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Citation for published version:
Hunter, A 2016, 'Staking a claim to land, faith and family: Burial location preferences of Middle Eastern Christian migrants' Journal of Intercultural Studies, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 179-194. DOI: 10.1080/07256868.2016.1141759

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1080/07256868.2016.1141759

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Published In:
Journal of Intercultural Studies

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Download date: 05. Apr. 2019

Staking a claim to land, faith and family: burial location preferences of Middle Eastern Christian migrants

Alistair Hunter

Abstract

The question of where to conduct funeral rituals may confront migrants and their descendants with a stark existential choice which reveals much about how identities are negotiated in and through place. This paper scrutinises the relationship between identity and place through the prism of preferred burial location. More concretely, it sets out a typology of motivations for preferred burial location in contexts of migration. In addition to advancing analytical clarity with this typology, the paper also aims to promote theoretical clarity by questioning the hypothesis that burial in the country of residence constitutes a straightforward indicator of migrant integration. Based on 67 qualitative interviews with Christians of Middle Eastern origin in Britain, Denmark and Sweden, the paper presents various rationales for preferred burial location, showing the sometimes ambivalent relationship which migrants negotiate between place and identity.

The study of death and dying in migration contexts is a relatively recent development in European scholarship on migration and ethnic minorities, with a small number of scholars first engaging in this field around the turn of the twenty-first century (Chaïb 2000; Gardner 2002; Jonker 1996; Reimers 1999; Tan 1998). One question which this body of literature has treated, albeit partially and disparately, is the preferred place of burial (or other form of disposal). In other words, whether to choose the country of origin, the country of residence, a third country,

or indeed the transnational option of conducting funerary rituals in more than one location. Although hitherto overlooked by scholars, both in death studies and migration studies, I argue in this paper that burial choices in the context of migration can reveal much about the connection between place and identity. My aim here is firstly to stimulate reflection on the topic of burial choice in migration contexts, in anticipation of the wider set of questions flowing from transnational ageing and dying which such reflection may elucidate: the care of vulnerable strangers, the ethics of hospitality and the 'eschatological questions that speak to us all. 'Who am I?', 'How did I get here?'' (Gunaratnam 2013: xiv-xv). These questions will only become more salient in the decades to come, according to the latest demographic projections which show substantial increases in the number of older migrant populations in the coming decades (Rallu forthcoming). More concretely, this paper contributes to this promising line of study by presenting a systematic typology of motivations for preferred burial location. Such a typology will serve, I hope, to bring greater analytical clarity to scholarly analyses of the relationship between place and identity through migrant funerary rituals.

In conceptual and theoretical terms, the connections between place and identity have been most thoroughly explored by geographers and environmental psychologists. In the latter discipline, Harold Proshansky and colleagues (1983) developed a theory of place-identity which argued for the centrality of environment-related awareness in the development of self-identity. The geographer Tim Cresswell has defined place as 'meaningful space' (Cresswell 2004). Conceiving of place as meaningful space underlines the direct connection between place and identity, particularly in contexts of post-migration diversity and inter-ethnic relations, as another geographer John Clayton observes: 'Identities do not just take place, but also make place' (Clayton 2009: 483). The increased capacity of migrants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to maintain multiple ties with 'home' places and with other nodes in their transnational networks, thanks to the democratisation of long-distance travel and

communication technologies, means that questions of migrant place-making are ever more complex and fluid (Kaplan and Chacko 2015).

Just as the act of migrating from one place to another may constitute a major turning point in the lifecourse, death signifies an even more radical, indeed the most radical, juncture, bringing into sharp focus the relationship between place and identity. Eva Reimers (1999) reminds us that in many cultures ancestral burial grounds are a privileged place, synonymous with 'home' or place or origin. The anthropologist Myrna Tonkinson shows how funerals have gained in significance for Indigenous Australian communities in recent decades. In the face of mounting inequalities (including in terms of life expectancy), Indigenous Australian funerals – often attended by hundreds of mourners – have become 'settings for the display of solidarity, the assertion of identity and autonomy, and the expression of a determination to retain their distinctiveness' (Tonkinson 2008: 52). In social and cultural geography, a literature on 'deathscapes' has emerged, defined as 'the material expression in the landscape of practices relating to death' (Teather 2001: 185). Deathscapes are not only the terrain of the dead and dying, but are also intensely meaningful – if contested – places where the living find a 'spatial fix' for mourning and memorialisation (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Maddrell and Sidaway 2010).

