constitution was amended in 1851, granting Jews permission to settle in Norway, about thirty Jewish families immigrated to Trondheim between 1880 and 1890 (Reitan, 2005, p. 40). They formed a local Jewish community, and after some years established an Orthodox congregation. They initially rented synagogue rooms and, in 1903, after years of



**Fig. 7.1** The Jewish Cemetery in Trondheim. (Photo by Ida Marie Høeg)

negotiations with the local authorities, they established their separate and distinct burial place (Mendelsohn, 2019, p. 300), permanently marking Jewish religious and cultural life in the city and region (see Fig. 7.1).

Trondheim was, at that point, experiencing a remarkable transition when, after many years of demographic, cultural and economic stagnation, the city was transformed into a regional trading hub (Danielsen, 1997). The city's population increased almost threefold, from 25,000 in 1890 to 70,000 in 1910 (Reitan, 2005, p. 38). This increase was due not only to rapidly increasing birth rates and decreasing mortality, but also to immigration, mostly from the greater region. The Jews who immigrated to Trondheim from Estonia and Poland were poor but also marked as 'foreign,' with their own languages, religion and culture – which differed from the Norwegian norm. They were 'Eastern Jews' from the Shtetls in Estonia and the northeast of Poland. For some of these economic migrants, the migration process started in Sweden, where many Jewish men spent a period working as travelling traders before crossing the border to live and work in Norway (Reitan, 2005, p. 79). After years of itinerant living, travelling the countryside and coast selling homemade (and eventually, manufactured) products to farmers and fishermen, most of the men later settled down in Trondheim or other small cities in the region. Finally, they could reunite with their wives and children, or establish families.

Jews settled primarily in the northern part of the city centre, close to the docks for both short and long-distance ferries and, later on, where the railway station opened in 1909 (Reitan, 2005, p. 44). Here they opened shoe and watchmaker's workshops and shops. In early 1900, some moved to the newly established working-class area, east of the city, where they bought houses. It was in one of these areas, Lademoen, where the Jews of Trondheim purchased a long-awaited Jewish burial place in 1902, and it is notable that this was three years before their congregation was formally established. Instead of dealing with the practical challenges and increasing financial expense of sending their dead south to the community cemetery in Kristiania (now Oslo) or to Sweden, representatives of the Jewish community applied to the municipality to buy a burial ground in 1897. In response to this application, Haakon Løken, left-wing politician and editor for one of Trondheim's newspapers, argued: "Civil rights should not be conditional for an organised faith community" (Mendelsohn, 2019, p. 299). Even though there was little cemetery space in Trondheim, Løken was of the opinion that the municipality had to hand over part of one of the cities' cemeteries to the Jewish community. When Trondheim established a new cemetery, Lademoen Cemetery, it provided the opportunity for the Jews to buy their own land, ensuring perpetual grave rights (i.e., no requirement to reuse graves after twenty years as was the typical practice) and avoiding the potential risk of a decision from the city government to discontinue the cemetery (Mendelsohn, 2019, p. 299). Even then, some officials objected on the grounds that a group of individuals should not be the owners of a cemetery. Mayor Rostad came to the Jews' aid as he believed that it was unreasonable to deny them a burial ground. Even though they did not have an established congregation, Rostad permitted the Jews to own the cemetery as long as their burials were performed according to ritual regulations by an "educated man." At that time the community did not have a rabbi, but a religious teacher who taught the children and performed religious functions (Mendelsohn, 2019, pp. 299–300).

The devastating events of the Holocaust forever altered the Jewish community and drastically reduced their numbers. In 1940, the congregation counted 260 members (Reitan, 2005, p. 131), and about 25 shops had Jewish owners (Bruland, 2017, p. 137). The Nazi occupation of Norway resulted in the appropriation of economic assets (Bruland, 2017, p. 659) and 133 Jews from Norway's central and northern regions (Nordenfjellsk) were killed as a result of Nazi genocide (Bruland, 2017, pp. 674–701; see Fig. 7.2). During Nazism, many Jewish cemeteries were destroyed, but none of the three Jewish cemeteries in Norway (two of them situated in Oslo) suffered this fate. In Trondheim, the occupying forces tried on several occasions to have the burial ground closed and made available as a building site. Thanks to a church trustee in Trondheim, who managed to delay these plans several times, the cemetery was saved. It would probably have been destroyed if the war had lasted a few more months (Mendelsohn, 2019, p. 640).



Fig. 7.2 The Holocaust memorial in the Jewish Cemetery in Trondheim. (Photo by Ida Marie Høeg)

### 7.3 The Northernmost Jewish Cemetery in Europe

In 1902, the community of Jews in Trondheim bought 1392.5 m<sup>2</sup> of land at Lademoen Cemetery. The Jewish cemetery became a key site for religious ritual and a sacred place. Serving as a culturally symbolic space, it expresses Jewish identity and community. The cemetery has 150 tombstones, the oldest dating back to 1903 and the most recent from 2021. All of the approximately two hundred graves fulfil the religious obligation to place a marker at the grave and bury the body in a direction pointing towards Jerusalem in a permanent grave (Rødner, 2014, p. 115).

The design of Lademoen Cemetery (see Fig. 7.3), as with many other Jewish cemeteries, was inspired by neighbouring non-Jewish burial places (Laqueur, 2015, pp. 296–298). In this sense, the cemetery bears witness to a dynamic Jewish history of collaboration and diversity. The Jews' long-term coexistence with Norwegian culture has contributed symbolic images to the Jewish cemetery, which means a colourful greenspace – grave flowers and short, mown grass – that has much in common with majority Norwegian cemetery culture. Some of the interred (about 25%) have a tombstone surrounded by grass, while the rest have stone kerbs filled with gravel, often with a Magen David (six-pointed star) placed in the centre. A small proportion shows evidence of the Jewish custom for visitors to place stones on top of the tombstones. Overall, the tombstones are well-preserved with legible epitaphs, except for the oldest ones, and serve as evidence of a Jewish community.



## LADEMOEN KIRKEGÅRD

**Fig. 7.3** The Jewish cemetery at Lademoen Cemetery in the southwestern corner by the gate from Thomas von Westens street. (Map by Ecclesiastical Council, Trondheim)

In the cemetery, Jewish identity is expressed in a number of ways. Symbols and epitaphs carved in Hebrew are the most common signifier of Jewish identity. In general, the tombstones are decorated with a widely recognised Jewish symbol, the Star of David, often with  $\text{שׁוֹכֵן}$  (here lies/here is buried) placed in the middle of the star. Other widely used inscriptions are the epitaph  $\text{נֶפְשׁוֹ בְּבִטְחוֹן חַיִּים}$  (may his/her soul be bound in the bond of life) and  $\text{בִּישׁוּב}$  (here lies). Most of the tombstones for members of the Cohen family are decorated with Chovin's hands. More recent epitaphs have shifted from Hebrew-only epitaphs to a mix of Hebrew and Norwegian, signalling integration into Norwegian culture. Among the oldest memorials, the Hebrew calendar is used to state the date of death without the date of birth, combined with



**Fig. 7.4** On the middle tombstone epitaphs of family members who were victims of the Holocaust. (Photo by Ida Marie Høeg)

Norwegian epitaphs about the age of the deceased. In recent decades, some tombstones start to reflect typical grave formulations from the Norwegian majority culture, for example phrases such as “rest in peace,” “deeply missed,” “much loved,” and “thank you for everything.” The only tombstone with an epitaph in a language other than Norwegian or Hebrew, dated 2010, uses Cyrillic, which evidences a tie to the person’s country of origin. Remembrance of the Holocaust is also noticeable throughout the cemetery, including several family graves which have inscriptions for those who were victims of the Holocaust with no demarcated burial site (see Fig. 7.4, middle stone).

The inscriptions, the shape and the artistic work enable every tombstone to tell a powerful story of those who crossed the nation’s borders over time, observed their *mitzvah* and strived to have a dignified burial where they could place their loved ones in a Jewish grave. The tombstones are also witness to stories of Jews who were not themselves immigrants, but who were second, third or fourth generation Norwegian Jews educated in Norway, well-established in the community, who spoke Norwegian and the local dialect, and whose memorials reveal the intersecting between the Norwegian majority culture and Jewish culture. Moreover, Jews living in Trondheim and who were affiliated with the Orthodox congregation asserted their distinctive identity in death through their use of the separate burial ground defined by faith and ethnicity (Amanik & Fletcher, 2020, p. 4).

## 7.4 Research Background and Method

The study draws on semi-structured, in-depth life-story interviews with twenty-one self-identified Jews that were conducted from 2019 to 2021 as part of the wider research project *Negotiating Jewish Identity: Jewish Life in Twenty-first Century Norway*.<sup>2</sup> All the interviews were digitally recorded, anonymised and transcribed. Nvivo7 was used to code and analyse the data. The participants in the study were recruited using my personal network, in combination with snowball sampling and some suggestions from the leader of the Jewish congregation in Trondheim. The participants reflect a variety of age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, geographical origins and levels of Jewish network. I have been particularly sensitive to in-group and out-group distinctions, such as active versus inactive, and observant versus non-observant. I also conducted interviews with the leader of the congregation, Ralph Buchmann, and the leader of the Friendship Association (*Venneforeningen*), Henriette Kahn.<sup>3</sup>

A narrative approach reveals patterns and themes through an individual's experience of concrete events, meetings and people, together with the placement of experiences in time and space (Riessman, 1993, pp. 1–7). Using a narrative approach to analyse Jewish identity produces a historically sensitive coupling between identity and agency (Somers, 1994, p. 635). The interview narratives revealed some tension between the commitment to Jewish tradition and individual agency in burial choices. Descriptions of affiliation with the congregation, ritual performance and other collective activities Jews in Trondheim perform at the cemetery are narratives about ethnicity-related behaviour that construct and signify the Jewish actors' changing social and spatial embeddedness. One can recognise different narratives, imbued with different spatial implications, that account for how Jews in Trondheim negotiate their identity and belonging to the Jewish community; these together influence their decision to be buried there or elsewhere. Before considering the informants' narratives, and particularly five informants' narratives that present different rationales for the cemetery decision, I will discuss the interrelation of religion, ethnicity and space in the next section, which will inform the discussion on the spatial mobilisation of Jewish identity and belonging.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.hlsenteret.no/english/research/Minorities/negotiating-jewish-identity%2D%2D-jewish-life-in-21-ce/>

<sup>3</sup> With exception of Buchmann and Kahn, for reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant. At times, some biographical elements of participants were altered as well. The informant profiles given in this chapter are not very detailed, meaning they do not provide information about exact age, education, occupation, job fields and origins. Nonetheless, the tiny Jewish community means it is possible that third parties might recognise someone. Therefore, it was impossible to add more elements to the narratives being told without compromising the informant's anonymity.

## 7.5 The Social and Dialectical Process of Space

A spatial approach to the cemetery reveals how social relations and place are interwoven with each other. An important shift in spatial thinking has moved from the view of place as a stable fixed entity to a stronger focus on space as process (Soja, 1989). Space is no longer understood primarily in relation to locality, but rather seen as relational and processual, i.e., reflecting a group of relationships important to a study's subjects (Maddrell, 2016; Massey, 2005). The processual approach makes it possible to gain insight into social relationships and how they are shaped by the places people contact and embody. By moving the focus away from fixed notions of place, we can observe mobility in landscapes and communities, and at the same time, the processes that this mobility involves.

This theory on space resonates with Kim Knott's description of religious space as material and discursive space "that is meaningful for those within it" and is "important for individual and group identity and is a practical working environment" (Knott, 1998, pp. 283–284). Considering religious space as a set of relationships, rather than a specific site, provides the opportunity to examine the actors' social processes, such as relations to the Jewish community and relations to the Jewish space. Studies of religious places show that place regulates performance, attitudes and attachments, and vice-versa, that actors have the agency to alter spatial structures to satisfy new religious and social demands spatially (Brenneman & Miller, 2016; Christensen et al., 2018), such as new notions of Jewish community and community formations. Knott's critique challenges the concept of world religions as "unities focused on a discrete, systematic set of traditions, and normative beliefs and practices" (Knott, 2009, p. 159). Based on a relational, but also a processual understanding of space, religious space cannot be distilled into a religious doctrinal concept. Rather, religious space is expressed and shaped in everyday practices, memories, perceptions, beliefs and identities.

The relational approach to space provides the potential for seeing how both religious groups and ethnic groups establish community through everyday spatial actions and interactions. Ethnicity is a social construct that defines the "we-ness" of group membership and often involves connection to place (Barth, 1969). A particular sense of place or place attachment could be what is unique and therefore distinguishes 'us' from 'them,' and also influences how others within the larger society see 'them.' The relational approach to understanding space reveals the ways ethnicity and place co-constitute social relations.

Jewish cemetery space is more than consecrated ground established, owned and regulated by the Orthodox congregation in Trondheim. The cemetery has physical boundaries which define who has the right be buried there. However, who belongs to this space and where to set its boundaries are subjects of negotiation. The Jewish community – its members and others with relations to the Jewish community – negotiate the organisation of space for the deceased. The process of shaping and reshaping space is established in contact with their surroundings, including other burial places. Thus, the local Jewish cemetery in Trondheim, like other burial



grounds, is a social phenomenon (Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010; Saramo, 2019). Bearing the dynamic of the social and dialectical process of the space in mind, the Jewish cemetery is in this chapter understood as a social landscape, culturally marked by identity and belonging.

## 7.6 An Optional Jewish Burial Place

The narratives of Jews in this study are about life and death, which include the desire to maintain rituals and attachment to Jewish places. What to maintain and what to abandon is an ongoing negotiation both on the individual and community levels. In the narratives about the Jewish cemetery in Trondheim, the Jewish burial space is negotiated both spatially and socially.

The location of the final resting place raises the question of whom a burial place is for and whom it belongs to. The participants' notions of different burial places were considered along with whether their choices were considered an appropriate/ideal for them as a Norwegian- or non-Norwegian born Jews. The varying conceptions of the organisation of burial places were divided into an exclusive burial place belonging to Jews, a Christian place for the majority population, a neutral place for everyone independent of religious or worldview stance, and a place betwixt and between – an inclusive place for Jews and their non-Jewish spouses and children.

The Lademoen Jewish Cemetery has many of the characteristics of a public place. It is defined, visible and open to everybody. It can be accessed from the street through an unlocked iron gate, and there is a broad opening in the fence leading to the neighbouring municipal burial place. However, the boundary is clear: the fence symbolically marks and sets off the cemetery from its ethnic surroundings. The particularism expresses that the space is a Jewish ground where Jewish burial practices and customs are observed. A Jewish cemetery is consecrated ground where all those who are buried there are buried according to Jewish law. The law has been interpreted to make arrangements that satisfy it in practical terms. Consequently, no one other than Jews can be buried in the cemetery. Those who were born Jewish but do not consider themselves as such, those who have converted out of Judaism or those who do not want to have a religious funeral must be buried elsewhere. Notably, several of the participants with a Norwegian national background referred to those who are buried outside of their burial ground as “Christians” and described the municipal burial place as “the Christian cemetery” in contrast to a Jewish cemetery.

Esther, an interviewee from a family with relatively deep roots in Norway, recounted that her great-grandparents were among the first Jews in Trondheim and the surrounding region. She considers herself to be Jewish and is affiliated with the congregation but pointed out that she is not religious but is Jewish *culturally*. Esther is married to a non-Jew; her son has not been circumcised and she does not think he will be enrolled in the Jewish educational *bar mitzvah* program. With the exception of a few years, she has lived in Trondheim her entire life. She currently believes she will likely be buried at the place where her Jewish family has been laid to rest.

However, she admits that her burial location is not a given. Her husband's family has a family grave in a cemetery outside of Trondheim and being laid to rest with him there could be a choice. Assessing the two options, to go with her Jewish family or her non-Jewish spouse, her conclusion is to leave it up to the next generation. Her son must decide where it will be most suitable for him to place her grave. This prompted her to reflect on the definition of a non-Jewish cemetery: "In fact, I have never explored whether you are allowed to lie in a Christian cemetery if you are not a Christian yourself."

Esther highlights a common assumption in the Jewish community in Trondheim – the difference between Jews and *the others*, even many of them who have little to do with other Jews except for their Jewish family members. Esther's narratives about her upbringing and adulthood shape her Jewish identity in relation to religion. She refers to the majority population as Christians, instead of Norwegian or any other term used to describe the non-Jewish population. She constructs the majority as those who are inherently Christian and belong to a Christian confession. At the same time, she also constructs herself as a minority, like others who are Jewish, Muslim or of any other non-Christian religious belonging. Esther's indicator of the difference within the Norwegian population is primarily identified in relation to religion. Religion functions here as an indicator of ethnicity which divides people into different groups: majority and minorities communities. Her cultural Jewishness in turn contributes to how she sees Christians: Christians are perceived like Jews, they are both a religious and non-religious group. Regardless of their actual religious beliefs, they relate to religion in significant ways: as cultural belonging. Esther's cultural belonging has consequences for her notion of a burial ground and to whom it belongs. From her perspective on the burial ground, religion is the marker. By distinguishing people living in Norway according to religious cultural belonging, the cemetery space seems to reaffirm such communal boundaries.

Esther's self-identification as a cultural Jew resonates with the identities articulated by other participants. Most of them identified themselves as a cultural or secular, rather than religious or observant Jew. A minority of the participants considered Judaism to be a key part of their lives, identifying with Orthodoxy and Orthodox observance, but admitted that the level of observance has to be solved pragmatically. Observance is related to what is possible within a tiny Jewish community in Trondheim. For those who consider themselves culturally Jewish, they are members of the Orthodox congregation in Trondheim and might attend the synagogue and religious funeral ceremonies, but they do not see religion as a key part of their lives. Taking part in religious rituals is not motivated by a belief in God, at least not the commanding Creator of the biblical tradition. Rather, they are secularised members of Jewish descent who want to enrich their cultural identity with Jewish tradition, narratives, customs and places. The cemetery and the Jewish burial customs and rituals are obvious parts of their Jewishness, but as we have seen with Esther's suggestions, and which I will elaborate on below, the modern religious affiliations and identification have become increasingly voluntaristic in nature rather than being certainties.

With the unique interweaving of religion and ethnicity, the construction of Jewish identity can take many forms. The varieties of Jewish identity within the Trondheim Jewish community do not comprise a group identified by a shared understanding of what it means to be a Jew. However, they do constitute a whole, albeit a vulnerable whole. The members seem to have a shared assumption of a Jewish local community, one which they would like to protect and maintain in some way. In terms of an institution, they embrace a social structure. Those who can satisfy Jewish law's definition of who is a Jew and who is a member of the Orthodox congregation, constitute an institution with no obligations but some rights. As members, they point out that they can choose whether or not they will be buried in the local Jewish cemetery.

## 7.7 Attachment Bonds to Jewish Family and the Holocaust

Despite the differing national backgrounds of Jews, the cemetery facilitates a common commitment to Jewish history, and provides ties to the Jewish family and the migrants' lived Jewish life in Norway. These aspects of spatial settings and attachment to the Jewish cemetery are not immediately obvious, but for most of the participants this seems to be part of an ongoing construction of Jewish identity.

Esther is an exponent of the changing bonds between individual and community where no position can be taken for granted, a voluntaristic attitude that she shares with several of the other participants in the study. In the participants' narratives about deceased relatives and parents, or siblings who have passed away recently, the cemetery is referred to as a particularly Jewish place. It is recognised as *their* place in the same way as the synagogue, which means that both were recognised as vital to their own and their Jewish families' Jewish life (Høeg, 2023b). However, interview narratives convey a clear awareness that they have an obvious right to opt-in and opt-out of the cemetery. The underlying logic concerning the Jewish cemetery for a congregational affiliate is that membership will grant the opportunity to choose whether or not to have the Jewish cemetery as one's final resting place. Among those who had little relationship with other Jews besides their relatives, they suggested it was essential to be a "supporting member" in the congregation to sustain the Jewish community in the city (Høeg, 2023b). In addition to the participants' understanding of being a supporter, both morally and financially, membership provides the option of having a Jewish funeral and a Jewish grave.

On the other hand, the cemetery also operationalises Jewish history. The cemetery is a place to memorialise the victims of the Norwegian Holocaust. For several of the participants, when they narrated their lives, the historical aspect of being a Jew in Norway was a key point. In this context, the cemetery expresses the history of those who lived in Norway when the Nazis invaded and occupied the country in 1940. For the participants with relatives who were victims of the Holocaust, which took the lives of 133 Jews in this region, their lives and deaths are materialised and visualised in the cemetery's Holocaust memorial and on several tombstones.

The cemetery's role in tying Jewish family and history together is represented in the life-stories. It is a middle ground between a family place (the private burial place where the family history is expressed; a community place), a community burial place (where the history of Jews in Trondheim and the central and northern part of Norway is expressed), and a public place (the public sphere represented by the Norwegian Holocaust). These dimensions of Jewish history both mirror and constitute social ties to the Jewish community in Trondheim. For some of the participants, their attachment to and notion of the cemetery was shaped by their history, which in turn was framed by considerations about the cemetery as a final resting place for them personally.

One participant, Joseph, a fourth-generation Jew in Trondheim, states that he was brought up in the Jewish tradition, with many Jewish customs and the Sabbath meal on Fridays. From an early age he attended Jewish *cheider* classes. Joseph feels that he has carried the Jewishness with him throughout his life, but that it has become stronger now that he has become an adult. Throughout his upbringing, he was constantly aware that several of his relatives fled the Holocaust, but also that several died in Auschwitz. Joseph explained being attached to the cemetery because several members of his Jewish family were buried there, and because of the presence of the Holocaust remembrance. Joseph's ancestors from Trondheim who lost their lives in Auschwitz have their names engraved on the memorial and tombstones at the cemetery:

There's a connection to family, and then there's a connection to history. The cemetery is an identification with history. There is the memorial for those who were killed during the war. So, it's both the fate of the family, the family and the historical fate of the Jews. (Interview with Joseph)

The cemetery has family significance through blood and marriage. At the same time, the cemetery also attaches historical kin to this place, which is intimately connected to the history of Jewish people from Trondheim and the mobilities and genocide of the Norwegian and European Holocaust. The memorials and the cemetery mediate peoples' encounters with the family and Jewish history. Both Joseph's identification with his family history and his cultural self-awareness contribute to confirming social ties and shaping the bond to the spatial setting. The desire to maintain the bonds to the history and his family are ways to confirm and maintain his Jewish identity. Subject to how Joseph's life unfolds, he expects to have his final resting place there.