Given the rich ground for reflecting on the relations between place and identity which the contexts of migration and death respectively provide, it is noteworthy that few scholars have sought to combine the insights from these two bodies of literature. The deathscapes literature can be critiqued for its lack of engagement with the diversity of funerary practices resulting from international migration (Hunter 2015). Likewise the literature on migrant place-making has rarely engaged with sites of funeral practices or memorialisation. Geographic mobility leads people to identify with multiple places, and consequentially opens up multiple options for where people envisage their final resting place to be (Casal et al. 2010). Death in migration

is an interesting point at which to study these questions of place and identity. Particularly for cultures which dispose of the dead through burial – the focus of the present analysis – the choice of location may provoke profound questions of identity: 'In the choice of place of burial, the soil/earth becomes a fundamental 'where', a stable basis by which the place of origin is precisely defined' (Chaïb 2000: 24; author's translation). As I argue elsewhere (Hunter 2015), death is a critical juncture in the settlement process of migrant families and communities. In terms of location of memorialisation and disposal rites, the individual or the bereaved have three main choices open to them.

Firstly, death can be an occasion to emphasise self-conceptions of temporary presence and 'guesthood', by opting for posthumous repatriation and conducting funeral rites in countries of origin. While alive, migrant elders may nurture ambivalent feelings about the legitimacy of their place both in countries of origin and immigration. However, as Katy Gardner recounts in her study of Bengali seniors in London, approaching death there may occur 'a significant shift in attitude. As the domain of the sacred and – inextricably – the site where the patrilineage is based ... it is to [the homeland] that most elders feel their corpses, if not always their living bodies, should return'. (Gardner 2002: 205). It is no surprise therefore that in many countries of immigration a veritable industry has grown up to facilitate repatriation of deceased migrants (Chaïb 2000). In contrast, for some it becomes harder to 'stake a territorial claim' via burial in countries of immigration (Ansari 2007: 563), particularly due to apprehensions about non-observance of religious funerary rituals (Chaïb 2000; Venhorst 2013).

Secondly, death can be an occasion to lay what are perhaps the deepest foundations for settlement and belonging, through ritual practices in the country of immigration. In Reimers' study, the graves of Serbs in Sweden became a mooring for the community there (Reimers 1999). Others go one step further to argue that the act of burial in the country of residence should be interpreted as the ultimate (in all senses of the word) marker of migrant integration

(Chaïb 2000; Oliver 2004); or to put it differently, in Chaïb's neat turn of phrase, 'the integration of ... immigrant communit[ies] through the disintegration of their corpses' (2000: 29; author's translation).

Thirdly, migrants and their descendants may also opt to conduct funeral rites both in places of origin and settlement. This can be interpreted as a quintessentially transnational solution to the questions of place and identity posed above. Yet the literature on transnational funerary rituals is sparse and primarily limited to studies of groups which practice cremation due to the greater portability of cremated remains (Jassal 2015).

Pioneering quantitative research has been conducted in France showing the varied significance of each of these three choices. Based on a survey of over 6,000 older migrants in France, Claudine Attias-Donfut and François-Charles Wolff (2005) propose three main sets of factors which influence preferred burial location: territorial attachments to 'home' and 'host' countries; religious affiliation, and family attachment. Although not encompassing international migrants, evidence from Spain and France (Casal et al. 2010) and Sweden (Marjavaara 2012) also shows the importance of family, religious and territorial attachments in decisions about place of burial. Marjavaara's study makes a rare contribution insofar as post-mortal mobility decisions are analysed from actually accomplished burial data rather than the stated preferences of living respondents to questions about future burial location (see also Rowles and Comeaux 1987): as with other forms of bodily mobility, there is always likely to be a discrepancy between stated preferences and actual outcomes. Data on outcomes has a particularly useful practical application in estimating future demand for burial space in different locales. By contrast the advantage of qualitative studies based on prospective preferences, such as this one, lies instead in unpicking the nuances of the relationship between place and identity as experienced by the living. In what follows I will present a typology of motivations for preferred burial location, building on the works cited above and based on an

analysis of 67 interviews with Middle Eastern Christians resident in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden. In the Discussion, I will return to the question of integration through burial, critically evaluating the contentions made in the literature against the data collected for this paper. Before that, however, some background information about the methodology and populations under study will provide the necessary context to the research.

Research Context and Methodology

Burial is not a disposal method which is universally practised: the generalisability of the present analysis is therefore limited to those migrant communities in which burial is the norm. Burial is understood here as including both whole body inhumation and the interment of remains such as ashes. Reviewing the small number of studies which have included the question of preferred burial location, it transpires that Muslim migrant communities have been the primary focus of attention (Ansari 2007; Chaïb 2000; Gardner 2002; Jonker 1996; Venhorst 2013). In adding a new empirical dimension to this literature, I focus here on the burial preferences of Middle Eastern Christian migrants, comparing Egyptian (Coptic Orthodox), Assyrian and Iraqi Christians (various denominations) in three European countries: Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Within these ancient Middle Eastern churches, eschatological questions about the condition of the soul and the body after death, and the chronology of future salvation, were settled as early as the fourth century. As such, 'doctrine on the last things differs little' among these denominations: whole body inhumation is recommended in preference to other means of disposal (such as cremation) owing to belief in bodily resurrection at the time of the Last Judgment (Cody 1991: 973a-974b). Prayers of intercession for the dead are a common liturgical feature, and visiting graves to pray for deceased relatives takes place around

important dates in the church calendar such as Christmas Eve, Easter, and Ascension Day (Wissa Wassef 1991).

In Europe, Middle Eastern Christian communities have developed from a diverse range of migration routes including post-colonial and guestworker flows, high skilled labour and student migration, as well as significant refugee movements. This study focuses on Middle Eastern Christian communities in Denmark, Sweden and the UK. These countries were chosen in the context of the wider project *Defining and Identifying Middle Eastern Christians Communities in Europe* (DIMECCE)[1], on the basis of their analytical value in comparing variations in church-state models and different community sizes and patterns of settlement. In the UK, the Coptic Orthodox Church is by far the largest Middle Eastern Christian community with over 20,000 adherents. Iraqi and Assyrian Christians number in total some 8-10,000 people in Britain. Iraqi and Assyrian groups are less geographically spread than the Copts, with a clustering of communities, churches and other institutions in West London. The situation is different in Sweden where a more open refugee policy has led to a significant number of Middle Eastern Christians settling in the country. The vast majority – some 120,000 people – are Assyrians/Syriacs (*Assyrier/Syrianer*) originally from Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, and most belong to the Syriac Orthodox Church. In addition, there are a few thousand Copts and some 20,000 members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, most of whom fled Iraq due to the security situation in the 1990s and since 2003. For all these communities, the small city of Södertälje near Stockholm is a particular hub. In Denmark, the community context differs again with the majority of Middle Eastern Christians being of Iraqi origin. In 2014, there were around 3,000-3,500 Christians of Iraqi background, and 500-600 Christians of Egyptian origin. Most live in the Copenhagen and Århus areas. Among the Christians from Iraq, many are Assyrians or Chaldeans who fled the wars in Iraq from the 1980s onwards. Most of the Egyptian Copts arrived as migrant workers between the late 1960s and 1980s. Due to the small numbers in

Denmark, not all communities have access to their own church or even their own priest, something which impacts on their practices and identifications (Galal et al. forthcoming).