## **7.8 The Country for a Lived Life and for a Final Resting Place**

But what about Jewish immigrants living in Norway who cannot link their families' histories to the locality or to the Norwegian and Trondheim Holocaust? Despite the diversity of geographical origins of the congregation members in Trondheim, their

connection to the Holocaust travelled with them through immigration. They and their families were *all* affected by the Holocaust. However, they did not all link the burial space to the history of the Holocaust. Their relatives were not connected to the cemetery as Holocaust victims. None of their relatives were honoured there at the Holocaust memorial.

A transnational or international perspective on immigrants is essential for their attachment to the cemetery. Set in the context of their daily lives in their host country or adopted homeland, spatial and social boundaries are bridged. The growing capacity for transnational activities and links to their places of origin did not influence the decisions of the Jewish immigrants in this study to be buried in their country of origin. With the exception of Noah, who did not touch on the subject in his narratives, the four other first-generation migrants (Magda, Ori, Martin and Lea) expressed that the local Jewish cemetery in Trondheim was the place where they want to be buried. Similar to Norwegian-born Jews, they have adopted the notion that the cemetery space is a particular Jewish place. For them, the Jewish cemetery is not only a place for Norwegian-born Jews, but a multi-national Jewish place for anyone who is connected to the congregation. Their perception of the Jewish community that the congregation formally administers is so open and changeable that there is room for them too. But in contrast to the Norwegian-born Jews, they did not question where to be buried. They even had the intention to include their Norwegian-born spouse and family there as well.

This choice must be understood in the framework of participants' investments in their host country and how these investments have shaped and reshaped them. Their life histories are marked by years of living in Norway and Trondheim, where they have settled and shared their lives with spouses (both Norwegian and non-Norwegian born) and where, for some, they also have children born in Trondheim. They expressed their preference to stay in Trondheim, and that the rootedness of their children and spouses have interrupted any plans to return to their homelands. To understand their choice of local burial at Lademoen, we must consider integration into the Norwegian Jewish and non-Jewish communities and their surroundings' ability to integrate them.

Another participant, Lea, lives in Trondheim but was born and raised in another country. She has been living in Trondheim for decades and is part of the Jewish community in the city. Lea has a Jewish family and many Jewish friends. But as she points out, she also has many non-Jewish friends and friends with the same national origin as her:

It's very natural that I should lie here where I have lived most of my years. There's also a Jewish cemetery in Oslo, but it's much more unnatural for me to be buried in Oslo than here. (Interview with Lea)

A cemetery becomes a mediator of social relations and is a powerful means to assert belonging. Lea's explanation for where she wants to have her grave reflects her sense of belonging to Norwegian society and Norwegian Jewish life. When Lea talks about where she wants to be buried, she considers Norway as the location, despite disconnection from her wider family and childhood home. Having children living in Norway

and having Norwegian friends, Jews and non-Jews, make her birth country irrelevant when it comes to the final journey in a lifetime of travel. However, the burial place becomes the subject of negotiation between two Jewish cemeteries. Her son lives in Oslo where there also is a Jewish cemetery. When she considers the Jewish cemetery in Oslo, the cemetery in Trondheim has become more of a Jewish place of kin for her. Having her Jewish family in Trondheim means that the local Jewish cemetery is more of a relational place. Years in Trondheim spent together with in-laws and relatives bridge spatial and kin-belonging in the local Jewish cemetery.

## 7.9 A Neutral Burial Space

The multifaceted aspects of a burial ground create hesitation and a lack of certainty in relation to traditional funerary culture. Jews in Trondheim do not differ from the general Norwegian population in this respect (Høeg, 2019, 2023a). Influenced by Norwegian culture, they do not necessarily give traditional answers to where their remains will be buried. Five of the participants are considering ash scattering or a burial place in one of the new municipal cemeteries in Trondheim. This cemetery, Charlottenlund Cemetery, which has a natural landscape and park-like design, stands out as an attractive alternative to four of these five participants.

Nora, a young adult living in Trondheim, is married to a non-Jew and is a member of the Jewish congregation. She has not circumcised her son and, like Esther, does not think that the *bar mitzvah* is an option for him. She considers herself to be a non-religious Jew and underscores that she distances herself from religions and the religious part of Jewish culture:

I've been thinking about [where I want to be buried] after they actually built that cemetery. There are no other non-religious alternatives than this. It's very strange for me to lie in such a Christian burial ground and there's no alternative than this for those of us who are non-religious. I don't know others besides this, and scattering of the ashes and things like that. But I want a place, but I don't know [where]. (Interview with Nora)

Nora's consideration of a proper burial place conveys a desire for a non-religious site and a detachment from the religious aspect of the Jewish cemetery. Still, her Jewish grandparents' burial place at Lademoen and the Jewish funeral rituals and memorialisation are highly valued. However, Trondheim's new cemetery with common memorials in a cemetery park are also something she appreciates. The references to the new cemetery and the new ash-scattering options contrast with the notion of a Christian and a Jewish cemetery. Nora considers Charlottenlund's municipal burial place to be a non-religious ground. She describes it as a cemetery cut off from religion and therefore "neutral." Charlottenlund's neutral design and burial places can also include her as a Jew, according to Nora.

Her interest in the notion of a neutral ground demonstrates that Jewish identities in Trondheim are differently constructed. By considering the two burial options she negotiates overlapping and valued identities: her non-religious identity and her

Jewish identity. But, as several other participants' life stories convey, the Jewish community also allows for several ways of belonging. Her positive notion of Charlottenlund expresses that she has a need to construct a Jewish community for death outside and in contrast to the "religious institution" the Jewish cemetery at Lademoen represents. For her, a Jewish community after death is important. She reports that she does not want to lie in the neutral ground alone without her Jewish family. Being isolated from her closest Jewish relatives is therefore no alternative. Weighed against the desire for a neutral ground, Jewish kin relations are given priority. Wherever her mother decides that her remains will be disposed, Nora says she will decide the same. Her reasoning behind her decision about where to be buried demonstrates that a burial place is relational. In this case the relational aspect is understood as collective space. Therefore, a decision by one individual about where to be buried may have consequences for others.

## 7.10 A Mixed Jewish Burial Space

Intermarriage is a crucial factor which impacts choices about burial place. But intermarriage does not leave Jews without agency, not even the agency to claim and enact a meaningful Jewish identity in spatiality. In the narratives about the cemetery, several participants refer to the plans to change the strict religious rules that determine who can be buried in the Jewish cemetery. They are optimistic about changing the rules at Lademoen so it could better reflect the Jewish community in Trondheim. This entails facilitating a separate space for non-Jewish partners and children, but not redefining the religious rules for the whole cemetery. None of the participants know if this has already been realised at the cemetery but presume the congregation leaders will soon welcome a proposal of a "mixed" Jewish space.

Ori, from Israel, is married to a Norwegian woman. His daughters are Jewish by conversion, but his wife is not. He has been working in Trondheim for many years and his greater family is in Israel, where he, together with his wife and children, spends much time. He does not want to be buried in Israel but at the local Jewish cemetery in Trondheim. He prefers that the physical and religious borders that have separated Jewish and non-Jewish spouses will not be maintained, and that the congregation will open a new section where there is space for him and his family:

Yes, we have our own Jewish cemetery. There's still some space left there, so that isn't an issue. It's an issue that my wife and I are thinking about where to be buried. Because she's not a Jew. I think there's a kind of quasi-solution for the congregation, which is closer to the fence. Mixed family arrangements ... I want to be with my wife. But we have not decided yet but talked a bit about it. (Interview with Ori)

One participant's narrative included that of a relative in Oslo who opted for the non-Jewish burial ground in order to be buried with his non-Jewish wife. Another talked about an uncle who was cremated and buried in an anonymous grave. Ori's wish for a separate section for Jews and their non-Jewish partners and family members

illustrates his sense of belonging to the Jewish community, even as a dead body, and the significance for a Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, but also his desire to be buried with his wife. Instead of being separated from his wife or being buried with her on the other side of the fence, he sees that his dual belonging – to the Jewish community and his wife – can be satisfied through a “quasi-solution.” The suggestion of a burial space for those of different or no faith within the Jewish cemetery indicates that a Jewish space does not have to be an exclusively Jewish place. It could be a mixed burial place which can reflect the fluidity of the Jewish community. By making space for the new forms of belonging and space continuity in Jewish life is ensured.

## 7.11 Discussion: Spatial Webs of Connections and Belonging

The participants’ considerations and choices to have their final resting place at the Jewish cemetery in Trondheim reflect a Jewish identity that operates within social networks influenced by the living as well as the deceased. At the community level, the cemetery both safeguards and challenges Jewish particularity and continuity. In illustrating the different reasons for choosing the cemetery as a burial location, the Jewish cemetery offers an identity-based cemetery, but presents a dilemma for the non-religious and those with a non-Jewish partner. Nonetheless, Jewish particularity is expressed by having an obvious right as a Jew and member of the congregation to decide whether or not to be buried there, regardless of one’s level of observance. In this sense, the cemetery represents a protected but also a limited ethnic space of Jewish Trondheim.

The notions of the cemetery are set in a network of close and wider relationships (Maddrell, 2016). Participants who are first, second, third and further generations Trondheim residents and have relatives buried at the Jewish cemetery have an intimate connection to them. Those who have relatives whose graves are marked with Holocaust inscriptions have a personal link to the place’s historical meaning. In this sense, the cemetery has the potential to confirm its bonds to the Jewish family and its bonds to the Holocaust. This varies, as for some the Jewish cemetery actively affects the social processes and forms connected to the Jewish family, and for others also Jewish history. Consequently, the cemetery is shaped and reshaped, weaving intricate webs of connections and belonging.

An important aspect of changes to the cemetery, as reported by several participants, was the initial discussion within the congregation to change the cemetery to include a reserved space for children or spouses who are not Jewish according to the Jewish *halakha* law. The central point here is that Jewish identity and space are made in relation to one another. The initial discussions for a fixed spatial location for non-Jewish children and spouses, or an ethnically mixed section, may be understood as a wish for an inclusive cemetery space. The inclusivity challenges the doctrinal concept of space and rather defines it as shaped in processes (Knott, 1998, pp. 283–284). Ongoing discussions show that the traditional cemetery is



re-interpreted and adapted to how Jews in Trondheim today understand themselves as Jews. Their wish for an inclusive space seems to contribute to its shape and preserve an expression of Jewish identity that is not defined primarily by religious doctrines. Through this notion of an inclusive cemetery, the individuals take on a collective symbolic significance for their community. This creates a Jewish identity that encompasses a broadened Jewish community inclusive of those who are not Jews but are part of a Jew's family.

At the same time that each individual life makes a mark as part of something greater, this individuality comes at the expense of the collective, creating tension when the social decision to choose a Jewish burial place is contested. The participants find new meaning in other places and other available options, such as ash scattering and newly build cemeteries. 'Jewish' and other identities are held simultaneously, and understandings of the cemetery and burial practices allow for these to be reflected on in the choice to opt out of the Jewish cemetery in favour of a 'neutral' place that does not require any religious belief or practice. Participants challenged the notion that being buried in a Jewish cemetery is the only way of being a Jew in Trondheim. For them, Jewish identity does not come with any obligation to keep burial traditions. However, being a Jew seems to let the collective consideration that governs the decision to be laid to rest in a Jewish cemetery, particularly when their Jewish family members want to lie there.

For first-generation Jewish migrants, the Lademoen burial ground is connected to the processes of making Trondheim a new homeplace, and the right to claim the cemetery as a Jewish space for Jewish identity, no matter where you come from. The choice of burial in Trondheim seems to be heavily influenced by the biographical story of how a person and their family settled in Norway and Trondheim, and is reported by migrants who have been living in Norway for more than a decade. The duration of their residence has given space-time for expression, construction and assertion of Jewish identity in relation to Trondheim. For those who have lived many years in Trondheim, their narratives articulate strong bonds to the city, but commonly more relaxed attitudes to fixing their identity in the Jewish cemetery. These wishes seem to be a token of a gradual transformation of their identities in which their connections, and their relatives' and spouse's connections to Trondheim, bring their pre- and post-migration lives full circle in the Trondheim Jewish cemetery.

## 7.12 Conclusion

Burial decisions impact what a site can convey in terms of Jewish identity and belonging to Jewish people. The narratives about the Jewish cemetery in Trondheim demonstrate that a burial place becomes a mediator of social relations and is a powerful means for asserting belonging. The narratives express that the burial place is a particular Jewish space at the same time that the cemetery is voluntaristic in nature. Significantly, the cemetery activates Jewish kin relations for Jews in Trondheim and

for the first generation of migrants it activates belonging to the place where they have settled and lived for many years. The narratives show the deep-rooted connections to the legacies of the Holocaust, and how these are manifest in the Jewish cemetery. And lastly, the active narration of the informants' cemetery choices and stories reveals complex negotiations over the cemetery according to modern Orthodoxy's doctrinal concept and the borders for the Jewish community. In Trondheim, Jewish identity calls for a broader Jewish spatiality which can correspond with their understanding of a Jewish community. Several of the participants support a proposal for a more inclusive section within the Jewish cemetery that expresses a concept of a Jewish community that encompasses not only Jews but those with non-Jewish partners and family members.

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**Part III**  
**Changing and Contemporary Practices in**  
**European Cemeteries**

# Chapter 8

## Contemporary ‘Outsiders’ in Narratives of Belonging in Cork’s Cemeteries: Reflections on Experiences of Irish Travellers and Recent Polish Migrants



Katie McClymont and Danielle House

### 8.1 Introduction

In contemporary cities, cemeteries and associated practices of memorialisation represent important spaces for the expression of belonging and identity, mediating personal, place-based and historical factors. They illustrate the changing histories of a given place through the lives and deaths of the individuals memorialised inside their walls, fences or hedges, often reflecting life-journeys by noting places of birth as well as death in memorials (Maddrell, 2011; McClymont, 2018). This therefore gives cemeteries a particularly important role in documenting the migrations and mobilities of the place in which they are located. Exploring these, and the associated inclusions and exclusions in policy and practice which bring about their current form, offers a way to understand migration and belonging which is currently under-researched. Practices around death and remembrance are expressions of fundamental human experience, but are culturally and geographically particular, and the ability for minority groups to ensure appropriate and timely actions can be undertaken with regards to the death of a relative or community member is, as we have seen across this volume, of the utmost importance for a sense of belonging and acceptance.

This chapter draws upon experiences and views of the Traveller and Polish communities in the city of Cork, Ireland to offer new insights into these issues. Irish Travellers are nomadic people who were only officially recognised as a distinct

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K. McClymont (✉)  
Department of Geography and Environmental Management,  
University of the West of England, Bristol, UK  
e-mail: [katie.mcclymont@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:katie.mcclymont@uwe.ac.uk)

D. House  
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK  
e-mail: [danielle.house@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:danielle.house@bristol.ac.uk)

ethnic group in Ireland in 2017,<sup>1</sup> and who are also ethnically distinct from English gypsies or European Roma despite being often classified together through the sedentist gaze of nation states. They lack a written history of their own and are largely ignored by recorded Irish history, so clear understandings of origins and evolution of traditions are absent (Gmelch & Gmelch, 2014). Discrimination against Travellers is commonplace, which, although similar across European contexts, is notable here because, as discussed below, the Irish national context is more pro-migrant than many other countries discussed in this volume. On the other hand, widespread migration to Ireland is a recent phenomenon, only emerging on a visible scale since the late 1990s as Ireland's economy boomed, but especially since the accession of eight eastern European countries to the EU in 2004, including Poland. Both Travellers and Polish communities are traditionally Roman Catholic (within Ireland as a Catholic country) and are also considered white, if 'white other,' as discussed at greater depth below. This therefore presents an interesting opportunity to explore the similarities and differences experienced between these groups with regard to their sense of belonging as mediated by and expressed in cemeteries and death rituals. It explores how acceptance granted via whiteness is conditional and does not necessarily relate to time spent in a context or place of birth – to relative mobility or immobility – and that such lines of differentiation and discrimination impact on feelings of belonging and the possibility of honouring the dead in a culturally appropriate manner.

The chapter first explores migration in the Irish context, both in terms of numbers and policy direction, and literature about Polish migration to Ireland and Traveller communities in Ireland. The chapter then turns to theories of whiteness to frame the discussion of belonging and exclusions in the Cork case, noting the importance of both self-identification and acceptance from state structures in this. It then draws on findings from interviews and presents images of both Traveller and Polish graves in Cork cemeteries to illustrate areas where these framings of whiteness/belonging intersect with practices around death and remembrance. It concludes by reflecting on the role of cemeteries to show ways into these debates about migration and mobility, both in practical terms, but also in more symbolic and spiritual ways.

## 8.2 Mobilities in Ireland: Irish Travellers and Polish Migrants

Traditionally, Ireland has been perceived as a nation of outmigration, with “the highest and most sustained per capita rates of emigration in Europe” (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008, p. 153) in the 1960s and continuing to remain high into the 1980s. It

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<sup>1</sup>This was a victory for campaigners, although it did not grant Travellers any additional rights. See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2017-06-01/48/> for detailed reporting.

is not until the mid-1990s that this trend begins to be reversed with the period 1995–2004 seeing net immigration of over 200,000 (*ibid.*, p. 154) with large numbers of native Irish people returning to Ireland making up a large proportion of this, but also an increase in people seeking asylum in Ireland, notably from Nigeria, Congo, Algeria and Romania. Unlike its near neighbour, Britain, Ireland's national policy discourse on migration has been largely, at least in general statements of intent, positive and accepting: "(p)olitical leaders attempt to demonstrate that welcoming migrants is part of Irish national identity, and that hosting migrants reinforces rather than threatens Irish identity" (Elliott, 2019, p. 566). Although racist sentiments are expressed within political debate, they are not seen as doorstep issues at election time, or have mainstream party-political support (*ibid.*). The Brexit debate, and role of Irish/British/EU relations in this, has only strengthened this position of Ireland as a tolerant nation, expressing migration issues in terms of human rights and compassion rather than a 'hostile environment' (Grierson, 2018; Griffiths & Yeo, 2021).

Despite this overall positive attitude to migration in the Irish political mainstream, there remain questions about the assumption of belonging and acceptance of minority practices with Mac Éinrí and White claiming that "[b]ehind a policy of vague respect for multicultural ideas there lurks a de facto assimilationism" (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008, pp. 161–162) and that this is particularly relevant with regards to the exclusion of long standing minorities, which is echoed in this paper with regards to the feelings of exclusion and discrimination held by Traveller communities. Lentin (2007) and Lentin and McVeigh (2006) examine how racialisation and diaspora play roles in the construction of Irish identity, and how this has played out in recent political events, including the 2004 citizenship referendum, the result of which granted Irish citizenship to people of Irish descent who do not and have not lived in Ireland more readily than to those born in Ireland of migrant parents. The boundaries defining insiders and outsiders are therefore not simple to navigate nor fixed permanently, but politically and individually constructed, reconstructed and challenged. This making and remaking of boundaries also intersects with debates around 'whiteness' and identity hierarchy in European context.

Polish migration to Ireland and the historical treatment of Traveller communities tell two very different stories about minority identity and acceptance in Ireland. Polish migrants, as white Christians (and specifically Roman Catholics), are seen as 'fitting' with the host country; their religious identity not perceived as threatening (Gallagher & Trzebiatowska, 2017). Moreover, Polish Catholicism has been easily accepted into the structure of the Catholic Church in Ireland with Polish masses being delivered in the majority of parishes across the country. Here the shared Catholic identity is seen as mitigating against a need for further integration. Roman Catholicism is an international identity (see Eade & Garbin, 2007 on Polish Roman Catholic pilgrimage in diaspora), and it is therefore acceptable to remain 'Polish' rather than necessarily becoming 'Irish' to integrate. However, migration to Ireland has also allowed for individual responses to the maintenance of religious identity, rather than being something essential to acceptance:

The existence of Polish masses and the efforts invested in the formation of Polish congregations all perform a vital role in maintaining faith for those committed to institutionalised Catholicism. For others, the host country serves as a catalyst for questioning what has been taken for granted in Poland. (Gallagher & Trzebiatowska, 2017, p. 437)

This shared basis for identity offers grounds for acceptance and belonging in an open way, with personal choice and agency playing a role in decisions about life, and about death, as explored below.

This contrasts strongly with the history of Travellers within Ireland. Throughout their presence in recorded history in Ireland, Travellers have been seen as problematic (Helleiner, 2001) and discrimination against Travellers remains widespread today across social groups and all political leanings (Fetzer, 2017). Social attitudes surveys reveal that “Travellers are the least-liked ethnic group in the country” (Fetzer, 2017, p. 196). It was not until 2017 that Travellers were recognised as an official ethnic group in Ireland, emerging out of long political campaigns against a policy arena which previously viewed nomadic lifestyles as “aimless wandering carried out by individuals, rather than as a cultural norm of the Traveller community” (Boyle et al., 2018, p. 6) reflecting, in part, conceptual troubles with the mobility of nomadism within sedentist culture (Sutherland, 2014). However, Travellers view the idea of nomadism as central to their identity, whether living in ‘bricks-and-mortar’ or caravans (Delaney, 2003) with links to extended family being critical. In this sense, nomadism suggests more than an itinerant lifestyle:

[Nomadism] signifies a way of thinking about the world, as much as a way of living through it. Indeed, many Travellers are at pains to point out that nomadism is not restricted to those who live in caravans or on halting sites—it is not dependent upon acts of physical movement, they argue, but, rather, it is suggestive of a certain mindset and an approach to life. (Delaney, 2003, pp. 85-86)

Even with changes in policy moving towards greater acceptance of the cultural value of Traveller ways of life from the mid-1990s onwards (Boyle et al., 2018), Travellers and Traveller culture remains under-represented and mis-understood in Ireland (Pavee Point, 2015). Moreover, debates emerging from issues about Traveller ‘integration’ or assimilation raise interesting points about issues of mobility and (national) identity for this chapter’s focus. Travellers have not been written in as part of ‘the nation’ within Irish history and are seen as outside of the struggle for Irish independence: “Such readings have also been used to deny Travellers a place in Irish society and to see them, rather, as an irritant and an anachronism in the modern nation state” (Delaney, 2003, p. 82). This labelling of Travellers as anachronistic relates to the different perceptions of nomadism held by Travellers and the Irish authorities. Nomadism has been seen as a problem to be solved by the authorities; the cause of Traveller deprivation and exclusion and something to be remedied by a settled life.