The data on which this analysis is based derives from 67 semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of the above communities. These interviews were conducted by myself and colleagues at the universities of Łodz, Roskilde and St Andrews, between February and July 2014. The DIMECCE project's focus on 'defining' Middle Eastern Christian identities in Europe dictated our sampling frame: we selected our interviewees from among those Middle Eastern Christians who were identifiable as having an active role in defining and/or representing their community or congregation. These figures included clergy (bishops and priests), deacons, lay representatives (e.g. members of church boards), Sunday school teachers, church youth leaders, political activists, and representatives of cultural, charitable and sports associations. Doctrinal injunctions against women being given ordained roles in their churches limited the number of females in active representative roles whom we could interview, hence the ratio of 49 men to 18 women in the sample.

Respondents were asked about burial location preferences in the final section of the interview, concerning connections to 'the homeland' – a necessarily vague term for some respondents given their forebears' experiences of redrawn borders and displacement within the Middle East. Unless the interviewee had volunteered the information previously, the question about burial location preferences was generally asked following a series of questions on the theme of homeland return. Asking about burial preferences and the possibility of posthumous return – a potentially sensitive topic – came more naturally at this juncture, by which time also a sufficient degree of rapport had been established between the interview participants.

The sample was split between first (including 1.5 generation) and second generation respondents. 49 first generation migrants were asked where they would prefer to be buried

when they come to the end of their lives, in the place of origin or country of residence. Following their initial response, they were then prompted for the motivations behind their answers. In addition, 18 second generation descendants were asked whether the question of burial location was a topic which is discussed in their families by older relatives; in addition to giving answers on these family dynamics, some second generation respondents also volunteered their own preferences regarding burial location.

The interviews were transcribed and the resulting transcripts were imported into the NVivo software package for qualitative data analysis. Analysis was an iterative process, informed by the insights of previous work, in particular the distinction between religious, territorial and familial motivations for preferred burial location (Attias-Donfut and Wolff 2005; Casal et al. 2010; Marjavaara 2012). However, repeated reading of the transcripts revealed further nuances within these categories, as will be presented below.

A typology of motivations for preferred burial location in migratory contexts

Table I presents a typology of motivations for preferred burial location in migratory contexts. In what follows I will elaborate each type of motivation, supported by examples from interview data. However, a first point to note is that a small minority of respondents were completely indifferent to the location of their final resting place. To quote one respondent, 'What's the difference? We're all – it's all one ground. If you're gonna decay, you're gonna decay my friend, it doesn't matter where you are [laughs]' (Assyrian/Syriac, Male, 30s, 1.5 generation, UK). Such nonchalance may be read as genuine indifference or alternatively as a coping mechanism to deflect ontological insecurities around mortality.

TABLE I. TYPOLOGY OF MOTIVATIONS FOR PREFERRED BURIAL LOCATION: **INSERT NEAR HERE**

Supplementing the three sets of variables identified in existing literature – familial, territorial and religious – I begin here with a prior set of practical considerations which emerged in interviewees' narratives of preferred burial location, namely financial and organisational costs, and appraisals of the security situation in a given location. This has been mentioned briefly as a factor influencing burial location (Attias-Donfut and Wolff 2005; Venhorst 2013), but in this analysis it enters centre-stage.

Practical Considerations: striking a balance between money, coordination and safety

Financial costs expresses a preference based on pragmatic consideration of the economic outlays associated with burial in the countries of origin and immigration respectively. The significant transport costs of repatriation to the Middle East, where cemetery plots nonetheless remain free or easily affordable, may effectively be offset by the high costs associated with burial in many European countries, especially the purchase of burial plots in perpetuity but also including expenditure for coffins, hearses, catering and receptions for mourners. Indeed, the elevated costs of burial in London had recently prompted representatives of the Assyrian community there to institute a funeral cooperative fund. According to one of the founders of this initiative:

> We collect membership from people, very little money – membership – and then we spend up to £4000 for every funeral. We pay for the coffin, we pay for the plot, we pay for limousines, hearse, all that. And then the person – the people [who] lose their father

> or brother or sister or whatever – in the house, they don't have to do nothing (Assyrian/Syriac, Male, 50s, 1st generation, UK).