As such, Travellers present different issues to modern nation states than migrants from other countries do, because their concept of nation is at odds with the way territory and movement are conceived in sedentist cultures or the ‘settled’ community. This is particularly important in Ireland as a country conceived in a history of struggle for independence founded on “the primacy of a territorialised identity and the importance of rootedness and kinship with the land” (Delaney, 2003, p. 87). Polish migrants, with shared Roman Catholic identity and heritage as



well as European citizenship, arguably present a less problematic presence in Irish society than a Traveller population who have spatially co-existed for hundreds of years with the settled Irish population. Polish migration to Ireland is understood within the sedentist lens of (fixed) nation states – moving from a defined 'here' to an equally defined 'there' – rather than the nomadic mobility of Travellers which undermines such a bounded understanding of place. In turn, this weave of nationalism(s) and sedentism raises interesting issues about belonging, identity and whiteness, which in turn have practical implications for decisions about burial and memorialisation.

According to 2016 statistics, 14% of Cork's population is non-Irish (17,183), and moreover, Cork has seen the largest non-Irish population increase in Ireland (Cork City Profile, 2018). This is comprised mainly of EU/UK migrants with Polish being largest non-Irish nationality population (2.6%) followed by British/Northern Irish: 1.5%, Lithuanian: 0.4%, Other EU: 5.3%, Asian/Asian Irish: 2.8% and Irish Travellers: 0.7% (ibid). In this chapter we explore how this relates to practices around death and memorialisation in Cork, but first turn to the idea of whiteness to frame some of the discussions around differentiated belonging.

### 8.3 Whiteness, Identity and Patterns of Exclusion

The conceptual debate on whiteness provides greater depth in looking at patterns of inclusion/exclusion for the Polish and Irish Traveller communities in Cork. It offers critique of white as 'normal' and looks for how its privilege is maintained or deviated from, seeing it as "a set of values and practices rather than simply a skin colour" (Webb, 2019, p. 4). As a theoretical perspective, its roots can be traced back to the work of W.B. Du Bois, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, with academic scholarship growing rapidly in the past three decades (Botterill & Burrell, 2019, p. 24). Both Travellers and Polish migrants (in Ireland, but also elsewhere in Western Europe) are not visually marked as non-white, but both groups remain viewed as different from mainstream national/Irish identities as 'others' or 'outsiders.' We use these terms in inverted commas to highlight the subjectivity of these boundaries, and highlight patterns of differentiation rather than accepting these definitions as natural or in some way accurate reflections of citizenship or identity. By identifying this position, rather than allowing whiteness to appear as unproblematic or to conflate the experiences of all migrant/minority groups, we are able to see how this is constituted by different patterns of mobility and subsequently identify patterns of privilege, acceptance and belonging within practices of death and memorialisation and in turn see how death and memorialisation practices make and remake these claims.

In writing about Polish migration to the UK, Botterill and Burrell state, "[h]owever inflected the whiteness of Polish migrants has been, as Garner (2007, p. 66) points out, 'not being white, and being black are two very different things'" (Botterill & Burrell, 2019, p. 26). Webb points out how problematic this status of 'white but not quite' is for Gypsy-Traveller communities in the UK, seeing them as

“simultaneously disinherited from the concept of minorityhood and the protection of multiculturalism” (Webb, 2019, p. 7) as well as being ‘othered’ from the white majority culture. This chimes with wider research into ‘white’ identities in Europe, and the way material cultures such as dress play a role in these (Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020). Migration between European countries, and the attitudes towards ‘outsiders’ in a new context reflects hierarchies of European space, and a lack of evenness or access to the same privileges of whiteness. Mobilities themselves, therefore, further complicate any unitary sense of white identity.

Issues of belonging intersect with debates on whiteness, identity, class and boundaries. There is not scope within this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview of this research, but a brief outline brings forward issues which are relevant for this discussion. As Kuurne and Vieno state, belonging is forged in “the intersection of personal experience, social processes and materiality” (Kuurne & Vieno, 2022, p. 283). The idea of whiteness can be part of all three. Within European mobilities, it is an important part of the way in which “actors manage to gain access to various social and material goods that are distributed on the basis of belonging” (ibid., p. 285). Claims to belong can be founded in shared ‘whiteness,’ or hierarchies of whiteness can be used to further differentiate between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’

Literature specific to Ireland is limited, but some parallels can be drawn with work from the UK. Notions of belonging and acceptance are complex and positioned within ill-defined spaces of colour and cultural markers of normative nationhood (Clarke, 2020, p. 102). The concept of whiteness unevenly governs processes of inclusion and exclusion. As well as being a barrier to differentiate against people of colour, it also governs norms of acceptability within the category of ‘white’ as is seen in the following discussions. Whiteness may be an initial boundary marker of inclusion/exclusion but is not automatic grounds for inclusion into a white national space. As Clarke explains:

Thinking not only about boundaries but also about hierarchies of belonging draws further attention to the complexity of belonging but is also vital in plural societies where those marginalised within hierarchies often include formal citizens who, in other spaces and times, are constructed as belonging. (Clarke, 2020, p. 97)

These debates echo those of racialisation, and the means of exclusion employed against ‘others’ who are not seen to fit in a given location both historically and contemporarily (Garner, 2013; Holloway, 2003; Krivonos & Diatlova, 2020). So, whiteness may lead to acceptance and privilege in certain scenarios, but its internal hierarchies and patterns of exclusion along intersectional identities such as class, add complexity to this. This is important to note, as shared Catholic (white) identity between the Traveller and Polish communities and mainstream Irish society does not lead to equal levels of acceptance for practices around death and memorialisation, as is explored below in the discussion of our research. The shared whiteness (and here religious/cultural Roman Catholicism) can operate as a smokescreen to discrimination within this category (Clarke, 2020; Webb, 2019) making it harder to apprehend and understand. Moreover, and importantly for research into death practices and memorialisation, belonging is not a unidirectional phenomenon. For

someone to belong to a nation, they need to identify as belonging to that community themselves and be recognised as part of it: it is as “much about being recognised as belonging as it is about self-identification, a substantive sense of belonging requiring recognition – if not acceptance – in the eyes of existing members” (Clarke, 2020, p. 96) or as Kuurne and Vieno put it: “People are often positioned between multiple settings of belonging, which may produce conflicting expectations” (Kuurne & Vieno, 2022, p. 285). This hints at notions of boundaries and the acceptability or hybridity of co-located identities, in life and in death, and the complex social and political issues which underpin the everyday implementation of policy, planning, maintenance and rules governing spaces of burial and remembrance.

## 8.4 Background to Research

The research discussed in this chapter is a small part of a wider European funded project looking at the cemeteries as public spaces of belonging (CeMi; see introduction of this volume). Cork is the second largest City in Ireland, with a population of 210,000. As noted earlier, Ireland has only recently become a country of immigration rather than emigration and, as stated earlier, Cork has the most notable increase in migrant populations in Ireland. There are thirteen cemeteries in the Cork City Council area and one nearby crematorium. Cremation makes up only 19.61% of bodily disposal in Ireland (The Cremation Society, 2021), and the Island Crematorium in Cork is one of only five in all of Ireland. Grave rights in all the cemeteries are leased in perpetuity.

This paper is based on twelve semi-structured stakeholder interviews with people in the burial service, wider funeral service provision, Polish community and Traveller community in Cork, one biographical interview, and one email conversation, as well as visits to the cemeteries and crematorium.<sup>2</sup> The majority of this research was undertaken in September 2019 as, due to COVID-19, much further planned fieldwork was cancelled, while a small number of interviews took place virtually. Topic guides were used for the stakeholder and biographical interviews. We asked stakeholders to discuss their background and their role, then moved to understandings of migrant and minority communities and their specific needs, and the usages of cemeteries and crematoria as a form of public space. Any interviews after the COVID-19 pandemic began also included questions on how this had affected their work and community. The biographical interviews covered questions about the respondents life, their experiences related to death remembrance, and

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<sup>2</sup>These semi-structured interviews consisted of: six interviews with five members of staff from the burial service (a second interview with one person during the COVID-19 lockdowns); two interviews with representatives from a Polish advocacy organisation; two interviews with representatives of a Traveller advocacy organisation; an interview with a stonemason; and an interview with a member of crematorium staff. The biographical interview was with a Traveller woman, and the email conversation with a Cork-based Polish priest.

their usage and perceptions of cemeteries and crematoria. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and then coded inductively using Atlas.ti. These codes were then developed in dialogue with the team of CeMi project research associates. All transcripts in the CeMi project were additionally coded for comparative analysis. In this chapter we only use transcripts from Cork that specifically mention Polish, Traveller, or migration issues and needs. Due to the COVID-19 disruptions to fieldwork, and that the Traveller and Polish experience in Cork is just one part of the larger CeMi project and not its central focus, the sample size for this chapter is limited. The fieldwork is therefore presented as snapshots of experience to begin to develop insights into the relationships between mobilities, whiteness and death/remembrance in contemporary Ireland rather than a large-scale empirical account of practice. Through both a limited number of interviews, and also observations of cemeteries, it opens questions for further research about 'whiteness' and the 'work' of belonging in this context.

There is limited academic research into practices of death and remembrance in Irish Traveller communities in Ireland. We next set out some background information to contextualise the findings we go on to present, but these should be seen as generalisations for context and will not accurately reflect the whole experience for all groups or families. The Traveller community generally follow the traditions of the majority Irish Catholic community in death and remembrance, but in distinctive ways. Burial is practiced, and each part of a funeral – the 'lay out,' the Mass, the funeral, prayers at the graveside, a graveside Mass 1 month after burial and a graveside Mass 1 year after burial and erecting the headstone – are seen as essential to a respectful and dignified burial (interviews with Mary, a Traveller woman in her 50 s; and Carole, a representative of Traveller advocacy organisation, also in her 50 s).<sup>3</sup> These are all large events, with an expectation that the wider community will attend and travel far to do so. Again, large numbers of people attending a funeral is common among the Irish 'settled' communities too, but Traveller funerals tend to be larger (interviews with Mary and Carole). Cemeteries and family plots are very important places for memorialisation and connection to ancestors and family, and despite aspects of nomadism in life, a specific cemetery is used for families across many generations. Traveller communities in Ireland experience higher levels of traumatic death (suicide and other sudden death) than the general population (Tobin et al., 2020) and ethnographic research suggests that memorial practices of Traveller communities have become more elaborate and larger in scale in the last few decades, which can be problematic in terms of the cost incurred for families of the deceased (Gmelch & Gmelch, 2014). Due to this limited body of work, when reflecting on the practices observed and discussed in our research, we also draw on literature discussing death practices of Travellers in England but wish to highlight that we understand there are marked contextual, historical and cultural differences. Rather, this is a question of drawing on what academic literature there is to help understand these issues in Ireland.

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<sup>3</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant.

Unsurprisingly, Polish funerals in Ireland also remain an under-researched topic, but it is useful here to highlight some of the funerary traditions from a Polish context to see how practices are accommodated or have changed. Polish traditions have developed out of Slavic culture, influenced by the Christian church from the Middle Ages onwards (Kubiak, 2016). Burial is the main means of bodily disposal with cremation rates reaching 15% in 2012 in Poland (ibid.) and attitudes to cremation vary by age, education and region (urban/rural). In the post-war era, funeral practices were dominated by state undertakers, but remained influenced by Catholic cultural practices which also supports the low uptake of cremation. From the 1990s onwards, funerals and memorials have become more lavish and expensive although there is variation amongst groups of people. However, 95% of funerals in Poland are currently Catholic ceremonies, linking to family expectations even if individuals are non-believers.

## 8.5 Experiences and Understandings of the Polish Community

The paper now turns to present findings from research with the Polish community in Cork. Three tentative themes emerge from this. The first is the sense of choice in bodily disposal and remembrance, and how this relates to wider decisions about mobility in the life course of those related to the deceased. This relates closely to the second theme: the importance of maintaining cultural heritage and identity within a new nation; in death as well as in life. Finally, the chapter reflects on what this means about the identity of the public space of the cemetery and of Cork/Irish identity.

If they think about Ireland as their home country they want to bury members of his family here; if not, they go to crematorium and keep an urn in his houses or in special places in the cemetery. (Father Andrzej, Polish priest based in Cork)

The above quote expresses the overall strategy and decisions for Polish people and families faced with a death in Ireland: it is based on personal choice and means and is not curbed by limitations imposed by Irish regulations. Choices around burial and cremation spring from personal perspectives on belonging and assumptions about where 'home' is (see McClymont et al., 2023), both for the deceased and for their family, mediated through the differing costs for burial, cremation, and repatriation of bodies or cremated remains. Therefore, Polish community members may choose to be buried in Ireland, or cremated in Ireland and either then send remains back to Poland or to keep in a special place, be this in a house or cemetery, in Ireland or in Poland. The scope for mobility or mooring is wide here. This is assisted by the structural support of the Roman Catholic church. As Jozef, a Polish community support worker in his 40 s, notes: "Well, the Polish priests are actually set in the Irish dioceses and are able to assist in the burial process." This institutional support is important both for recent migrants to be able to access and understand the system and their choices, but also for Irish burial authorities in understanding needs and wishes of the Polish community.

For some in the Polish community memorialisation appears to be less problematic in contrast with the Traveller community as discussed below. There are also instances where it appears to reflect a wish to be part of Irish society, as Jozef expressed: “We are here to get integrated but we don’t want to lose our heritage.” John, a stonemason we spoke to commented that of the few Polish headstones he has worked on, most do not choose to have them inscribed in Polish: “There’s not many. They keep it English most of them.” These comments are reflected in the experience of visiting cemeteries in Cork, where many graves with Polish names or other identity markers can be found with inscriptions in English. In these cemeteries, it is not uncommon to find Irish graves marked in both English and Irish (see Fig. 8.1), so dual language memorials do not therefore cross boundaries of acceptance in ways that they might do in other settings. This raises interesting challenges for notions of belonging – of accepting and acceptance (Clarke, 2020); becoming part of Irish society does not necessitate a total loss of Polish identity: dual belonging appears to be manageable in this situation. From our research, the balance of integration and heritage retention for Polish migrants does not appear problematic in death and memorialisation, linking to the expressed attitudes of pro-migrant and pro-EU policy discussed above. Irish identity, and the recent experiences of moving from a society of emigration to immigration, appears open to of the idea of diaspora and distant or dual belonging and offers more varied and diverse possibilities as acceptable national identities (although this is not always the case as noted by Lentini, 2007).



**Fig. 8.1** Similarities between Irish and Polish graves in terms of style and layout, St James’ cemetery, Chetwynd. (Photograph by Danielle House)

On the columbarium in Cork, we observed Polish plaques (see Fig. 8.2) marking cremated remains interred there. This resonated with Gallagher and Trzebiatowska's (2017) comments about how migration allows individuals to revisit what is important about their faith and identity in the freedoms of a new context. The ability to choose cremation (rather than the traditional practice of burial) and mark remains in this way appears to demonstrate this, and may indicate the security in an identity which must accept changes in practice rather than hold tight to traditions, as well as factors such as economics or uncertainty about the duration of migration to Cork. The outworkings of individual identity and its marking on gravestones and memorials have wider significance than that just pertaining to individual mourners. Cemeteries are important public spaces in any city (McClymont, 2016; Skår et al., 2018) and those who are memorialised there reflect certain aspects of the history of that place. The increase in migration to Cork and subsequent migrant graves will change the landscape of the city. This was noted by Jozef:

Ireland as a country is based on the clans. They've been for years here, you have O'Driscoll's here, McCarthy's there, kind of, we are newcomers! We are all different. And this country has been isolated for years, there was no such immigration. So something new for them as well. We're changing the focus, the scope.

It will be interesting to see whether this remains as seemingly uncontentious in the future and is likely to map out in tandem with wider political, social and economic changes in Cork and in Ireland.



**Fig. 8.2** Polish Cremated remains, translated as 'Forever in our hearts. Rest in peace,' St James' cemetery, Chetwynd. (Photograph by Danielle House)

## 8.6 Experiences and Understanding of the Traveller Community

As expected from the literature and policy reviews, and the history of Travellers in Ireland, the experience of Traveller communities in Cork's cemeteries was much more problematic than that of Polish migrants. In this section, four themes are also drawn from the findings, which in part parallel the discussion above. It first outlines issues of discrimination, both explicit and implicit. It then looks at how identity maintenance is experienced and managed very differently from that of the Polish community, and then what role Traveller graves have in Irish and Corkonian public space. Finally, it reflects on what these findings reveal about mobility, place attachment and family from the perspective of a nomadic culture, and how this is still so contrary to mainstream or settled understandings of space.

A key issue of contention is the acceptable size of memorials in Cork's cemeteries. Headstone height is limited to 1.2 meters (see Fig. 8.3) and there is also a prescription on plot boundaries and other adornments. This is for ease in the maintenance of the lawn cemetery style, and regulations on headstone size are viewed as fair, equalising and aesthetically pleasing by the authorities, with officials and stonemasons noting points such as "it's only fair to everyone, if you have a plot and someone puts up a big headstone, so it's fair. And everyone's the same [...] It's uniform, it's easier to maintain" (Mike, cemetery registrar, male, 50 s).



**Fig. 8.3** Signs regulating cemetery space, St Mary's cemetery, Curraghkippane. (Photograph by Danielle House)



However, amongst the Traveller community and their representatives, the view is that, as the only community which this policy adversely affects, this has been a deliberate policy choice to limit their preferred memorialisations which are traditionally larger than those of the settled community (see Figs. 8.4 and 8.5 for the impact of these regulations). This is perceived by some within the community as part of ongoing attempts to make Traveller communities assimilate and change life-style and cultural practices to 'fit in' with those of mainstream Ireland:

What came about for us is that we would have bigger monuments on our graves than settled people. I don't know why but it's important for us. And each local authority passed a law that they need to be a certain height, you know. So Settled [people] aren't forced to build higher, we were forced to build smaller ones without any explanation. Again, without explicitly saying this is for Travellers but we are the ones that have bigger headstones. (Carole, representative of a Traveller advocacy organisation)

For the Traveller community, maintaining identity, in death as well as in life, is highly important. This has a very different dynamic to it than with the Polish community in Cork, due to different histories, and different perceptions of their power or repression in Irish society. Dual belonging is not something as readily achievable: working towards, or achieving one set of affiliations requires the disavowal of another one. This is explained well in Carole's comments: "The thing is, marginalised groups, minorities, who've had so much change forced on them, tend to hold on to traditional stuff much more. Whereas for Settled people traditional stuff, they would have let it go." Mary describes: "Over the years a lot of Settled people have given out about [large Traveller memorials]. They say that Travellers' tombstones are overpowering the other graves." Yet she goes on to explain how despite their

**Fig. 8.4** Large-scale memorial for a Traveller family, St Catherine's cemetery, Kilcully. (Photograph by Danielle House)





**Fig. 8.5** Traveller memorials with height restriction in place, St James' cemetery, Chetwynd. (Photograph by Danielle House)

resistance to assimilation, they have to a large extent conformed. Due to the height restrictions headstones have got smaller, and due to the prohibition on grave curbs they no longer build small walls around the tombs: “In the past Travellers would have those, they’d build little walls around the tombs, but they’re not allowed to do that anymore. So that’s changed as well.”

The importance of memorialisation has a long history in Traveller communities in England as is noted in Okely’s (1983) classic ethnography: “an inability to afford an appropriate monument is seen to bring shame upon the family” (Okely, 1983, p. 195, cited in Parker & McVeigh, 2013, p. 306). This is seen in more detail in the following two comments from the same respondent:

It’s to show their love for the person that’s gone. If it’s a parent they show that those parents was loved and the family can’t do enough for them. If it was a young person, they show the grief of the loss of that young person. And the only way they have doing that now is by getting these elaborate grave tombstones and that. They can’t do it in person anymore, but they can do it in the elaborate tombstones. And it’s a sense of pride as well, to show the country and show other Travellers we’re not going to let our loved ones down, we’re going to give them the best tombstone that money can buy. (Mary)

This demonstrates the (unintentional) harm done by the universal regulations on memorial height and other restrictions (see Maddrell et al., 2021). Elaborate and large headstones are a very important part of Traveller culture and community, and by disallowing them, Traveller communities feel they cannot honour the dead in the ways they wish to. However, in maintaining their chosen memorial practices, they continue not to ‘belong’ to (settled) Irish society. Another way this is manifest is through the proscription on purchasing adjacent plots and plots in advance of a death. Mary gave a story of her relative, who is concerned for her brother who is buried alone, not in a family plot:

She’s so anxious that he’s not left on his own you know. In years to come if his wife or some of his family are there with him it’s not such a thing. But for us, and I don’t know if this comes from the exclusionary experience in life, that even in death we don’t want to be left on our own do you know what I mean? (Mary)

As discussed above, within the Polish community in Cork, there is a predominant sense of choice guiding decisions about bodily disposal and remembrance: choice for repatriation or burial in Ireland; choice about memorial practices which are accepted in local cemeteries. This is notable in the adoption of cremation and use of a columbarium in Cork. Changing from traditional burial does not appear to be a threat to Polish diaspora identity, as inscriptions can still be in Polish. However, this sense of acceptance and choice is not present within the Traveller community. A history of policies of assimilation and denial of value in Traveller culture have led to retrenchment of practices for fear of loss of identity. Moreover, there is not a 'homeland' to be returned to as Travellers are indigenously Irish rather than (recent) migrants. This makes official practices which work to assimilate Traveller traditions, in burial and memorialisation as well as in other aspects of life, even more threatening because they are perceived as an attack on their identity and being.

Here, the role of Traveller graves in and as part of public space raises different issues to those discussed in relation to the Polish community. Instead of Traveller memorials being perceived as part of the civic history of a place, representing its diversity and change, Traveller respondents viewed cemeteries as private places for the families of the deceased, but shared spaces for both the Traveller and Settled communities:

No, I think [a cemetery is] private. I think it's private. When we go to a graveyard we go and look at all Travellers in the graveyard, if we never knew the Travellers. But know there's a Travellers grave we'd go and look at their grave, and bless their grave. (Mary)

Carole commented:

For the graveyards, it's probably the one leveller, you know. We're all the same, in the graveyard we're all the same. In fact I suppose we're more united in the graveyard than any place else. There's a man two plots down from my brother who was a big business man in Cork. We talk to his family standing by the grave. In any other context we would never meet or talk to each other. (Carole)

This first comment differs from the wider debate in literature about the public vis-à-vis private nature of graves in a public cemetery (Woodthorpe, 2010). Traveller graves are held in high regard by the Traveller community, and seen as their community space, rather than only private spaces of mourning for a family. Traveller graves connect the community to itself, giving memorials a different meaning and importance. Yet as the second comment explains, cemeteries are a shared space where the Traveller and Settled communities come together, despite potential conflict over memorial aesthetics and traditions.

The importance of proper memorialisation for Traveller communities demonstrates the different understandings of community held by nomadic (even if not 'on the road') communities as opposed to the sedentist majority/state. Their sense of place and belonging is not bounded by fixed notions of space be this at the city or country scale (Cork or Poland for example) but by the sense of Traveller identity and (extended) family pride. This reflects the mindset of nomadism discussed by

Delaney (2003) which sets Traveller identity apart from other national identities and demonstrates its significance for death, remembrance and memorialisation practices. The paper now reflects further on the experiences of these two communities for the ideas of identity and belonging discussed above.

## 8.7 Discussion: Identity and Acceptance in the Cemetery

Our exploratory research into cemeteries, bodily disposal and remembrance practices in Polish and Traveller communities in Cork reveals the multi-layered and hierarchical experience of having ritual and memorial traditions accepted in public cemeteries. Further, it demonstrates how whiteness is a differentiated experience; serving as routes into, or barriers to, acceptance and belonging. It also reveals the importance and complexity of cemeteries as public spaces, civic spaces and private emotional spaces.

Polish experience demonstrated how the institutional privileges of shared white Roman Catholicism allowed for matters of burial, bodily disposal and remembrance to be managed positively, and as a process in which those involved felt they had informed choices which allowed for their personal wishes and cultural heritage to be respected. Burial or cremation in Ireland is one choice, whereas repatriation, of a body or of ashes is also possible and supported notwithstanding relevant concerns about individuals' finances. Polish migrant culture is flexible enough to accommodate pragmatic and personal choice around place of burial and dispersal. When living as a migrant across two countries, place-based attachment could be expressed in either or both, with the dispersal options in Ireland not excluding or denying Polish heritage. Ireland's cultural as well as religious Roman Catholicism provided a general assumption of burial as preferred method of bodily disposal, and hence no issues of inequitable costs as seen elsewhere (see Maddrell et al., 2021 for a discussion of the impact of price rises on Muslim burial in Huddersfield) or fears of land shortages (see McManus, 2015). This was compounded by the institutional support of Polish priests as part of the Irish diocese. Further, there was a sense that an increased Polish presence, in life and death, would be a positive attribute to Irish cities, to increase their diversity and hence cosmopolitanism as new sites of immigration rather than emigration, though it remains to be seen whether this attitude will change over time. Here whiteness as a shared identity does not remove all differences between the Polish migrant community and the majority Irish community but our research also demonstrates the ease of accommodation of certain practices at least at the level of policy-makers and community representatives.

Traveller experience revealed the converse: whiteness and Roman Catholicism did not serve as privilege, or easy routes to acceptance, but instead can be seen as masking the discrimination and prejudice faced by the Traveller community. Institutional norms of memorialisation, codified in cemetery and memorial regulations, are expressed by the authorities as fairness and equality for all. The aim of cemetery managers in establishing these is to ensure that no-one is negatively

impacted by the behaviour and choices of those with rights to a neighbouring grave. In our research, these regulations have proved unproblematic for Polish migrants, as well as for the small but increasing number of Muslim burials in Cork, so these regulations are not necessarily to the detriment of accommodating the needs of all other groups. However, Traveller culture, and the attendant expression of this in wishes about memorialising deceased loved ones, are beyond the scope of acceptable normality as defined by the Cork burial authorities. This resonates with Traveller experience elsewhere, as Parker and McVeigh note: "Oversize memorials are also a common feature [of Traveller graves in England]; some of the largest cover multiple plots, while others contain vases, plaques and other graveside offerings that are positioned outside kerb boundaries – in contravention of cemetery regulations" (Parker & McVeigh, 2013, p. 305). They go on to offer an interesting explanation for this:

A further possibility is that the memorials have taken the place of expensive custom-built caravans as a medium for the expression of understandings of ethnicity, wealth and status. The growth in the size, expense and decoration of memorials with explicit expressions of Gypsy-Traveller identity has occurred at the same time as restrictions have been placed upon travelling, and the manufacture of custom-built caravans has ceased. The cemetery has now become one of the primary areas of interaction between different Gypsy-Traveller families, as well as between Gypsy-Travellers and non-Gypsies. As a consequence, *its importance in the negotiation of identity may have grown.* (Parker & McVeigh, 2013, p. 305, emphasis added)

This is interesting for two reasons which relate to the themes of this chapter. The first is that due to their status as a 'forgotten' minority, the Traveller community are often viewed as troublesome individuals rather than a group with distinct traditions and needs which could be accommodated within a framework of multiculturalism: their acceptance as an ethnic group as late as 2017 in Ireland supports this claim. The Traveller populations are small – less than 1% of Cork's population – and due to their whiteness can be overlooked as a minority that needs support through multicultural policies. Yet although overlooked in terms of superficially positive multicultural policy, the Traveller community are certainly not forgotten by authorities, who comment on and complain about Traveller behaviour.

Second, distinctions between the settled and Traveller communities may be sharply drawn by members of both groups, but their shared whiteness leads these differences to be framed differently than between a non-white racialised group. As Delaney (2003) argues, Travellers, because of their nomadism, were not seen as part of the Irish nationalist project. Moreover, their practices remain outside of the domestication of national space, and therefore are unacceptably alien (Hunter, 2016, following Hage, 1996). However, as they are spatially (and historically) located within Ireland, they do not have another national identity to claim. Instead, their sameness, or lack of different and explicit national identity, makes their claims to different needs for memorialisation less easy to define and justify. Instead, they could be classed as deviant individuals who will not follow codes which are set out on generalised principles of fairness (as expressed by Matthew Parris in the UK press, see Purdy-Moore, 2021). In turn, this accentuates feelings of fear and

defensiveness in Traveller communities, for whom maintaining their cultural identity becomes more important, and this is in turn again expressed through practices of memorialisation as one of the few publicly visible and lasting material edifices of their identity.

The notion of belonging as reciprocal is useful here to think about the implications and meaning of this more fully. As Clarke (2020) discussed (explored above), to belong you need to want to be part of the community in question, and it needs to want you as part of it. With the Polish community in Cork, this reciprocity of belonging appears to be evident; acceptance and integration are facilitated and welcomed, but not at the expense of loss of cultural heritage, reinforced in events such as the *Polska Eire Festival* which describes itself as “a nationwide celebration of Irish-Polish friendship and culture” (Polska Eire Festival, 2019). Being buried in Ireland with an epitaph in English, with Polish symbolism or noting of country of origin on the grave, appears to be a positive choice for those who wish it, and there are other options for those who do not. Traveller identity, on the other hand, stands firmly outside of such patterns of belonging. Traveller practices, although in so many ways the same Roman Catholic traditions, do not readily fit with official practices, and Travellers feel their identity threatened by calls to comply with regulations; seeing these as part of a legacy of assimilation rather than an opportunity to ‘belong’ and therefore even and fair policy for all cemetery users. This difference in experience of flexibility around death practices is shaped by Ireland as a country and its institutions, but very much about the communities themselves. The Polish community does not need to be defensive in its identity expression, as the advocacy organisation representative explained, they want to be integrated while not losing their heritage. Within the Traveller community there is a strong social pressure to conform to community tradition, even if this means financial debt. Therefore, some of the restriction of cultural hybridity comes from settled communities (regulations), some from Traveller communities (social pressure), and some comes from the interface of the two where their culture feels threatened and must be defended and strengthened. These differing views are reflected in the way cemetery space is perceived by both groups. Polish representatives see the emergence of more Polish memorials as a positive, diversifying claim on the public space of the cemetery and part of a process of settling, whilst Travellers see their memorials as deeply connected to identity, ancestry and place – a place to defend and celebrate their culture.

## 8.8 Conclusions

To conclude, we turn to questions of ‘deathscapes’ and of mobility and reflect on what our findings say to these wider debates and questions of belonging and exclusion. Within Cork’s cemeteries, whiteness operates in different ways, or the differentiated privileges of whiteness are revealed as patterns of inclusion and exclusion within this. Both accepted practices (burial in perpetuity, with marked graves) and established restrictions (heights of memorials, kerb marking) allow for the inclusion of diverse

peoples and practices, but remain based on cultural assumptions of 'normality' and attendant exclusions of deviant practice. These assumptions lie within sedentist notions of national identity and place-based belonging which in turn frame the importance of burial and the marking of graves in ways which are different to the views of Traveller communities. As Parker and McVeigh (2013) note in relation to experience in England, the cemetery therefore becomes one of the few places where the settled community and Traveller community encounter each other, and one of the few spaces where this differential identity can be performed or presented. It therefore becomes an arena of contested practices and contested belonging, unlike the Polish community whose diaspora identity seems to be managed and positively contained within Irish cemeteries, both accepting of and being accepted within majority practice (Parker & McVeigh, 2013, following Clarke, 2020).

Our research findings raise interesting points for reflection on the idea of mobilities and migrations, and how 'deathscapes' offer a unique and important lens in the understanding of these issues. The contrast between the Polish and Traveller communities in Cork reveal complexities around notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' woven together by Roman Catholicism, whiteness and ideas of national and internationalism. Moreover, it reveals the opportunities for and limits to the notion of belonging. Polish needs are framed within positive individual choices: ones where past and future, or hybrid identities can co-exist and their presence in cemeteries as public spaces are seen positively, reflecting Ireland's European and Internationalist status. The nomadism of the Traveller community, whether practiced in terms of caravan dwelling on the road or not, unsettles these notions of mobility. For Travellers, identity is not marked through language and national symbols but through a sense of respect for the deceased expressed by the scale of a memorial; something meaningful within the cultural expectations of this community, and necessarily different from that of the settled community. Ways of managing this are challenging, and call for deeper and different understandings of how identity is mediated through and by mobilities.

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# Chapter 9

## Co-creating and Co-producing Multicultural Cemeteries in Norway and Sweden: A Comparative Study with Insights from Drammen, Eskilstuna and Umeå



**Helena Nordh, Marianne Knapskog, Tanu Priya Uteng, and Carola Wingren**

The new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006) insists on understanding the varied nature of mobilities (social, political, economic, digital and physical), their mutual overlaps and assemblages of different factors to shed light on how and why mobilities continue to differ and how mobilities are being negotiated over time and space. The meta-dimension of mobility is put forth for further examination through the new mobilities paradigm. The frame of reference guiding these inquiries are rooted in appreciating the uneven distribution of power as production of mobilities often occur in a context of social and cultural difference within a systematically asymmetrical field of power (e.g., Cresswell, 2006). A parallel discussion on ‘place attachment and exclusion’ (Saar & Palang, 2009) and the ‘politics of belonging’ (Malone, 1999) digs into questions on who belongs and who does not belong to a place and ways in which ‘belongingness’ is under a continuous flux. People’s sense of rootedness and belonging is sometimes achieved by excluding others (Maddrell et al., 2021; Manzo, 2003) and conflicts related to questions on whose memories and history is preserved and why abound. A focused attention to mobilities and places and their mutual interlocking allows for understanding how intersectional identities are being formed, negotiated and contested across time and scale. As Marotta (2017) outlines, the articulation of ideas such as religiosity, difference, place, indigeneity,

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H. Nordh (✉) · C. Wingren

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,  
Uppsala, Sweden

e-mail: [helena.nordh@slu.se](mailto:helena.nordh@slu.se); [Carola.Wingren@slu.se](mailto:Carola.Wingren@slu.se)

M. Knapskog

Department of Mobility and Organisation, Institute of Transport Economics, Oslo, Norway

e-mail: [Marianne.Knapskog@toi.no](mailto:Marianne.Knapskog@toi.no)

T. Priya Uteng

Regional Planning, Tourism and Culture Studies, Department of Mobility and Organisation,  
Institute of Transport Economics (TØI), Oslo, Norway

e-mail: [tpu@toi.no](mailto:tpu@toi.no)

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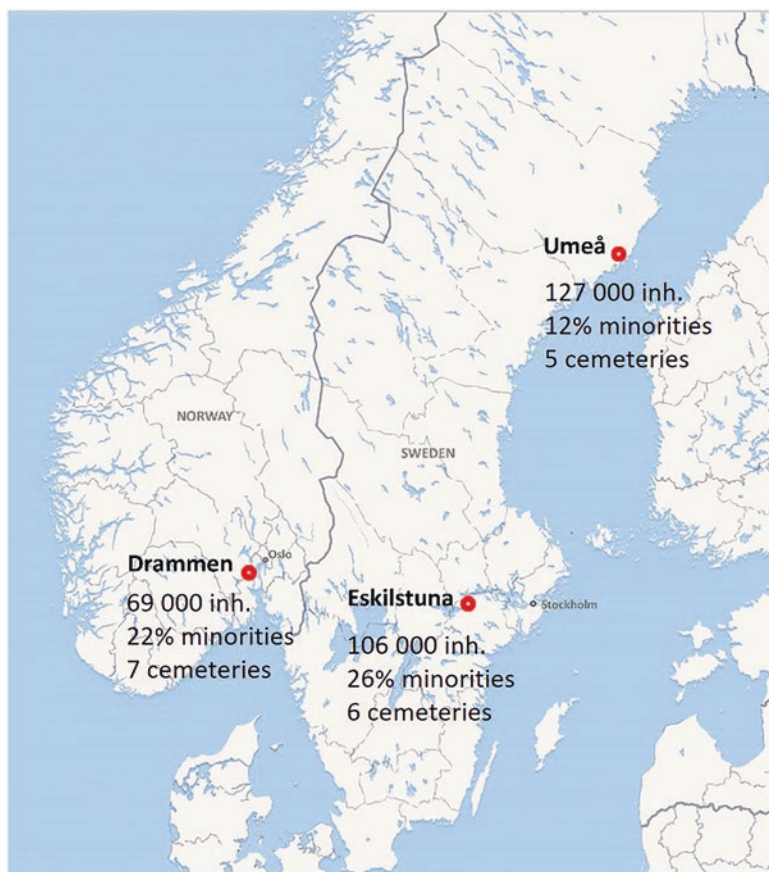
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digitalisation and the ways in which they are played out in a neo-liberal and global age deserves further attention. Passi's (2001) discussion on migration politics and refugee problem in the light of place identity is of special relevance here. Management of death-related practices, when migrants vie for symbolic capital in an already established regime, provides an opportunity for sharpening public policies which need to bring together (material, digital and symbolic) mobilities-migration-multiculturalism and inclusive place-making exercises.

Scandinavian societies are often referred to as secular societies in which religion, though not spirituality, is losing ground (Bäckström, 2017; Høeg & Pajari, 2013; Kjærsgaard, 2013). However, when death occurs, the caretaking of bodily remains is mainly processed and performed in cemeteries and crematoria owned by religious organisations (the Church of Sweden or the Church of Norway, both Evangelical Lutheran; see Nordh et al., 2021). This means that both private performers of funeral services as well as citizens using them need to cope with a situation where cultural and religious needs are met by an organisation based on Christian foundations. In both countries, immigration is on the rise resulting in an increasingly higher number of non-Christian burials. This necessitates studies of cultural and religious diversity at the cemeteries, in the crematoria and in funeral practices. In Scandinavia, so far little attention has been paid to diversity in 'death practices.' In other parts of Europe, such as the UK, focus has been put on issues and challenges around burial provision in multicultural societies, highlighting a lack of knowledge among stakeholders about minorities needs, and ways in which 'diversity within diversity' can be found within religious communities (Maddrell et al., 2018). Furthermore, a study by Maddrell et al. (2021) addresses the consequences for individual mourners when their religious or cultural needs cannot be fulfilled.

In this chapter, we analyse the level of preparedness of the cemeteries in a sample of Norwegian and Swedish case towns from the perspective of cultural and religious diversity (see Fig. 9.1 and Table 9.1). The cases have been selected as examples of how medium-size towns, outside the metropolitan areas in Scandinavia, are dealing with issues around multicultural cemeteries. Building knowledge on how to meet the needs of burial provision, and death practices at large, within a multicultural urban society is an urgent task considering the fast changing demographics caused by unprecedented international mobility of recent decades. Such knowledge is valuable to practice, not least since burial practices outside a nation's context is usually scarce (Walters, 2005) which might imply difficulties when planning for inclusive, multicultural cemeteries.

In this chapter, we not only focus on minorities (spatial) needs at cemeteries and crematoria, but also explore if, how and when minorities are involved in the planning and management of cemeteries and crematoria. Among spatial planning practitioners, ways to actively involve citizens in providing public welfare services and in solving problems and challenges has been a major interest, evolving from positive notions regarding participatory planning to more nuanced theories of co-creation, co-production and consensus building at all levels of planning (Forester, 1999; Innes & Booher, 2018; Sandercock, 2000; Torfing et al., 2016). In this study,



**Fig. 9.1** An overview of the cases based on census data from 2019

we build on the topic of spatial planning, management and design of cemeteries and crematoria considering increasingly multicultural societies in Norway and Sweden. Our aim is to broaden the understanding on the spatial and processual situations which need further attention in cemetery practice, to actualise inclusive approaches within multicultural societies.

## 9.1 Theoretical Framework

The ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) provides the much-needed intellectual vigour, vocabulary and approaches to study the emerging and evolving relationships between migrants, places vis-à-vis spaces and the unfolding of multicultural societies. Situated within the broad framework of

**Table 9.1** Presentation of the case studies. In 2020, Drammen municipality merged with two neighbouring municipalities; however, we report on the number of inhabitants from 2019, at the time when the interviews for this study were conducted

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### **Drammen**

Drammen is a Norwegian municipality with 69,000 inhabitants, of which 22% have a minority background (foreign-born). The Polish (12.4%) and Turkish (7.7%) communities constitute the biggest groups (Statistics Norway, 2019). Drammen, located in the metropolitan area of Oslo, is an important and vital part of Oslo's functional region. As in most Norwegian municipalities, the funeral services (cremation, burial, management of cemeteries etc.) are operated by the Norwegian Church. Drammen has one crematorium, located at one of the central cemeteries. In 2019, cremation rate in Drammen was 78%, which is one of the highest in the country (Norsk Forening for Gravplasskultur, 2020). There are seven cemeteries in the town, of which four are located around a churches, one of these are located approximately fifteen minutes' drive outside the center in a rural area; note this is the only cemetery that facilitates for Muslim burial in Drammen.

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### **Eskilstuna**

Eskilstuna is a Swedish municipality, with 106,000 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden, 2020b). In 2019, 26% of the inhabitants had minority background, of these people from Iraq (20.8%) and Finland (14.5%) formed the biggest groups. Eskilstuna is located in the central part of Sweden, about an hour drive from Stockholm. The funeral services are operated by the Church of Sweden. Cremation statistics from 2018 shows a cremation rate of 92% (Sveriges Kyrkogårds och Krematorieförbund, 2019). The parish of Eskilstuna has six cemeteries, of which two are the main town cemeteries and four are remote cemeteries located around rural churches. There is one crematorium in Eskilstuna, and it is located at one of the town cemeteries.

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### **Umeå**

In the end of 2019, Umeå municipality had 128,901 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden, 2020b). About 12% of its inhabitants has a minority background (Statistics Sweden, 2020a). People from Finland (13.5%) and Iraq (6%) constitute the main minority groups. The funeral services are operated by the Church of Sweden. In 2018, cremation rate was 83% (Sveriges Kyrkogårds och Krematorieförbund, 2019). There are five cemeteries in the Umeå parish, out of which one is located in a nearby town and another is located about ten minutes' drive outside the town center. There is one crematorium in Umeå, located at one of the main cemeteries.

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mobilities is the theme of 'material mobilities' (Jensen et al., 2019) which further insists on merging the materiality and mobility foci to develop a nuanced and better understanding of the role of place, matter, architecture and politics of sentiments as not simply given, but also designed with more or less hidden agendas and human consequences (Bille, 2019, p. xv). 'The turn to the material further problematises the modern binary distinctions between humans and non-humans, subjects and objects, and culture and nature' (Jensen, et al., 2019, p. 2). The cemetery infrastructures and associated materiality are increasingly becoming important sites for people's everyday lives as performed through social and cultural encounters, emotions, atmospheres and resistance. Through these performative iterations, the materiality of cemeteries can provide knowledge on the interrelationship between embodied practices and physical infrastructure. Unpacking these interrelationships can sensitise a host of actors working with cemeteries at various scales and levels.

Further on, studying cemeteries provides an opportunity to explore their emerging roles in addressing diversity and possibly challenge the traditional landscape designs which are usually associated with this category of public space. Positioned within this framework, we begin by reviewing the cemetery studies literature with a particular focus on the Scandinavian context. This is followed by a section on co-creation and co-production, which are the theoretical concepts of collaborative governance which we use to frame the discussion.

### ***9.1.1 Design, Management and Use of Cemeteries in Scandinavia***

Norway and Sweden share many similarities both within and beyond the governance and organisation of funeral service practices. In the year 2000 in Sweden and 2012 in Norway, the Churches of Sweden and Norway respectively receded their governance powers as ‘national churches.’ Funeral services in these two countries, however, is still principally operated by the Christian churches, which effectively means that both cemeteries and crematoria belong to the churches. Even if members of the Swedish and Norwegian Churches are decreasing, most funerals (in Sweden 75%, in Norway 85.5%) are still performed in accordance with Christian traditions (Statistics Norway, 2020; Sveriges Aukoriserade Begravningsbyråer, 2020).

Previous research presents the Scandinavian model for cemeteries and crematoria as an institutional religious model (Walter, 2005), organised initially around the individual church parish (Kjøller, 2012). Since the twentieth century, there has been a change from the conceptual framing of a graveyard to a cemetery. The old logic – one church, one churchyard – has been expanded with the logic of a cemetery as something set aside from the church itself. Another change is that in later years, the Norwegian and Swedish Churches, the governments and especially the citizens, have progressively redefined the urban cemeteries as green, recreational spaces with unique qualities (for example, tranquillity), compared to other urban green spaces such as parks (Cerwén et al., 2017; Grabalov & Nordh, 2020; Nordh et al., 2017; Nordh & Evensen, 2018; Peterson et al., 2018; Skår et al., 2018). On a detailed level, several Scandinavian researchers (Grabalov & Nordh, 2020; Petersson et al., 2018; Skår et al., 2018; Wingren, 2013) as well as scholars from the UK (McClymont, 2016; Woodthorpe, 2011) describe the variety of functions urban cemeteries can have. But as Skår et al. (2018) state, even if there is a secondary function as public space for reflection, recreation, and cultural encounters, the primary purpose of the cemetery is to be a burial ground and a place for mourning.

Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou (2000, p. 34) observed that ‘cemetery behaviour – notably that of people who visit graves – has been overlooked by most Western scholars seeking to examine and understand their own society.’ Even if we have seen an increased number of studies focusing on cemetery use and practices in

both Scandinavia and Europe, there is still a gap to fill specifically from a multicultural perspective. In a Norwegian case study of various religious and non-religious communities' needs, Swensen and Skår (2018) point to a number of differences between communities, but they also show that what bridges the communities are human compassion and understanding of differences. Agrawal and Baratt (2014) contend that the importance of mundane, everyday encounters simply cannot be overlooked for strengthening communication and understanding between people. To this end, there is a need to explore ways to strengthen religious and cultural diversity from the bottom-up. It is here that taking a macroscopic approach in understanding the variations in practices and usage across cultures and religions becomes essential, as it allows for creating public spaces to become sites for everyday encounters which could potentially lead to strengthened communication and understanding between people.

### ***9.1.2 Co-creation and Co-production in Cemetery Management***

We frame this chapter around the concepts of co-creation and co-production, which here refer to the various ways citizens engage in and are involved in the planning, design and management of cemeteries. The terms are often used interchangeably; however, in an attempt to scrutinise the difference Brandsen and Honingh (2018, p. 13) explain that 'when citizens are involved in the general planning of a service – perhaps even initiating it – then this is co-creation, whereas if they shape the service during later phases of the cycle it is co-production.' Co-creation and co-production can be understood as forms of collaborative governance, mediating the production of public value, innovation and experiments in governance (Torfing et al., 2016; Weber & Khademian, 2008). They can work as a means to attain social goals more efficiently, while they also bear the potential to strengthen democracy by including a broader set of stakeholders. Jedan et al. (2020, p. 452) refer to co-creation when describing the different parties (e.g., users, religious communities, funeral industry) involved in shaping the cemetery as a ritual space. The authors stress the importance of balance between the parties involved in the process and describe how cemeteries are not only ritual spaces but spaces that 'evoke, produce and maintain communities,' hence are important spaces in multicultural societies.

The domain of both research and practice of co-creation and co-production offers a grounded perspective to look upon the ongoing changing processes of cemetery practices in Sweden and Norway. By solving specific issues in successive iterations, bereaved citizens, religious communities, funeral service providers, and church employees in towns are co-producing new practices 'on the move', and one can observe these different types of experimentations taking place.

## 9.2 Method

The study employs a combined methodology, merging analyses from reviewing the national burial acts, and interviewing stakeholders involved in funeral or cemetery services in the three towns.

The national burial acts from both countries (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996; Ministry of Culture, 1990) were carefully scanned for topics related to minority groups or religious or cultural diversity. Relevant sections were marked and pasted in a table to conduct cross-comparisons among the two countries and colour coded manually.

Interviews were conducted between November 2019 and February 2020 and lasted for approximately sixty minutes each. All interviews were recorded and transcribed after permission from the informant (the study is approved by national ethical committees in both countries). A total of 28 stakeholders were interviewed. We initially targeted similar kinds of informants across the three cases, however some variations were subsequently accommodated owing to the contextual and structural differences between the cases. The set of stakeholders comprises cemetery or crematorium managers/workers (N = 9), funeral service providers (N = 4), national or local burial advisors (N = 3) and planners/landscape architects (N = 2). Finding representatives of minority communities who were willing to participate proved to be a challenge, but representatives from the following communities were interviewed: Bahá'í, Catholic, Christian, Hindu and Muslim (N = 10). We also included representatives from the Humanist organisation, a significant secular organisation which has a relatively high number of members, particularly in Norway, and which has had an impact on the overall secularisation of funeral services.

The analysis of interviews builds on a qualitative content analysis (Barbour, 2014) using the software Atlas.ti in which all coding was done manually (list coding). During the analysis, new codes emerged and were subsequently added. Here, we focus on the analysis of the codes that were relevant for this book chapter: *communities* (information on communities (religious or cultural) and their wishes/needs); *inclusion/exclusion* (information on how people's needs are included or excluded in the planning or management of cemeteries or funerals); *cooperation* (this code partly overlaps with inclusion/exclusion, but focuses on partnerships or cooperation with other parties, such as funeral directors, community groups, the municipality), and *cemetery sections* (special graves for religious or cultural communities). We began broadly (using Atlas.ti) by selecting all quotations from cemetery or crematoria managers, funeral service providers, local/national burial advisors and landscape architects/planners involving the code *communities*. We added another layer and explored what the same group of stakeholders said about *inclusion/exclusion* or *cooperation* with communities across the two countries. Thereafter we explored if the community leaders/representatives brought up anything about inclusion/exclusion or cooperation in the interviews.



## 9.3 Results

### 9.3.1 National Legal Frameworks and Agencies

In both countries, there are principally three types of acts that impact the coalescing of policies guiding development of cemeteries and multicultural societies: the burial acts (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996; Ministry of Culture, 1990), the planning and building acts (Ministry of Finance, 2010; Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2008) and the acts for faith communities (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996; Ministry of Culture, 1998). Furthermore, in both countries, the cultural heritage act (Ministry of Climate and Environments, 1978; Ministry of Culture, 1988) also has a major influence on cemeteries, specifically in relation to protection and limiting changes that can be allowed in cemeteries.

On assessing the Swedish and Norwegian burial acts, we notice that they share many similarities, but there are important differences as well. The Norwegian act already acknowledges in the first sentence that ‘burial must be made with respect for the religion or life philosophy of the dead’ (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996). Such a precise goal related to religion and philosophy is not found in the Swedish burial act where there is only a general writing about the need to follow the burial wishes of the deceased. However, both acts make allowances for registered religious communities to apply for running ‘private’ cemeteries, but it is not a common practice. Additionally, both acts acknowledge that the organisation responsible for burial services must offer special graves for those who do not belong to the Christian church. In practice, this means that several municipalities offer special sections for religious communities. The Norwegian burial act states that if the parish cannot offer special graves, they must cover costs for burial in other parishes/municipalities. The Norwegian act also states that ‘religious or faith communities that have a presence in the area must be given the opportunity to conduct a ceremony when a new cemetery is about to open’ (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996, §5). The statement above includes faith communities as well and is not restricted to only religious communities. In the Swedish burial act, we do not find similar statements. Pertaining to cooperation or inclusion of religious communities, the burial acts differ which has resulted in different approaches being adopted in the two countries. In Sweden, the act states that

when a congregation [the Swedish Church] is the head of the funeral service, the county administration must appoint a funeral advisor obliged to review how the congregation includes the interests of the people who do not belong to the Swedish Church. (Ministry of Culture, 1990, ch.10.2)

In Norway, the act does not set similar requirements so there is no reviewing authority and no requirement for coordination or inclusion of other than Christian beliefs at the national level. Instead, the municipality is given the task to coordinate local needs:

The municipal representative responsible for management of burial activities in the municipality should, on an annual basis, invite religious and belief communities active in the municipality, to a meeting to discuss how to safeguard the needs of the religious and belief communities in the burial services. (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996, §23)

Since burial and cremation is usually operated by the church, the municipal representative comes from the church. Criticism has been directed towards the Norwegian Church for not running these meetings regularly (Gran, 2019). There has also been a pressure in Norway to change the burial act so that municipalities, instead of the Church, can be assigned the responsibility of organising the burial services (Ministry of Children and Families, 2020). Such changes would herald a major step towards the processes and aims of secularisation in Norway. This essentially means that the Norwegian Church would lose its monopoly over administrative and decision-making practices in conducting the funeral services.

In both countries, securing enough space for graves and deciding the location of new burial grounds is undertaken at a local municipal level through mutual cooperation between the municipality and the church. Further, the planning and building acts regulate all planning processes, in which participation is an important component, in both countries. Additionally, in Norway, participation is influenced by the anti-discrimination act securing the possibility for everyone, including minority groups, to participate in the planning process (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2014). The Norwegian planning and building act requires the municipality to have a plan to secure public commitments including space for graves in long-term spatial planning. In Drammen, the Norwegian Church, together with key representatives from various active faith communities in the municipality, developed such a plan in 2015 (Norwegian Church, 2015).

Interest groups for cemeteries and crematoria which operate in the public sphere, though not formalised through the burial acts, can be found in both Norway and Sweden. For example, the *Nordic Network for Cemeteries and Crematoria* is one such interest group.<sup>1</sup> They regularly organise activities and share experiences across all five Nordic countries. In Sweden, there is a governmental agency called the *Swedish Agency for Support for Faith Communities* under the Swedish Ministry of Culture, and according to its webpage 'its mission is to promote dialogue between the government and faith communities in Sweden as well as to contribute to knowledge about religion.' The Agency is also responsible for allocating grants to faith communities. In Norway, no such governmental supporting body is currently in place. However, there is a national burial advisor responsible for questions governing cemeteries including minorities needs. Further, similar to the Swedish policy, registered faith communities can apply for economic support from the state (Ministry of Children and Families, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://gravplasskultur.no/nordisk/>

### 9.3.2 *Key Themes from the Analyses of Stakeholder Interviews*

Analysis of selected quotations from the stakeholder interviews resulted in the following four main categories: (i) presence of diversity, (ii) accommodation of needs, (iii) cooperation with minorities, and (iv) reflections over special graves or cemetery sections for minorities; these are presented in the subheadings below.

#### **Presence of Diversity**

The interviews revealed that, despite relatively high number of immigrants across the Scandinavian case towns, there was little evidence of religious or cultural diversity at the cemeteries, in the crematoria or funeral practices. According to funeral service providers in the Swedish cases, Christian funerals cover around 80–90% of workload, another 10% was non-religious ceremonies and only a small share represented other beliefs. As one of the cemetery managers from Umeå described:

When one receives the funeral confirmations or meetings, one has [with relatives] to choose the burial plot, then there is almost never anyone from another country, with only a few exceptions. (Laila, cemetery manager from Umeå)<sup>2</sup>

Despite some typical burial traditions within certain religious communities, the funeral service providers highlighted that variations were mainly about the details. Klas and Per, two Swedish funeral service providers in Eskilstuna, discussed their experiences with diversity in funeral ceremonies:

It refers to the details in the ceremony. For example, there is incense, that we never use in a Swedish Christian ceremony. And the priests [Christian orthodox] use their native language, so to say. So we do not really understand what they say. But there are mostly details in the ceremony that differ, I think. (Klas, funeral service provider)

So it does not affect us that much, we do not have any specific employee for those funerals, we are so small that everyone has to do everything. So we learn the small differences there are, and we adapt to it. (Per, funeral service provider)

Funeral service providers are the key actors, and they are the ones who must find solutions catering to individual needs. Cemetery managers or workers are much less in contact with the bereaved family, hence are not always aware of communities' specific needs. A cemetery worker from Drammen described that they, as cemetery workers, were rarely in contact with the families, but there could be practical issues related to ceremonies, such as covering the coffin with soil, that could affect how they have to prepare for a funeral.

In all the cases, the crematorium were in the same building as a chapel or ceremony room for funerals. This means that in those places, crematorium workers were

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<sup>2</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant.

also responsible for preparing the chapels for funeral ceremonies. In these instances, the crematorium managers had more contact with the bereaved family. Additionally, crematorium managers contacted the family when cremation was done, and ashes ready to be buried. There were sometimes also a few family members, primarily from the Hindu community, who wanted to be at the crematorium when the coffin was inserted into the oven. Hence, crematorium managers had some experiences with managing diversity. However, as mentioned before, diversity was not necessarily connected to a particular religion or ethnicity, it could be individual needs or wishes as well. To facilitate participation, some measures had been made at the crematorium such as seating near the oven where families could gather. In some crematoria, families could follow the cremation behind a window, while in other crematoria, they could interact and even ‘push the button’ to insert the coffin into the oven. In Eskilstuna, they provided a metal box/tray that Hindus or Sikhs could use to do a symbolic ceremony like burning clothes or memory objects in the outdoors during cremation.

Despite some cemetery sections being reserved for certain religious communities, there was relatively little diversity at cemeteries with regards to headstones, planting and decorations. However, St. Eskil cemetery in Eskilstuna stands out a bit; for example, here a significant proportion of graves have Finish names, mirroring the high percentage of Finns in the municipality. Even if there was no special section for the Finns, most of them had chosen to be buried next to each other creating a kind of ‘Finish section.’ A similar unplanned ‘Asian section’ and ‘Orthodox section’ was also found at the cemetery.

### **Accommodation of Needs**

Throughout the transcripts, we find examples of quotations describing how the stakeholders try to accommodate individual’s or community’s needs. The funeral service providers stress the importance of meeting the needs of their customers, and even among the cemetery managers, there are several examples of how they are trying to meet the needs of everyone. The following quotation from Gudrun (fictive name) a cemetery manager in Umeå describes how they try to incorporate the needs of the Muslim community while developing a new section for Muslim burial at one of the cemeteries:

It is their wish. They do not want to mix. And for the Muslims, it was very important to have a separate entrance, not having to pass through other cemetery sections. And we have taken that into account [...]. And they wished that we should not use signs, nothing that shows the direction of their section. They do not want us to show it on a map, because they have had bad experiences with it. And then of course, we will listen to it. (Gudrun, cemetery manager)

One of the landscape architects we interviewed had been involved in developing cemetery sections for religious communities in Eskilstuna as well as in other places in Sweden. She affirmed the inclusive approach she had experienced among cemetery managers. She also raised a concern about cemetery managers being ‘too’

inclusive or accommodating in meeting minorities needs, as it could conflict with overarching goals, for example, issues of sustainable use of grave space. Even if a general agreement and consensus was noticed among the stakeholders about the importance of facilitating religious or cultural needs, there was usually a ‘but’ or ‘if’ attached to the statements. Such hesitations often relate to restrictions imposed by national or local rules, security for cemetery workers or availability of burial spaces. The following quotation from a cemetery manager from Umeå illustrates this point:

We really try to meet everyone’s needs, but sometimes we cannot accommodate everything because of soil conditions or other aspects.(Gudrun, cemetery manager)

Interviews also provided examples of innovative solutions or practices provided by the cemetery managers or funeral service providers locally in cooperation with the communities. These could be rebuilding crematoria for making them more accessible to visitors, marking the direction of Mecca on the floor in the chapel, or accommodating Muslim burial wishes to bury without a coffin (which is against Norwegian burial practice) through placing the coffin upside down, on top of the dead, as a kind of cover.

In both countries, some communities raised concerns about the time consuming bureaucracy that hindered the communities to perform their rituals as soon as possible after death. Muhammed (fictive name), a Swedish Muslim community representative describes how members from his community have adapted their needs and that they now, after many years in Sweden, understand the bureaucratic details of the country.

I think that most who are born and raised here, ... they have adapted a bit to the Swedish model. They realise the hopelessness once they understand the number of forms that has to be filled in. Paperwork, well well, it is important, they understand so to speak. (Muhammed, Muslim community representative)

### **Cooperation with Minorities**

As described in the Norwegian burial act, the cemetery management should invite active religious and belief communities within the municipalities to yearly meetings to discuss their needs and wishes. In Drammen, this seemed to work relatively well, only one of the community representatives brought up that they have not heard about these meetings. However, the cemetery managers and burial service advisor did report difficulties associated with finding representatives from various communities. In Drammen, as well as in Umeå, we noticed as well that some communities were more engaged than others in discussions around burial services. These were mainly the Humanist and Muslim communities. In addition to inviting communities, the cemetery management in Drammen also invited funeral service providers to these regular meetings. In Sweden, the approach was different, and cooperation with communities, rather than being a routine, was established if needed such as when establishing specific (religious) cemetery sections.

The Swedish Church's representative from Eskilstuna mentioned that they conducted regular meetings, and not surprisingly, the Christian community was more involved. Some of the community representatives we talked to had been in direct contact with the cemetery management when developing special sections for religious communities at the cemeteries. Most of them had a positive experience and did not report any kind of exclusion, rather the contrary. However, one of the community representatives, Alem (fictive name), from Drammen expressed concerns as Muslims are currently not allowed raised grave beds. When the researcher asked if the concern had been discussed with the cemetery management, the response of the Muslim representative was as following:

Yes, this concern has been raised but when it comes to this issue, they do not want to listen. Because everything is about money, it is all about the budget. But we do not have to go very far, for example in our neighbouring country Sweden, in Malmö, there Muslim sections are allowed, and in other small towns as well in Sweden. There one has been allowed to make a raised grave bed and have flowers and all that. Simply because of respect. And I think the cemetery management in Norway should understand this. In this situation, in a way, everything cannot be measured in money. (Alem, Muslim representative)

Some of the community representatives we talked to did not have a special grave or section at the cemeteries. When we asked about this, it had not been an issue or even discussed within the community. However, it seemed that our question raised some thoughts about potential possibilities.

### Reflections on Special Graves or Cemetery Sections for Minorities

Four of the cemeteries in the case towns offered special graves for religious communities (see Figs. 9.2, 9.3, and 9.4): in Drammen: Muslim burial; in Eskilstuna: Muslim, Bahá'í, and Mande sections; in Umeå: Bahá'í Catholic, and Muslim sections. In all the cases, the special graves (sections) were located at the outskirts of the cemetery (see Fig. 9.5).

We asked both cemetery managers and representatives of religious communities about benefits of having special sections at the cemetery. Here are some reflections from Anna (fictive name), a cemetery manager/worker:

Anna: The benefits, I assume, are the benefits for the relatives. Because, since we have various beliefs, and Muslims have, contrary to Christians or others, another way of decorating their graves. That I have experienced. And they can mark the grave space with a frame, so that one should not step on the grave. So, they put stones around the whole burial plot. It is a benefit to them, but it can be unfavourable for us when maintaining the site.

Researcher: Are they allowed to do so?

Anna: Strictly speaking, no. They must follow the rules for the cemetery. So, when I notice that they have started to make frames, walls you know, making such things, then I confront my boss and he passes it forward to his boss who approaches the relatives by letter. It is not always they do anything about it or respect it. So, it is in a way a separate section where more is allowed as compared to the other parts of the cemetery.



**Fig. 9.2** The Muslim section at St Eskil's cemetery in Eskilstuna. (Photograph by authors)



**Fig. 9.3** The Bahá'í section at Röbäck cemetery in Umeå. (Photograph by authors)

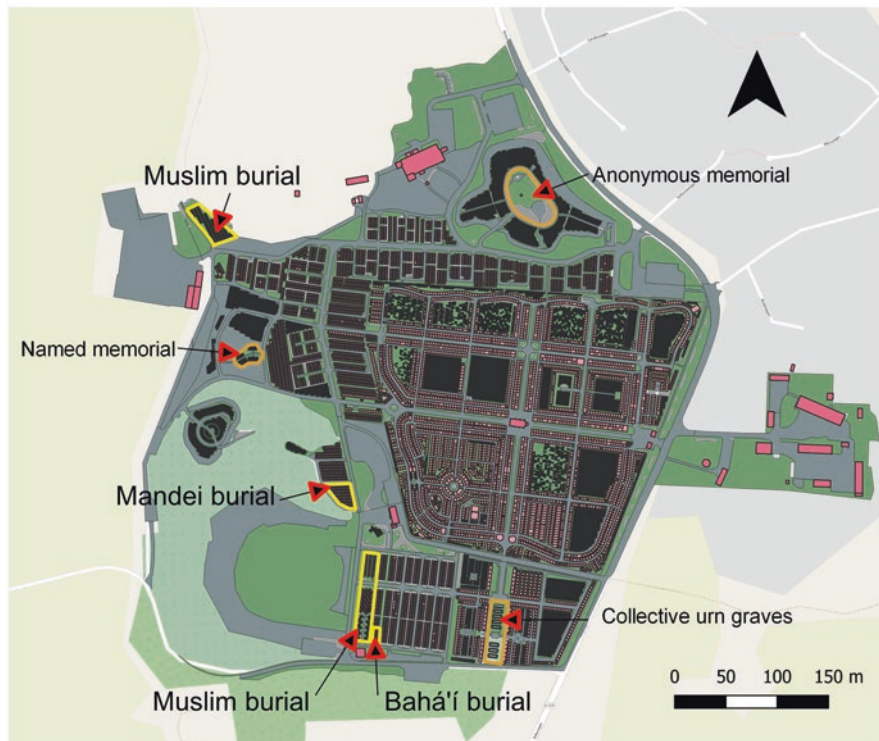


**Fig. 9.4** The section at Skoger cemetery in Drammen that provides Muslim burial. (Photograph by authors)

The frames around the Muslim graves was a recurrent topic in the interviews. We noticed varying approaches across the municipalities and cemeteries we studied. Some were more lenient and allowed frames around the graves, while others were stricter. As we see in the quote above, dilemmas around resources for management of Muslim cemetery sections arose since frames around graves demand more manual work when mowing the lawn at the cemetery. Some of our interviewees brought up challenges related to the variations across the country in understanding of minorities burial practices.

It is evident in the collected material that meeting the needs of different communities remains a key priority. However, in Drammen, providing a cemetery section for a religious community is related to a ‘critical mass’ of members from the community (The Norwegian Church, 2015). While in Sweden, the cemetery managers allow sections/special graves even with only a few burials. For example, the Bahá’í sections in Eskilstuna and Umeå house two and one grave respectively. At some places, we got the impression that understanding of varied traditions in burial practices had changed towards a more inclusive approach. For example, in Skoger cemetery in Drammen, there is an old Muslim section where the graves are not directed towards Mecca. Nowadays, it is unlikely that such an important detail, as the direction of graves, would not be facilitated for (Fig. 9.5).





**Fig. 9.5** A map of St Eskil cemetery in Eskilstuna. As can be seen there are special sections dedicated for some beliefs located in the outskirts of the cemetery. The graves in the other parts are mainly Christian but there is also a mix of other beliefs or non-beliefs representing the mix of people in the society as well as co-creation taking place locally

## 9.4 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have presented how the Swedish and Norwegian society, through cemetery and crematoria managerial practices and national legislation, address diversity. We have also touched upon cemetery use, design and planning in these countries. It is important to emphasise that the empirical data from the case towns is not representative at national levels, especially not for the bigger cities, and cannot be used for generalising but can be utilised to develop the complex and diverse picture that multicultural cemetery and crematoria practices entail. The discussion is framed by the terms co-creation and co-production within the following perspectives: (i) development of multicultural cemetery practices, (ii) interpretation and development in a post-secular society, and (iii) collaboration and co-operation with minority groups to develop new practices.

### ***9.4.1 Development of Multicultural Cemetery Practices***

As evidenced in this paper, and addressed elsewhere (Maddrell et al., 2018), there is limited knowledge about minorities needs in relation to burial practices. Instead, cemetery practices are based on country's burial acts, but just as much influenced by the local reactions to upcoming problems and possibilities within these situations. Solutions seem to be principally based either on interaction between individual users through their representatives and the managerial staff, or in relation to the managerial staff's interpretation of how economic limitations can meet legal requirements and their assumptions of which needs should be the most important to take care of. As a result, decisions can be very different from town to town and especially from town to bigger city, which consequently means that the possibilities for citizens to fulfil their burial needs may differ quite a lot within the countries (c.f., Nordh et al., 2021). Therefore, there is an urgent need for an informed strategic development (on national or on Scandinavian level) for dealing with religious and cultural diversity within cemetery and crematoria practices. In the case towns, we found examples of co-creation, where community groups or engaged citizens and mourners initiate cooperation with local authorities and request their religious or cultural needs to be met through cemetery management practices. An example is the specific cemetery sections that were established across the cases due to active local community groups. We also find examples of co-production where communities in cooperation with cemetery management find solutions to accommodate religious and cultural needs without violating existing laws and regulations for example, making available a metal box/tray that Hindus or Sikhs can use to perform a symbolic ceremony outdoors during cremation. We also found examples when citizens themselves take actions without cooperating with the managers, such as putting up benches next to graves or installing sun-driven spot lights in trees at dark places in the cemetery. These examples point towards the resultant ethical concerns for cemetery managers as and when they decide on the future of such installations.

### ***9.4.2 Interpretation and Development in a Post-secular Society***

Norway and Sweden have emerged as secularised and individualised countries (Kjærsgaard, 2013). To cite Pettersson (2011, p. 131) 'the state [Sweden] is ideologically secular although in many ways religion is integrated in social practice.' This means that there exist many different approaches to what could be described as the sacred in life. Especially the Humanist organisation is a strong voice and driving force (especially in Norway, where it has 98,000 members and is one of the largest communities apart from the Norwegian Church) to push towards a more secular or neutral cemetery practice through provision of facilities like symbol free chapels or ceremony rooms. Still, burial practices are to a high extent based within the purview

of the Christian traditions, even if actual members formally registered with the Swedish and Norwegian Churches are lower (it is to be noted that there is a slight discrepancy between Sweden and Norway here; in Sweden, 56% are members of the Swedish Church, whereas in Norway 69% are members of the Norwegian Church; see Statistics Norway, 2020; Swedish Church, 2019). This shows a hegemonic order, where the dominant practice is accepted and sometimes even used without questioning it by newcomers or minorities. This can also be seen in the material presented in this study where it has been difficult to recruit informants from minorities and where relatively little multicultural imprints can be seen in the case town cemeteries compared to the number of migrants in the municipality.

Both the Norwegian and the Swedish burial acts (Ministry of Children and Families, 1996; Ministry of Culture, 1990) clearly specify the need for the Churches of Sweden and Norway to respond to specific religious or cultural needs that are not covered by the Churches' original practices or traditions. However, the results from the case studies, as well as from another Scandinavian study (e.g., Hadders, 2021), show a difference in interpretation of how and to what extent these needs should or can be met, resulting in an unequal situation. There is clearly an urgent need for developing interpretations of the current laws to stress on the quotient of equality the laws originally allow for. At the same time, it is important to generate discussions on how a seemingly diminishing Christian influence on burial and ritual practices and a growing need for other sacral traditions can be integrated and developed side by side to avoid marginalisation, fear or stigmatisation in future practices at cemeteries and crematoria.

### ***9.4.3 Collaboration and Co-operation with Minority Groups to Develop New Practices***

The results highlight a need for discussions between the burial providers (the churches) and people who use the cemeteries and crematoria for burial, rituals, mourning and memorialisation. There is a need for co-creation and co-production at different levels, at the local level with mourners and communities, and at the national level with representatives of communities. There is of course an economic side of offering different services, but if funding is scarce as is the reality in many municipalities, it is even more important to adjust services to specific and most urgent needs, such as the issues raised around providing frames and raised Muslim graves. Today the services provided are on one side based on needs developed through Christian practices and traditions, and on the other, on assumptions on the death practices of different minorities and their needs as collective communities. This means that there is a tendency that even if one understands the diversity within Christian cultural practices, diversity within other cultures is not explored or asked for in the same manner. Research indicates the importance of diversity within communities (c.f., Maddrell et al., 2018). For example, Beebeejaun (2012, p. 546) asks

for a more open debate about what diversity could be, which involves nuances more than ‘rose-tinted spectacles of participatory theorists, and without signing up to implicitly racist suspicion of ‘other’ cultures.’ This implies that co-creation and co-production processes and discussions with different minorities must include not only religious community leaders but different people or groups within the communities and people with different ethnicities as burial practices may be equally dependent on culture. And not least as Brandsen, Steen and Vershuere (2018, p. 5) point out when referring to participation that ‘citizens without the necessary cultural capital are still likely to be excluded,’ pinpointing the necessity for finding appropriate methods for co-creation and co-production.

The case of Norway and Sweden highlights that death-related practices are mobile and prone to changes both due to external and internal forces. There is a cluster of factors affecting the changing landscape of practices at cemeteries and crematoria ranging from social, political, economic, to the physical availability, provision and management of space. The concept of time-space, meaning-making and material mobilities borrowed from the domain of mobilities studies and ‘place attachment and exclusion’ is relevant for discussing the future of cemeteries in emerging multicultural societies. There is an imbalance in influence exerted by different groups, authorities and stakeholders involved in dealing with prevalent practices at cemeteries, which necessitates further discussion on how to build ‘belongingness’ for groups of people subscribing to different faith, religion and culture. The issue of scale, from national to local, in interpreting laws and guidelines deserves further attention for streamlining and implementing one policy set applicable throughout the country, and not left to be decided at local levels. Finally, we would like to emphasise that the results clearly point towards a need for co-creation and co-production, both to find good solutions for stand-alone and complicated situations, and to develop a knowledge base for proposing a strategic framework for practices at different levels of governance.

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# Chapter 10

## The Economics and Politics of Dedicated Funerary Provision for Migrant and Minority Groups: A Perspective from the Netherlands



Christoph Jedan

### 10.1 Introduction

Analysing funerary provision<sup>1</sup> within the mobilities paradigm (for the latter, see Hannam et al., 2006; Jensen, 2009; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000, 2007) shows how fluid even the ‘traditional’ cemetery really is: human migration (both pre- and post-mortal), (post)colonial mobility, but also the travel of ideas, practices and expectations, increased by modern means of communication, are not only continuously transforming the demand for funerary provision; they do also transform the ‘supply side’ of managing current, and planning for future, funerary needs. However, planners, managers, policy makers and politicians must respond to migratory and wider societal changes either by way of hindsight (e.g., after it has become obvious how migration has altered the composition of the population for good) or by way of intrinsically highly uncertain predictions of future developments (e.g., assessing whether or not a newly-arrived, and on average young, refugee group will stay in the municipality/country and might, after many years, need specific funerary provision). It is, therefore, extremely likely for mismatches to occur between the demand and supply sides of funerary provision, especially where the needs of migrant and minority groups are concerned: “Diversity-ready cemeteries, crematoria and remembrance sites are a necessary, but currently neglected aspect of an inclusive and integrated multicultural society” (Maddrell et al., 2018a, p. 11). The challenges are formidable: local funerary service providers need to deal with the transnational character of migrant groups, changing patterns

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<sup>1</sup>In the following, I use the terms ‘funerary provision’ and ‘funerary facilities’ as a shorthand for both cemetery and crematorium provision and facilities.

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C. Jedan (✉)  
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Groningen, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [c.jedan@rug.nl](mailto:c.jedan@rug.nl)



of repatriation, and a highly complex reality of diversity, which is characterised not only by “variation between different religious or ethnic groups, but also by significant diversities within them” (“diversity within diversity”) (Maddrell et al., 2018a, b, p. 36).

Yet, for all those challenges, it is an obligation of justice to try for the best available match between funerary needs and services, given the evident importance of adequate funerary provision for the bereaved, and conversely the manifold dangers of doing “(infra)structural harm” to the dead and the bereaved (Ansari, 2007; Maddrell et al., 2021; Beebeejaun et al., this volume). At the same time it is clear that any decision about the best funerary provision a municipality or a regional body can and ought to realise needs to be made on the basis of a clear analysis of the local and regional context.

The present chapter proposes conceptual tools for such a context-aware analysis, based on the Dutch case studies of the CeMi project (see Maddrell et al., introduction to this volume). It discusses the specificity of the Dutch situation, making *inter alia* use of a typology of Dutch municipalities developed by the Dutch government’s advisory body WRR (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid*). The chapter then argues that researchers and administrators also need to be aware of significant *diversity within diversity-readiness*. It suggests that there is considerable (historical and contemporary) variation of funerary provision that can claim to ‘include’ (accommodate, integrate and/or assimilate) in various ways migrant and minority groups. In effect, the creation of dedicated funerary provision is only one (albeit pivotal) option available to municipalities. Finally, the chapter focuses on the issue of dedicated funerary provision for migrant and minority groups. It raises the question of which economic, political and cultural factors enhance or limit the creation of dedicated municipal funerary facilities. It suggests a framework identifying eight such factors (‘Eight-Factor Framework,’ EFF), which may be useful not only for researchers analysing why specific facilities for specific minorities have or have not been established, but it could also serve as a heuristic tool for municipal administrators who need to decide on such facilities. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the wider implications of the framework for the future planning of dedicated funerary provision.

The chapter thus shares a conceptual reflection that tries to make sense of research articles, governmental data, policy documents and empirical data gained in the Dutch case studies of the CeMi project.<sup>2</sup> In total, 37 interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Leeuwarden and Maastricht, ranging from community members and volunteers to funerary service providers, and from local religious leaders to municipal policy makers and politicians. Additionally, three focus groups were held with elderly citizens in Leeuwarden. The interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and coded. Moreover, numerous site visits, not only in Leeuwarden and

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<sup>2</sup>The team members researching the Dutch case studies were – in addition to the author of this chapter – Mariske Westendorp and Eric Venbrux. On one occasion, we received support from a research assistant, David Knigge. I want to express my heartfelt thanks for their dedicated work.

Maastricht, but also in Groningen and Zwolle, resulted in observations and encounters with stakeholders that were recorded in written fieldnotes.

All technicalities aside, the chapter analyses a striking dissimilarity between the funerary provision for migrant and minority groups in three Dutch towns: whereas Maastricht has a highly entrepreneurial municipal funerary sector, trying to offer new ‘product/market combinations’ in its historical cemetery Tongerseweg, and whereas Zwolle has realised and actively promotes a dedicated Chinese cemetery annexed to its municipal cemetery Kranenburg, there is little initiative in Leeuwarden to realise specific funerary facilities for minorities that would go above and beyond the thoughtfully-executed, but rather standard Muslim grave field in its largest municipal cemetery, the Noorderbegraafplaats. How can this difference be explained, and how can we refine our conceptual apparatus to account for the salient issues? To make headway, I begin by presenting the three towns and by analysing their specific political and cultural context in the Netherlands.

## 10.2 The Dutch Case Study Towns and Their Context

The chapter focuses on the three Dutch case studies researched in the CeMi project: (a) Leeuwarden, the capital of the province of Friesland in the historically Protestant North-West of the Netherlands; (b) Maastricht, the capital of the province of Limburg in the historically Roman-Catholic South of the Netherlands; (c) Zwolle, the capital of the province of Overijssel. The three towns share the characteristic of being mid-sized towns of around 120,000 to 130,000 inhabitants. They all have relatively diverse populations: Leeuwarden has 17.9% inhabitants with a “migration background” (to use the Dutch term), Zwolle 17.6% and Maastricht 33.1% (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* [CBS], 2021a).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the chapter uses field observations from the pilot study in Groningen, the capital of the eponymous North-Eastern province, which is – with more than 230,000 inhabitants (CBS, 2021a) – larger than the three case study towns (see Fig. 10.1 for the location of the towns).

To understand the specific situation in the Netherlands, three aspects need to be sketched: (i) the longitudinal development of migration processes, (ii) changes in the political and economic context of Dutch municipalities, and (iii) how those developments affect municipal funerary provision.

To begin with the first aspect, a recent, wide-ranging report on migration policy written by the Dutch government’s advisory body *The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy* (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*, WRR) offers important insights. The report, entitled *Samenleven in verscheidenheid*:

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<sup>3</sup>For the sake of comparability with other countries it should be noted, however, that Dutch statistics consider an inhabitant with a migration background (“allochthonous”) even Dutch nationals who were born and raised in the Netherlands, if at least one of their parents was born outside the Netherlands (CBS, 2021b). This results in official statistics with comparatively larger shares of migrant and minority groups than would be the case in other countries.



**Fig. 10.1** Map of the Netherlands, with locations of Leeuwarden, Zwolle, Maastricht and Groningen. (Map by Christoph Jedan)

*Beleid voor de migratiesamenleving* ('Living together in difference: Policy for the migration society'), was published in December 2020. The following four of the WRR's observations are pivotal:

First, the WRR points out that patterns of migration to the Netherlands have changed. The proportion of the four main countries of origin in the first waves of migration (Turkey, Morocco, and colonial migration from Suriname and the Antilles; see also Bosma, 2012; Oostindie, 2008) has decreased over time. As the WRR puts it: "whereas formerly big groups of migrants came from a small number of countries, today smaller groups come from a multitude of countries" (WRR, 2020, p. 45). Modern travel and holiday patterns, and from the 1990s the increasing influx of knowledge migrants working in research-intensive industries and academia have been drivers of an increased diversity among migrants. Today, migrants come from a wider array of countries and have more diverse cultural and professional backgrounds than ever before.

Second, the duration of migrants' stay in the Netherlands has changed: on average, migrants who come to the Netherlands stay for a shorter period of time. Whereas roughly 60% of those who came to the Netherlands in 1995 were still living there after ten years, this is the case for fewer than 40% of those who came to the Netherlands in 2010 (WRR, 2020, p. 62). This may have to do with altered motives of migration: whereas the earliest waves of migration consisted of lowly skilled workers in search of a better future, an important group today are highly skilled and specialised knowledge workers who are highly mobile internationally. Many lowly-skilled migrants are seasonal workers who do not stay for long.

Third, within the Netherlands, there are important regional and even local differences vis-à-vis migration and minorities. The WRR uses a typology of municipalities. In total, the WRR distinguishes eight different types of municipalities:

1. Majority-minorities cities. These municipalities are characterised by superdiversity; the majority of inhabitants has a migration background and the number of countries of origin is particularly large. The big Dutch cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague) fall into this category;
2. Suburban towns. These municipalities are towns in the vicinity of the big Dutch cities (e.g., Capelle aan den IJssel near Rotterdam). Whilst the majority of inhabitants still has a Dutch background, the diversity increases even more rapidly than in the majority-minority cities;
3. Metropolitan provincial municipalities. This category comprises municipalities that play an important role as centre in their province, and often are its capital. It is noteworthy that our case study towns, the provincial capitals Leeuwarden, Maastricht and Zwolle, fall into this category. In these municipalities, the population is diverse, but the percentage of people with a Dutch background is considerably larger than in the three large cities and their suburban towns;
4. Municipalities with one specific large minority (e.g., Gouda). The population is characterised by the presence of a single large non-European/non-Anglo-Saxon group, which is the result of labour migration from a specific country or the settling of a large group of Antilleans;
5. Expat municipalities (e.g., Wassenaar). These are also municipalities with a large proportion of migrants, but characteristically the migrants are “knowledge migrants” (highly skilled workers and academic researchers) from a wide range of backgrounds. The traditional four big migration backgrounds (Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean) are underrepresented;
6. Horticulture municipalities (e.g., Westland), where a large proportion of workers in the local horticulture industry have a Polish or (in smaller numbers) Bulgarian background;
7. Border-region municipalities (e.g., Kerkrade). In such municipalities there is a substantial minority with German or Belgian background;
8. Homogenous municipalities (e.g., Staphorst). This last category comprises municipalities where the overwhelming majority (more than 90%) has a Dutch background, in the sense that both of their parents were born in the Netherlands. (WRR, 2020, pp. 67–68)

Fourth, the WRR argues that the increasing diversity and the increasing churn rate of migrants puts social cohesion under pressure: inhabitants say they feel less “at home” in their neighbourhood due to those factors. According to the WRR, there is no easy fix for this problem, but they recommend improving the “social infrastructure” (sport fields, neighbourhood shops, libraries and community centres) to strengthen social cohesion (WRR, 2020, pp. 13–14).

Against the background of the WRR’s emphasis on the “social infrastructure,” it seems curious that the report neglects to mention funerary provision. This absence may be due to the WRR’s emphasis on the increasing “churn rate” of migrants, with increasing numbers leaving the Netherlands after short periods of time. However, focusing on young and mobile migrants leaving the Netherlands after a short period of time, it is easy to lose sight of those who fulfil their life span in the Netherlands and need adequate funerary facilities. One should not forget that even if fewer than 40% of migrants can be expected to stay in the Netherlands for more than 10 years, the scale of migration (since 2015, more than 200,000 migrants per annum; WRR, 2020, p. 25) will inevitably result in significant future need of funerary provision. In short, funerary provision needs to be considered as part of an equitable and potentially successful migration and integration policy.

What lessons regarding funerary provision can be drawn from the data assembled and interpreted by the WRR? The key points which stand out are the following: (i) the shifting composition and diversification of the migration streams, away from a few traditional, big migration countries, towards a multitude of small groups; and (ii) the diversity of municipalities in the Netherlands.

Taken together, the two points allow us to reflect on the specific situation of the medium-sized Dutch towns of Leeuwarden, Maastricht and Zwolle. All three of them are, according to the WRR’s typology, “metropolitan provincial municipalities,” i.e., they share to a large extent the diversity of the “majority-minorities cities,” but the smaller size of their total population results in smaller sizes of the respective migrant and minority groups in their midst. In other words, medium-sized towns such as Leeuwarden, Maastricht and Zwolle arguably experience more particular challenges with offering adequate funerary facilities to their minority and migrant groups in the first place, because the respective group sizes are so small in the context of cemetery governance structures which typically respond to diverse needs in the light of group size. The difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that due to the diversification of migrant streams, the number of different groups to cater for has increased dramatically.

All of this puts those medium-sized towns at a unique disadvantage when compared to other types of municipalities: majority-minority cities (to use the WRR’s terminology) tend to have larger absolute sizes of the different minority and migrant groups; taken together with a better funding base, it is easier for them to offer specific funerary facilities. The suburban towns can often easily share in funerary provision in the metropolitan areas. Similarly-sized municipalities with a specific large minority can focus on provision for their dominant minority in a cost-effective way. Expat and horticulture municipalities have rather transitory migrant groups (knowledge workers moving on internationally, and seasonal workers moving to their

home countries), so there is not an equal pressure to offer group-specific funerary provision. For different reasons, this also holds for border-region and homogenous municipalities: they are characterised by a lack of ritual and funerary diversity, which makes specific provision less urgent. In this chapter case study data focuses on metropolitan provincial municipalities which face particular challenges when it comes to equitable group-specific funerary provision for minority and migrant groups.

In addition to the trends in migration processes analysed in the WRR report, there have been considerable changes in the financial situation of municipalities in the Netherlands. In general, municipalities have three main sources of income: (i) most importantly, the “municipality fund” through which the national government contributes to the financing of the municipalities; (ii) special investment programs financed by the central government; and (iii) a very small number of direct taxes and levies, such as the real estate tax, the sewage levy and, indeed, funerary fees (*Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties*, 2021). It should be noted that governmental contribution to the municipalities fund varies with the overall economic context, since the contribution is tied to overall national expenditure. This means that in times of economic crisis, municipalities have to deal with shrinking incomes. In addition to these structural facts of Dutch municipal funding, the national government has enforced a dramatic expansion of municipal responsibilities through the *Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning 2015* (‘Social Support Act 2015’). The law stipulates that municipalities are now fully responsible for financing, and if needs be arranging the support for, inhabitants who are not self-reliant (e.g., assisted living, youth care services and all forms of psycho-social support). This has created a huge category of costs in ‘the social domain’ for municipal budgets, yet the state has never fully compensated the municipalities for those extra tasks. The result of this expansion of municipal responsibilities is two-fold. First, municipal budgets have come under increased pressure. For instance, four out of five Dutch municipalities expect that they cannot break even in 2021 (BDO, 2021). Second, the new responsibilities and lack of funding have dramatically changed municipal expenditure patterns. A vivid illustration was provided by Jos and Paul, two senior civil servants working in the municipal funerary sector of Maastricht.<sup>4</sup> Previously, the municipality of Maastricht put 60–70% of its budget into town planning, development and maintenance, resulting for instance in the landmark transformation of a former industrial estate into the sparkling new Céramique district at the turn of the millennium. Today, 60% of the municipal budget is tied up in the ‘social domain,’ with expenditure for youth services, unemployment and psycho-social services claiming a large part of the budget.

In turn, this has exacerbated financial pressures on other services, including municipal funerary provision. As Jos and Paul relate, cost-awareness and attempts at cost-cutting have become regular traits of municipal administration, even in the funerary sector, which is part of the administrative unit ‘public space,’ sharing in the

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<sup>4</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, interviewees and other research participants have been given pseudonyms, unless there is a specific agreed reason to name a participant.

overarching business-like approach. In this context, loss-making services are eyed with suspicion, and at different stages of their careers Jos and Paul have therefore felt the need to come up with innovative plans that promise the minimisation of losses, perhaps even the possibility of approaching the break-even point, in the face of all available evidence: as a general rule, relates Jos, no cemetery without its own crematorium has ever managed to become cost-effective. In Maastricht, where the monumental cemetery Tongerseweg is the last remaining municipal cemetery, this has led to a cooperation with a newly-erected commercial crematorium nearby, to offer add-on services, such as an ash-dispersal site and a columbarium. The need to come up with optimistic plans has also led to the expansion of the historical cemetery to offer space for planting memorial trees. The thinking behind these plans was that green cemeteries are *en vogue* in the Netherlands, but that many citizens experience current natural burials as “anonymous.” The offer of planting memorial trees in the grounds of an atmospheric historical cemetery is seen as an interesting proposition for people who are considering a natural burial. At the same time, Jos and Paul emphasise the importance of offering convincing traditional burial services for the (shrinking) demand. In this regard, catering for the wishes of Muslims and funerary conservative Armenian (Apostolic) Christians could generate income for the cemetery. With these and similar initiatives, the civil servants expect that they can increase the rate of cost coverage from currently around 80% to 90%. Paul claimed that over time full cost recovery for funerals may be possible, but this may be optimistic given the general difficulty of cemeteries without attached crematorium.

The ‘entrepreneurial,’ business-like mindset that is evident in Maastricht cemetery management policy is not unique to the locality; in fact, it is all but universal within the sector. A good example of this mindset is the recent report *De begraafplaats van de toekomst* (‘The Cemetery of the Future’), which Mariska Overman and Rob Bruntink have drafted for the National Organisation of Cemeteries (*Landelijke organisatie van Begraafplaatsen* [LOB]). The LOB report is somewhat instrumentalist, including, for instance, a SWOT analysis (Strengths-Weakness-Opportunities-Threats), and calls for cemetery staff to “think as an entrepreneur, think commercially, think in opportunities”; “never cease to draw the attention of municipalities and churches”; and “appeal to the values of human beings: influence the emotion, not reason” (Overman & Bruntink, 2020). To this end, the cemeteries’ communication needs to professionalise: positive “frames” ought to be repeated as often as possible over an extended period of time (*ibid.*). The report’s overarching strategic recommendation is that Dutch cemeteries have to up their game by broadening their perceived usefulness; just as libraries, so cemeteries have to take on new, hitherto unimagined functions (see Jedan, 2021).

To sum up, migratory trends, the political and economic trends at the municipal level, and their knock-on effects for municipal funerary provision suggest a thoroughly ‘neo-liberal’ dynamic: financial pressures lead municipal managers and policy makers to adopt an “entrepreneurial,” business-like mindset and stimulate them to come up with innovative services. In the context of openness to change, the creation of funerary facilities geared towards specific migrant and minority groups becomes more likely. However, the typology of municipalities established by the

WRR also suggests that some types of municipality face bigger obstacles than others in their path towards creating such dedicated funerary facilities. How can these counteracting trends be combined in a single integrative framework, and are there other factors besides financial pressure and type of municipality to reckon with? This is the question to be tackled in the remainder of this chapter.

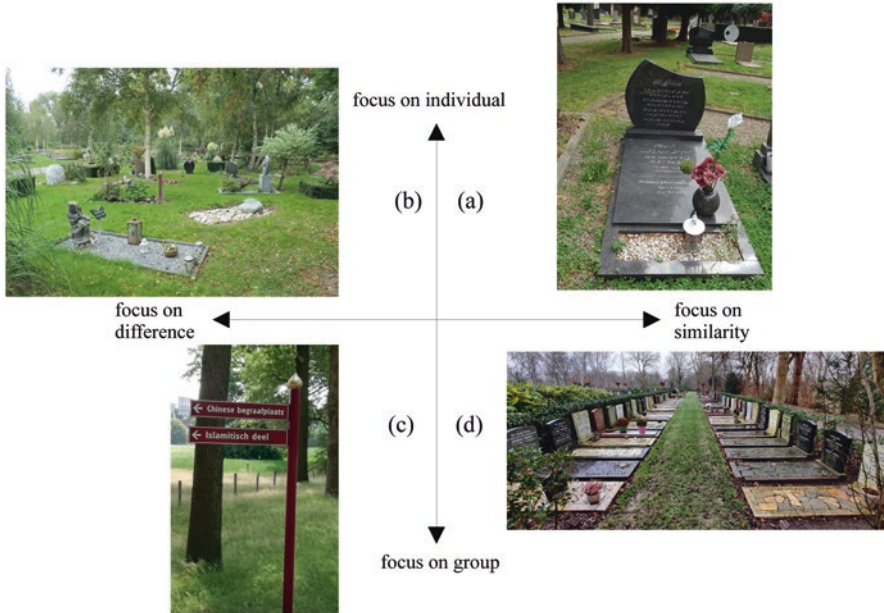
### 10.3 Diversity Within Diversity-Readiness: Four Types of ‘Inclusive’ Funerary Provision

Cemeteries in Europe are mostly shaped by European Judaeo-Christian traditions and their secular inflections. The cemeteries tend to operate on the basis of – frequently unacknowledged – aesthetic and religious-ritual norms that make it difficult to create “design justice” for migrant and minority groups outside the cultural majority (Jensen, 2017; Maddrell et al., introduction to this volume). However, it would be wrong to deny that municipalities, cemetery planners and management have tried to provide what they consider equitable and inclusive spaces for migrant and minorities. Cemetery staff interviewed report that they have tried to be “diversity-ready” and inclusive, but even to the casual visitor of European cemeteries it is visible that quite different models of diversity-readiness and inclusion seem to exist. In short, we need to acknowledge that there is considerable variation within the diversity-readiness of cemeteries.

I suggest that there are four types of minority provision within Dutch cemeteries which regularly (but not always) seem to follow a historical timeline:

- (i) Small numbers of graves of new migrant-refugee and minority groups are assimilated into the existing cemetery structure, with minimal disruption to its aesthetic. In a Protestant cultural context, with a norm of visual restraint and uniformity, graves of such small migrant-refugee and minority groups would hardly stand out. The inclusion of those groups that is afforded within this model emphasises that the migrant and minority group members are part of the people who lived in a place.
- (ii) Once there is clearer awareness of the divergent religious-ritual needs of such migrant and minority groups, increased by factors such as their longer presence and relatively larger size, there is some form of accommodation of ritual difference, again often with minimal disruption to the overall design of the cemetery. Striking examples of this type of inclusion are afforded by a second phase of Muslim graves in Tongerseweg Cemetery Maastricht (Jedan et al., 2020; Jedan & Westendorp, 2020; Jedan et al., 2023). Here the rectangular path structure of the cemetery was continued, but the individual Muslim graves were ‘slanted’ relative to the path structure (see Fig. 10.2a), so as to allow individual bodies to face Mecca. This model of inclusion tends to put more emphasis on the individual graves, whose difference from the aesthetic and ritual normativity of majority grave culture is underscored by their positioning.





**Fig. 10.2** Four types of inclusion. (Photographs by Christoph Jedan)

- (iii) The third type is the provision of separate cemetery sections for specific ethnic and/or religious groups, which prioritises the self-expression and representation of the distinct ethnic and/or religious identity of a group. There, the shared characteristics of the group define a separate space and aesthetic. Separate Muslim cemetery sections, with specific characteristics such as their separation by means of gates and fences utilising Islamic symbols, the provision of attributes such as canopied biers, and the orientation of the graves towards Mecca, are cases in point. It should be noted that in spite of this type's relatively recent rise in importance for public/municipal cemeteries, the model of separate cemeteries and cemetery sections in and of itself has a long history – European funerary culture is replete with separate cemeteries along religious lines (for instance Jewish cemeteries since the Middle Ages; cemeteries for different Christian denominations since the Age of the Reformation; Non-conformist or Socialist cemetery sections separated from the majority sections since the nineteenth century).
- (iv) A relatively new phenomenon seems to be a cemetery design in which a larger space, for instance a lawn section, is provided for the free orientation and adornment of the graves. There is no clear path structure, and the graves are very different in terms of adornment and religious or cultural text and iconography. Overall, this informal lay-out, compared to typically highly structured cemeteries, can seem slightly unorganised, and even 'messy' in appearance, e.g., the 'free field' at Groningen municipal cemetery Selwerderhof (see Fig. 10.2b).

How can we account for the difference of the four types? I suggest that the four types engage, and provide different emphases among, four foci: difference, similarity, individual, and group. The expression of the specific identity and distinctness of one group in society can be combined with expressions of similarity (for instance, civic equality in death), but the two values do seem to point towards different spatial arrangements and practices that need careful negotiation. The same holds for a focus on the individual and a focus on an overarching group.

On this basis, it makes sense to arrange the foci and the four types in a diagram, identifying four different quadrants, each offering a characteristic combination of, or trade-off between, the different foci (Fig. 10.2).

Figure 10.2 uses four photographs from the case study towns to illustrate the types of inclusion in question. Figure 10.2d shows a highly uniform Protestant cemetery aesthetic which leaves little space for the expression of difference. The emphasis here is on the group of all citizens and their similarity (Noorderbegraafplaats Leeuwarden). The picture in the top right corner shows one of the ‘slanted’ Muslim graves on Tongerseweg Cemetery Maastricht. It represents the cemetery type which attempts the difficult trade-off between similarity and individuality, by maintaining a mainstream overall aesthetic as mandated by the pre-existing cemetery design and lay-out, but also by accommodating ritual exigencies at the level of individual graves. Figure 10.2c is the picture of a signpost at Kranenburg Cemetery, Zwolle, symbolising the provision of separate cemeteries or cemetery sections. This type prioritises the self-expression and representation of the distinct ethnic and/or religious identity of a minority or migrant group, with the shared characteristics of the group defining a separate space and aesthetic. Finally, Fig. 10.2b shows an image of the ‘free field’ on Cemetery Selwerderhof, Groningen.

These four types indicate how different emphases of, and trade-offs between, foci can result in characteristically different cemetery designs, each of which can sincerely lay claim to pursuing the inclusion of migrant and minority groups, albeit in strikingly different ways. The highly individualised memorialisation available in the ‘free field’ at Groningen’s Selwerderhof Cemetery offers a different type of inclusion than the strongly group-focused creation of separate cemetery sections on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Yet, also those cemeteries evincing minimal minority provision may claim with sincerity that they are offering equitable and inclusive space. Ultimately, inclusion and diversity-readiness of cemeteries can be understood, and has in fact been understood, in strikingly different ways.

The differentiation of these four types also makes clear how cemeteries can embrace different designs of inclusivity in the course of their history, because the underlying value trade-offs can change along an historical axis. It is easy to conceive how a cemetery may begin, for instance with a rigid, uniform design fitting a particular type (Fig. 10.2d) in the 1940s and 1950s, go on to responding to migration processes by adding a dedicated Muslim cemetery section (Fig. 10.2c), and finally, around the turn of the century, respond to declining revenues by catering for the amorphous and spiritually diverse group of post-Christian and post-conventionalist citizens with the creation of a largely unstructured ‘free field’ (Fig. 10.2b). And, given the “obduracy” (Hommels, 2005) of cemetery design, it is more than likely

that the different phases in a cemetery's 'biography' remain visible as historical layers on its map. Also, cemeteries do not necessarily have to abandon any of their earlier design-types as they go forward; they might maintain and develop them in parallel. A good example of this is the municipal cemetery Selwerderhof in Groningen. The cemetery has, and continues to use, highly uniform cemetery sections where members of migrant and minority groups are buried with relatively little space for the expression of individuality and difference. However, the cemetery also has a more recent well-equipped and much-used dedicated Muslim cemetery section near the entrance. Finally, it also has the aforementioned 'free field' that caters for a maximum of individual expression.

In what follows, I want to focus on *one particular* type of inclusive cemetery, the creation of dedicated funerary provision for migrant and minority groups (symbolised with a picture from Kranenburg Cemetery, Zwolle; see Fig. 10.2c), in order to address the question: What are the factors that help us account for the differences between Leeuwarden, Maastricht, and Zwolle regarding the creation of such dedicated funerary provision?

## 10.4 Factors Explaining Dedicated Funerary Provision

An interview with Douwe, an alderman with responsibility for overseeing the management of municipal cemeteries in the municipality of Leeuwarden, provides a useful starting point. Interestingly, Douwe claims that funerary matters are little-discussed and eminently non-political: "Within municipal councils, there is hardly ever talk about cemeteries." If there is discussion, it is about the following three issues: (i) the accessibility of cemeteries, for instance by public transport, (ii) the level of maintenance in and around a cemetery, which should signal due respect for the deceased, and (iii) the rates for municipal funerary services, such as the rent of burial plots. However, Douwe underscores that such decisions are usually taken in a sphere of great harmony and even unanimity: there are hardly any political differences between parties on these matters, it is important that fees are not too high and that the level of maintenance is good.

The non-controversial nature and low political importance of funerary matters stand in stark contrast with the clearly neo-liberal, entrepreneurial language in recent business plans for municipal cemeteries across the Netherlands (Jedan, 2021; Jedan & Westendorp, 2021). The southern Dutch provincial capital Maastricht, for instance, published in 2018 a business plan for its monumental cemetery Tongerseweg (Jedan et al., 2020). The plan offers an optimistic view: by expanding the "range of products" (*productenaanbod*) the "exploitation" (*exploitatie*) can be improved (Kaptein et al., 2018, p. 10). It suggests new "product/market combinations," which result, after initial investments, in a positive balance (Kaptein et al., 2018, pp. 18–19). The latter focuses strategically on an important established group (the Muslim population) as well as a new, but potentially important group (the Armenian (Apostolic) minority in the region of Maastricht).

Even though the rhetoric of the municipality of Leeuwarden is less aggressively ‘neo-liberal,’ it has issued a ‘Policy Framework Cemeteries 2018 Leeuwarden’ (Gemeente Leeuwarden, 2019). Leeuwarden faces similar challenges as Maastricht, notably the cost effectiveness of municipal cemeteries. The policy framework reports that the current cost coverage level of 74% is under pressure: apparently the municipality has reached rock-bottom with the staffing of the cemetery and is unable even to remove obsolete grave markers according to plan. Also, there is no money for larger maintenance work (ibid., p. 8). The policy framework also discusses Leeuwarden’s competitive position: Leeuwarden is a medium-priced funerary location compared to other Frisian municipalities, but relatively cheap compared to Alkmaar and Zwolle, two similarly-sized towns in other provinces. The policy framework determines, without further argument, that fees should not be increased and the cost coverage level of 74% should be maintained (ibid., p. 8).

Douwe emphasises the legal context: whilst there is pressure to break even, Dutch municipalities are prohibited from making profits on public services. But, he explains, there is a grey area around the exact ways of accounting for costs incurred by the municipalities. It is, for instance, unclear whether or to what extent central municipal staff is included in the cost calculation: “Should one include centralised staff in the costs, and if so, with what share – should one include 50% of a manager’s time as related costs?” Douwe also explains that municipalities in general are anxious not to be perceived as too expensive with their services: there are regular publications of “rankings” of Dutch municipalities on aspects such as their tax burden and service costs in widely-circulating Dutch magazines and news outlets. Municipalities are conscious of their reputation and try not to be perceived as “greedy.” Douwe reiterates that in his experience there is great unanimity on funerary matters in municipal politics: prices should not be too high, and the maintenance level should be good, those are the primary concerns: “There *must* not arise discussion about this,” and unless a letter of complaint about perceived shortcomings is sent to the municipality, funerary issues stay out of municipal political discussions.

However, Douwe reports that he would be happy to increase minority use of the cemetery to help improve the cost effectiveness of the town’s cemeteries, especially its largest and most diverse one, the Noorderbegraafplaats. In this context, he points to the importance of Muslim burials for the Noorderbegraafplaats and to an ongoing project to redesign the cemetery. At the same time, he argues that this should be responsive to community needs rather than financially-driven: “If there are signals [of a clear demand] from society, we certainly follow up on them.”

That initiatives coming “from society” are indeed important is also illustrated by the example of Zwolle, where I spoke *inter alia* with Chao, a local Chinese business owner who had been instrumental in the creation of a dedicated Chinese cemetery. *Het paradijs* (‘The paradise’), as the Chinese cemetery is called, is located close to the entrance of municipal cemetery Kranenburg and is owned and run by the Kranenburg cemetery staff. Yet, it was co-designed with the Chinese community following Chinese *feng shui* principles, and major design elements, such as a pagoda, have been imported directly from China (see Fig. 10.3).



**Fig. 10.3** Entrance to Chinese cemetery Kranenburg, Zwolle. (Photography by Christoph Jedan)

As Chao told me, with hindsight the most important step towards a dedicated Chinese cemetery proved to be the foundation of a senior citizens association *Het zonnetje* (a Dutch diminutive that means ‘little sun,’ ‘dear sun,’ or ‘limelight’) specifically for the Chinese minority in Zwolle. Although there were some initial hesitations about the foundation of such an association from the part of the municipality (“Why an association solely for the Chinese?”), the Chinese community in Zwolle enjoys, according to Chao, a lot of goodwill as a minority group (“Known to be hard-working and constructive”; “doesn’t cause problems”), and ultimately, this carried a lot of weight with municipal decision-makers. In the event, the association acted as a stakeholder group and made it possible for the Chinese community to effectively signal its interest in dedicated funerary provision. The municipality needed to be convinced of the financial viability of the plan, but once it realised that there was huge interest among Chinese communities from other parts of the Netherlands, it embraced the initiative with characteristic Dutch pragmatism and business acumen. Today, the municipality uses the Chinese cemetery as a public relations instrument, signalling Zwolle’s openness and inclusiveness. The success of the initiative is indeed an interesting counterpoint to the usual financial problems of Dutch municipal cemeteries. Opened in 2016, the plots in cemetery *Het paradijs* sold out quickly, and a new extension and further visual and functional upgrades have been realised. The case of the Chinese cemetery in Zwolle thus points to the importance of migrant and minority groups

taking initiative as well as the importance of a positive attitude towards the groups' rights to funerary expression (Jedan, 2021).

Be that as it may, when compared to Maastricht, the municipal cemeteries in Leeuwarden show no comparable level of entrepreneurialism; the pace of change is decidedly slower. As we have seen above, there are clear initiatives in Maastricht to develop new "product/market combinations," for instance the construction of a memorial woodland section on cemetery Tongerseweg, to cater for the group of (presumably largely native Dutch) post-conventionalists and post-Christians, who variously seek less traditional and/or more ecology-minded funerals. This group is currently targeted by commercial green burial sites in the Netherlands, and Maastricht wants to retain a share of those customers in its municipal funeral system. Also, the municipality of Maastricht plans a new type of urn repository and memorial, to offer an add-on service to cremations conducted at a commercial crematorium in the region. This provides a final place of disposition for cremated remains and a modest income stream for the cemetery.

The relative lack of funerary entrepreneurialism in Leeuwarden compared to Maastricht seems to be due to a whole number of factors. First, there seem to be long-term historical trends that continue to influence attitudes today. After the Reformation, the public display of Roman Catholicism was banned in Leeuwarden, and Friesland more generally. With the exception of the West Frisian island of Ameland, there was no dedicated cemetery available for Roman Catholics living in the deanery of Leeuwarden. Roman Catholics had to bury their dead in cemeteries catering for the Protestant majority and follow their aesthetic (Bok, n.d., pp. 59–61). Only as late as the second half of the nineteenth century were Roman Catholic cemeteries established, first (1859) in Wytgaard (10 km south of Leeuwarden's city centre), and finally (1882) in the city of Leeuwarden itself (St. Vitushof). Up until then, the Roman Catholic minority faced the stark choice between invisibility in the majoritarian cemeteries and funerary mobility (for more on postmodern funerary mobility, see Marjavaara, 2012, 2017; Maddrell, 2013; Maddrell et al., introduction to this volume). The major historical Leeuwarden cemetery (Spanjaardslaan) still illustrates this point. In the monumental cemetery, opened in 1833 and closed in 1969 (Bok, n.d., pp. 23–30), but still accessible for visits and ash dispersals, there is a far-reaching visual uniformity of graves, mainly carved slabs, covering the ground like a church floor. There are no visual clues for the identification of Roman Catholic graves as seen elsewhere at this time, although next to the cemetery, there is a separate Jewish cemetery. By contrast, the monumental cemetery Tongerseweg in Maastricht (opened in 1811) was set up under French rule (1795–1814), according to a French law from 1804, to accommodate different religions and denominations (Jedan et al., 2020). In the context of Leeuwarden history, long-standing homogeneous aesthetic and ritual assimilation of minorities can explain mentalities today, as exemplified by cemetery staff with limited knowledge of diverse needs or provision.

At the same time, a focus group among elderly (autochthonous) inhabitants of Bilgaard, a working-class neighbourhood near the city centre of Leeuwarden, revealed the degree to which a restrained Protestant aesthetic is considered a matter of course. All group members explained their personal stance on religious matters as non-practicing, agnostic or atheist, not believing in an afterlife and declaring matters of funerary protocol as irrelevant. Hendrik, for instance, pointed out: “I’m gone, right? It doesn’t matter how they design the cemetery. As far as I am concerned they could staple me on top of others in a grave.” Yet, when they were shown photographs of different cemetery layouts, group members all favoured a highly traditional restrained aesthetic: gravel or grass path, small grave plots left and right, horizontal smallish headstones, low hedges behind the headstones to cordon off the graves from those in the next lane. All in all, there was little interest in cemetery innovation on the part of those citizens. Any suggestion of adding new functions to existing cemeteries – e.g., allowing people to walk their dogs in the cemetery, go for a run or to install a children’s playground in one corner of a cemetery – resulted in a laughter of disbelief.

However, there is more to the lack of dedicated minority funerary provision than historically-rooted expectations. In Leeuwarden, there is no clearly delineable, large migrant or minority group to target with specific new cemetery “products,” as Maastricht markets to the Armenian (Apostolic) Christians. Another factor that can explain the lack of entrepreneurialism in Leeuwarden has to do with the availability of public funding. As the “Policy framework” and the interview with Douwe show, the municipality is prepared to foot a substantial bill for the sake of competitively-priced municipal funerary services. In Maastricht, by contrast, municipal funerary services seem far less shielded from financial pressures. For instance, the municipality attempted to privatise the Tongerseweg cemetery, but could not find an investor, meaning that financial pressures persist.

Again, local cultural factors appear to be at play, impacting on limited public funding. When quizzed, Jos and Paul, two interviewees from the Maastricht municipality, came up with two interesting explanations. First, that the cremation rate in Maastricht is very high:

I believe around 75%, this is – possibly with the exception of a small area in the West of the country – the highest in the whole of the Netherlands ... This means that seven or eight out of ten inhabitants are lost for a traditional cemetery. Once local politicians and policy makers realise this, it comes as a shock, it’s an eye-opener.

With this argument, Jos gestures towards context-specific, cultural factors. His second explanation points in the same direction: “Do you know the inhabitants of Maastricht? They are, to use a local phrase, *‘bij het leven,’* they are oriented towards life in the here and now. The typical Maastricht person doesn’t talk easily about death,” and Jos suggests that this may be different in Leeuwarden, in the Protestant North of the country. As Jos suggests, the lack of interest in funerary culture may reflect wider cultural disinterest in death-related subjects, explaining why the monumental municipal cemetery of Maastricht is far less shielded from financial pressures than cemeteries elsewhere.

## 10.5 Dedicated Funerary Provision: The Eight-Factor Framework

Offering specific funerary facilities for minority and migrant groups becomes easier and even a compelling option in cases where a number of the following eight criteria are fulfilled: (i) There is only a small number of clearly delineable minority and migrant groups to cater for. (ii) The minority and migrant groups in question are relatively large. (iii) There is a long-standing presence of those groups in society which has led them to seek burial in the ‘host’ country. (iv) Majority stakeholders have an (ideally, historically grown) acquaintance with, and positive attitude towards, the migrant and minority groups in question. (v) The ritual exigencies of the minority groups are so different from those of the mainstream that an integration into the pre-existing majority aesthetic and ritualistic template must be considered an inadequate response. (vi) The group or groups in question have set up an effective campaign for dedicated provision, which can tap into an existing favourable attitude towards the group. (vii) The public culture, i.e., the outlook of a large proportion of the citizens, is tolerant towards the expression of religious and ethnic difference, at the expense of underscoring similarity (e.g., civic equality in death, traditional aesthetic norms). (viii) Municipal or other public funding of funerary services are under pressure, so that municipalities and/or cemetery managers seek out new streams of revenue.

This prompts the question how the eight factors outlined above provide a framework to explain dedicated funerary provision. Interview material indicates they are plausible ingredients for the following reasons. The first two factors are connected to the elementary feasibility of dedicated funerary provision. If there are too many different migrant and minority groups or such groups are individually too small, it would be hard to envision the case for one such minority provision for economic reasons alone. Moreover, it would create a costly precedent in respect of other, similarly placed groups.

Factors iii-vii concern the interaction between the migrant and minority groups and members of the majority culture. Research on popular ideas about citizenship in the Netherlands (but very likely applicable also in other countries) has shown that respondents evaluate good citizenship along criteria that put a premium on types of behaviour that make migrants “blend in” with a secular and socially liberal majority culture (Wagenvoerde, 2015). There appear to be certain historically rooted local and regional differences in the tolerance toward the expression of difference (factor vii). However, against the background of a by-and-large assimilationist conception of citizenship, the expression of difference – especially when it comes to difference based on religion and culture – can remain a challenging proposition. The transition towards the creation of dedicated funerary provision, which would appear in the abstract to go against the grain of the majority culture, must be supported in several ways to take effect. The long-standing presence of migrant and minority groups (factor iii) increases familiarity with, and knowledge of, those groups among



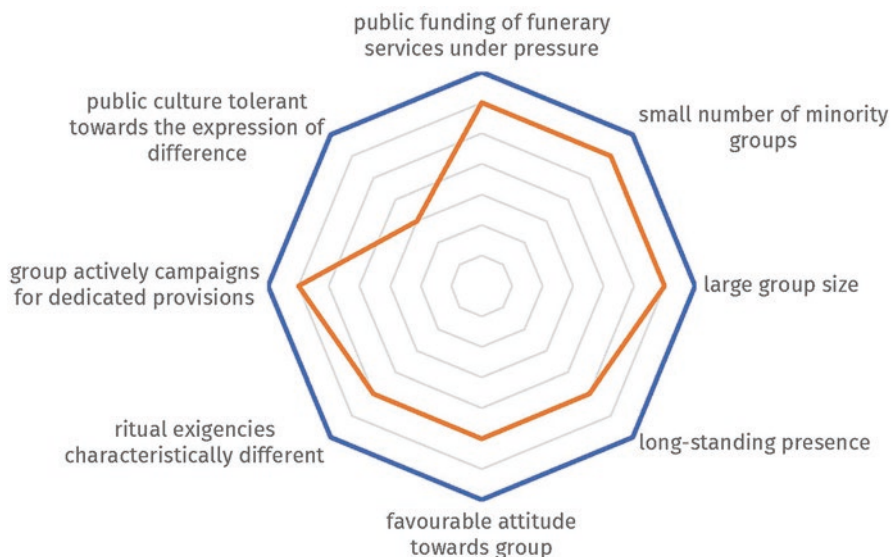
members of the majority culture. A positive attitude towards the groups in question (factor iv) will also help, since it creates the goodwill needed for that apparently difficult transition. At the same time, in a context in which the “disruption” of majority cultural expectations is not particularly appreciated, members of the majority culture must be made aware of the specific needs of the migrant and minority groups, and their urgency. This is where the factors of the groups’ actively campaigning for their funerary needs (factor v), and their specific needs being perceived as pressing due to the impossibility of fulfilling them within the majority culture’s normativity (factor vi) come into play.

Just as factor vii, so factor viii (public funding of funerary services needs to be under pressure) appears to be an important background condition in the Dutch context, because financial pressures cause at the very least a receptiveness on the part of municipal managers and policy makers towards initiatives from migrant and minority groups. If realised to a high degree, factor viii might even lead to managers and policy makers actively contacting migrant and minority groups to offer funerary provision. Factor viii provides a powerful motive for policy makers to respond positively, perhaps even pro-actively, to the funerary needs of migrant and minority groups, even if this means alienating parts of the population who might object to the larger symbolic space and recognition afforded to a specific minority through dedicated funerary provision.

In short, the suggested eight factors at play in the creation of dedicated funerary provision for migrant and minority groups form a network of mutually supporting motives and (background) conditions. They regard the composition of the migrant population (factors i-ii), facts about the interaction with and perception by members of the majority culture (factors iii-vii), and with the general politics of financing public funerary provision an important background condition that adds to a general cultural background condition (factor viii).

The eight factors allow a ‘scoring’ or mapping of intersecting factors influencing decisions about the creation of local dedicated funerary provision for migrant and minority groups set against a background of cultural inertia and expectations of assimilation. These eight factors may be applicable beyond the specific case of the Netherlands. However, more international empirical work, would be needed to corroborate this point. What can be offered on the basis of the current reflection is at the very least a highly flexible framework, in which the different factors can be fulfilled to a greater or smaller degrees, to explain contextual differences across different municipalities, possibly even across different countries.

The resultant framework should, therefore, be depicted by means of a *radar chart*; the eight factors should be thought of as ‘variables’ that can take different values for different migrant/minority groups and for different municipalities. The more a factor is fulfilled, the larger the respective ‘axis’ gets and thus the overall surface of the chart. What is suggested by the material in this chapter is that the more the different factors are fulfilled (i.e., the larger the overall surface of the chart), the more likely it is that the establishment of dedicated funerary facilities



**Fig. 10.4** Eight-Factor Framework (EFF) of specific funerary provision for minority and migrant groups, with illustrative example marked. (Diagram by Christoph Jedan)

might be successful. The resultant framework, the ‘Eight-Factor Framework’ (EFF), might therefore be depicted as follows (see Fig. 10.4).

Due to its design as a radar chart the EFF could quite possibly serve as both an analytic and a heuristic tool. The EFF can help policy makers to understand better *why* certain dedicated funerary facilities have been proposed for a specific migrant or minority group; it can also help them to structure an exploration of different combinations of migrant/minority groups and municipalities for the creation of new funerary facilities.

## 10.6 Conclusion: A Way Forward?

The case studies in this chapter point towards a surprising conclusion: ‘neo-liberal,’ market-driven and entrepreneurial approaches to the public administration of cemeteries can be an important driver in the creation of specific funerary facilities for migrant and minority groups. However, it has also become clear that there are more factors at play beyond municipal policy styles: the Eight-Factor Framework (EFF) suggests a multitude of interacting factors that make the creation of dedicated funerary provision in the shape of separate cemeteries or cemetery sections more attractive to politicians, policy makers, and members of the cultural majority, and thus more likely overall. The framework can show why and how mid-sized towns

such as Leeuwarden, Maastricht and Zwolle respond to demand for the creation of such facilities. Many preconditions need to be fulfilled to make such provision an 'easy choice': a small number of migrant and minority groups, relatively large numbers, their long-standing presence, an understanding of their ritual exigencies as clearly different from the mainstream, and a visible campaign for dedicated funerary rights should be met with a pro-attitude towards the groups and their demands. Also, the public culture should be tolerant towards the display of religious and ethnic difference, even if this means that an emphasis of the similarity among citizens must be reduced. In short, a lot of preconditions have to be fulfilled for this scenario. In practice, municipal funerary policies are often a matter of striking pragmatic compromises working with economic and political restraints.

The EFF thus enables us to understand why a town with the history and composition of Leeuwarden undertakes very few initiatives towards group-specific funerary facilities: a long tradition of limited tolerance towards the expression of religious difference has facilitated views of a restrained Protestant aesthetic as the *de facto* standard. Add to this the fact that Leeuwarden, as a typical metropolitan provincial municipality, has inhabitants from many different migration backgrounds and very small respective group sizes, which presents challenges beyond the clear-cut rationale for a historical Jewish cemetery and an Islamic section in the major municipal cemetery Noorderbegraafplaats. In contrast, the towns of Maastricht and Zwolle offer new dedicated funerary facilities for a single well-represented minority and migrant group (Armenian Apostolic Christians and Chinese, respectively), which is mutually beneficial to the minority community and cemetery financial management. However, if ritually adequate self-expression and funerary representation must be considered a fundamental human right, it should be obtainable for *individuals*, irrespective of group sizes.

One potential solution would be the creation of *regional* funerary facilities (note how this worked for the Chinese cemetery in Zwolle). In cases where the needs of relatively small groups exceed the economic means of individual municipalities, the *pooling of resources* among a number of municipalities might be an option. In this vein, it might be possible to create dedicated Surinamese or Moroccan cemeteries at the regional level, even in a less-densely populated province such as Friesland. However, this solution would weaken the link of the dead with the place they lived in, and necessitates additional travel – mobility – on the part of mourners, with associated time and financial costs. Another alternative is to embrace a model in line with the second of the four types of inclusion (see Fig. 10.2b). A cemetery design along the lines of the 'free field' in Groningen's Selwerderhof, a lawn section without a clear path section, combined with the free orientation and adornment of graves, would offer the possibility to accommodate the dead of very different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The tolerance that would be needed on the part of all users to learn to live with the unstructured aesthetics might be a small price to pay.

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# Afterword: Mobilising Death Studies

Eric Venbrux

Mobilities in life and death, as this volume shows, are intertwined. Towards the end of the final episode of the Dutch TV documentary *Mijn vader de Gelukszoeker* ('My father the fortune seeker'), Nadia Moussaïd is immensely touched by the words of her father Alice at his mother's grave in Morocco (Kaboly, 2022). Travelling from Schiedam, the Netherlands, to Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and finally to Morocco, together they made the journey in the reverse direction that Alice, then called Ali, has made as a 17-year-old illegal migrant in 1977.

On the occasion of the grave visit Nadia states that "no matter how Dutch her father is, his roots lie deep in the soil of Morocco." After he migrated, his mother, her grandmother, had died prematurely. They had been too far away and were not able to attend her funeral. "I had a lot of questions on which I would have liked to have had an answer. That is a pity," says Alice: "She moved house too early." Nadia responds that it must have been difficult for him that he could not easily visit his mother's grave. She knows "how nice that can be," she adds. Meanwhile Alice has planted a small plant on the grave, noting that he is aware that it will not grow. "It's very difficult," he replies to Nadia. She agrees, voicing that this experience is shared with all those families torn apart. Next Nadia asks Alice where he wants to be buried.

"Not here," Alice Moussaïd tells his daughter, nodding as he stresses the point, "not here." He continues: "Beside my children, that is the most beautiful thing there is for me. I may have had that inclination in the past – my own country – and that and that. ... But afterwards, as I get old, I realise that is not necessary at all." An emotional Nadia says that Alice is always there, adding in a voice-over how touched she is that her father now chooses the Netherlands, and that this is for her and her sisters (Kaboly, 2022, '42:28-'45:12).

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E. Venbrux

The Centre for Thanatology, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands  
e-mail: [eric.venbrux@ru.nl](mailto:eric.venbrux@ru.nl)

Nadia Moussaïd is right about transnational families being torn apart, but the documentary also shows the many ways in which family ties are maintained internationally. Alice, for example, continues to send remittances to his father and sister in his country of origin. The relatives, on their part, provide a warm welcome during the Dutch family's holidays in Morocco, their favourite destination. The consideration of people's mobilities in life and death is starting to erode the "sedentarist bias" (Hunter, 2016) in death studies in general. For example, in his latest book, *Death in the Modern World*, Tony Walter (2020) reflects on the implications of historical and contemporary migration. Walter notes that cross-border mobility, temporary labour migration, and multiple place attachments mean that choosing 'the right place' to die and to be buried can be a complex issue. Links with relatives in the country of origin and with kin in other countries in the diaspora are maintained, in person and via social media; therefore, death is increasingly a transnational affair (Saramo, 2019).

The life trajectories of first-generation migrants, such as Alice Moussaïd, as well as the dynamics of intergenerational relations, are bringing forth changes in the envisioned and negotiated arrangements around death and dying over time. Mortuary ritual often draws on the imagery of mobility, that is, the dead symbolically making a journey. Van Gennep (1960, pp. 18, 26) contends that rites of passage are always accompanied by a territorial passage. The widespread funerary practice of having a procession with the deceased to cemetery is a case in point. In the case of death rites, Van Gennep (1960, p. 146) further notes that the deceased can remain in the transition phase. The dead, in other words, stay in limbo, betwixt and between one social status and the next. There are clear similarities between the liminal status of the dead and the situation of present-day migrants confronting death.

These tensions are also present in historical accounts. The analogy of death and migration comes to the fore in classical studies of mortuary ritual in the ancient Greek countryside. Laments speak of the painful separation from dear relatives departed to foreign lands, the sorrow and loneliness of those left behind, and their longing for the departed (Danforth, 1982, pp. 90–95); there is thus a kind of "absence-presence" of the dead (see Maddrell, 2013). The local community in rural Greece draws on real life experiences of the emigration of close relatives. The concept of *xenitia* refers to the feared condition of being without the proper attention and care of one's own, being cut off from them, while living abroad (Danforth, 1982, pp. 90–91). Next to this term, pointing to the disruption of the bonds between those in exile and those who stay put, the emotional charge of the loss, termed *ponos*, is the driving force of continuing bonds. The pain indicated by the term *ponos* evidences attachment and thus offers solace, and this sense of solace is emphasised by the representation of death as *migration*, which mitigates the departure of the deceased. After all, a migrant, unlike a dead person, can return (ibid., pp. 140–141). There is a striking parallel here with the 'Still Travelling' inscription on the memorial bench for a deceased woman at York Station in the UK (Maddrell, 2013, p. 502), suggesting that the woman could return from her trip by train.

"Regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) vary widely from one migrant to another, evident in the journey of an oligarch with a golden visa compared to that of Alice Moussaïd, and others like him who have to risk their lives. The

potentially deadly enterprise of crossing the Mediterranean or the English Channel in unseaworthy, overloaded boats challenges prevailing border regimes. The occurrence of numerous tragic deaths mobilises people for the plight of these migrants (Horsti, 2019; M'charek, 2020; Stierl, 2016; see also Chap. 4, this volume). While one can be moved by the injustice and senseless loss of life, the grim reality is that due to their sheer number the dead are also soon forgotten (see also De León, 2015, p. 3).

The migrant dead and migrants as transnational mourners are also a more 'every-day' presence in Europe. The example of Ghanaian migrants to Europe shows migrants can have a considerable impact on the way death rites are performed in their country of origin. Van der Geest (2006) describes how in Ghana mortuaries emerged to preserve corpses for funerals at a later date. Funerals have become large, costly and prestigious events. Migrants have been shown to be the main financiers of both these occasions and the storage of the dead bodies. Morgues allow the timing of the funerals to be adjusted to times when migrants visit, with the Christmas period being especially popular. However, this is a two-way process because Ghanaian rituals have also travelled with them to their country of residence, where the new style Ghanaian funerals have been introduced (Van der Geest, 2006, p. 498). Such funerals tend to be constitutive of community, irrespective of national borders (cf. Olwig, 2009), including for young migrants who create and maintain ties with their peers through attending transnational funerals (Akom Ankobrey et al., 2021).

Patterns of attendance at funerals reflect diasporic communities spread over several countries in Europe. For example, Afghan and Somali refugees residing in the Netherlands attending funerals in Germany and the UK respectively. Colonial legacies are also evident. Hindu migrants from Suriname were not allowed to cremate their dead in the Dutch colonial period, but do so in the Netherlands now, while simultaneously orienting themselves towards India in their current practices (Shwajor et al., 2010), exemplifying multifaceted transnational relations. In another example, which spans history and geography, the relatively recent Armenian community in Maastricht has stressed its long-standing relationship to the town through connection to the first bishop, the fourth-century saint Servatius, who was an Armenian. The newcomers thus lodged a strong claim of authentic belonging in their country of residence. They now fill the space in the church and cemetery previously occupied by the local Roman Catholics, who are rapidly losing ground in the area (Jedan et al., 2020; see also Chap. 10, this volume). In this case "home-making in the diaspora" (Hunter, 2016) came full circle.

Saraiva (2008, 2016) speaks of "circulation" in death-related transnational space; a circulation of people, dead bodies, spirits, practices and ideas that affects the migrants' sense of belonging as well as the relationship between the living and the dead. This goes way beyond the repatriation of the dead (Balkan, 2016; Berthod, 2018; Hunter, 2016). Prior to death there is also return migration, sometimes with retirement migration of people from the country of residence in the same direction (e.g., Balkır & Böcker, 2012). And numerous migrants work in the care of the aging and dying in northwestern Europe (Walter, 2020). The migration landscape has changed (cf. Vertovec, 2023; Chap. 10, this volume). Labour migrants from Eastern



Europe and highly-educated expatriates from all over the world have been on the increase in recent years. Quite a few are people opting for temporary residence. How expats staying no longer than five years or so deal with death is probably better understood from a transnational perspective.

The Introduction (this volume) situates the volume at the intersection of mobility studies and death studies. The authors call for the need of studying death from a transnational perspective. Death studies would thus follow the example of mobility and migration studies. In other words, this implies a shift in focus from integration into the host society (e.g., Bot, 1998; Firth, 1997; Richner, 2006; Walter, 2012) to a truly transnational perspective, looking at transnational networks and conducting multi-sited research. In order to escape the still dominant “methodological nationalism” (Kalir, 2013) death studies will also have to follow transnational trajectories. We might rephrase important questions in the field accordingly, such as how a mobile lifestyle relates to a particular “death-style” (Davies, 2015). The take-away message is that death studies has to be mobilised to adopt a transnational perspective where appropriate.

Another point, as stressed in this volume, is the importance of the provision for minority needs for European cemeteries and crematoria to be inclusive (see also Maddrell et al., 2021). The related dynamics within the cemetery as they evolve over time are certainly of concern in clarifying how cemeteries serve as a microcosm of the inclusion and/or exclusion of migrants and minorities (cf. Jedan et al., 2020). The institution of the cemetery itself, however, is now also subject to change. The increase of anonymous burial (of urns and coffins) in some European Countries, such as Germany and Denmark, is a case in point (Kjærsgaard & Venbrux, 2021). Cemeteries in a number of places, especially in the Netherlands and Germany, tend to become less viable due to the sharp rise in cremation rates. A lot of space is freed up, because urn graves are smaller and have a quicker turn-over and because, in countries where this is permitted, people scatter the ashes elsewhere. It, therefore, becomes ever harder for cemeteries to be cost-neutral. Migrants with a preference for earth burial might thus be welcomed in European cemeteries, while members of the majority opt for bodily disposal elsewhere (keeping or scattering the ashes or choosing natural burial elsewhere). Some migrant and minority groups also seek to establish their own exclusive cemeteries, which meet specific needs, for various reasons. It is therefore also worth considering a broader perspective of deathscapes (Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010) when considering issues of inclusion and exclusion.

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