The last point raised here, that the recently bereaved can grieve in peace in the family home without having to attend to the funeral logistics, brings to light the *organisational costs* involved in arranging a funeral. Organisational costs have rarely been discussed as a factor influencing preferred burial location in the existing literature[2]: nonetheless, they appear as decisive for some respondents. As a UK-resident Copt noted, 'Not to make a hassle on my family, here is much better' (Coptic, Male, 40s, 1st generation, UK). On the one hand, repatriation is not only costly in financial terms but involves a lot of administrative form-filling, as well as extended periods of bereavement leave for those who accompany the casket. On the other hand, bureaucratic requirements may be minimal once the deceased has arrived in the place or origin: 'You know, London, it's not like Iraq, just paperwork from the church and then they say 'go bury him'. Here, there is the cemetery's involvement, the funeral director's involvement, council tax involvement, Council, town Hall, the hospital's involvement' (Assyrian/Syriac, Male, 50s, 1st generation, UK).

Security situation – the third practicality which emerged in interviews – resonated with respondents from specific national backgrounds. In particular, the fragile security situation for Christians in Iraq at the time of the interviews was mentioned by several respondents.[3]

> Most of them don't see that they would move back [to Turkey or Iraq] … They don't because it's not safe to take them there (Assyrian, Female, 40s, 1st generation, Sweden).

> You can't go back, you can't practically go back to Iraq no. (Iraqi, Male, 50s, 1st generation, UK).

However, not all Iraqi respondents were prepared to be cowed by the worsening security situation in their homeland. The following quote shows the primary importance of family ties over security concerns when it comes to final resting place: 'So I want to be repatriated. I also told my children … I want to travel over there, even though ISIS (see note 2) is there because I have family – I have my brother's grave, my father's [grave]' (Iraqi, Female, 50s, 1st generation, Denmark). In the next section I will present the family-based rationales for preferring one location over another.

Family Considerations: genealogical continuity or the 'new first ancestors'

From time immemorial, cemeteries have served the function of regrouping successive generations of a kin group around a common ancestor. This practice has been interpreted as a means of maintaining ontological security by reconciling the individual with the finite nature of existence (Reimers 1999). The importance of family and kin ties in burial thus serves a double purpose: looking backwards in time by assuring the continuity of the group through genealogical affiliation (Chaïb 2000); and looking to future generations to keep alive the memory of forebears who have died, i.e. survival by proxy (Casal et al. 2010). The act of emigrating from the place of origin, which is the location of the ancestors, inevitably disrupts this mechanism. First generation migrants have to choose between repatriation and burial amongst the ancestors, but at the risk of being lost to the 'memory work' of future generations; or to break with the genealogy in the place of origin in the hope of becoming the 'new first ancestor' for future generations in the adopted homeland.

Broadly, four family-based considerations corresponding with different temporal orientations can be discerned: an orientation to the past, via (i) ancestors in the place of origin, or (ii) via deceased parents, laid to rest either in the ancestral soil or the adopted homeland; (iii) an

orientation to ‘significant others’ in the present; or (iv) an orientation to future generations in the country of settlement. The *ancestors* category in the typology above expresses a preference for burial in the country of origin in order to maintain affiliation with the genealogical line going back in time. It may be associated with the existence of a family burial ground or family mausoleum:

> In Egypt, in my family's mausoleum. Because it's such an ancient land, and I belong to it. It's a very, very romanticised, irrational view, but yeah, that's the reason why (Coptic, Female, 40s, 1.5 generation, UK).

The category of *parents* is also oriented to the past, more specifically the recent past, namely a desire to be buried next to where deceased parents have been laid to rest (see also Attias-Donfut and Wolff 2005). However, unlike burial location choices based on ancestral orientation, a parental orientation may favour burial either in the country of origin – as in the quote above from the woman who disregarded the dire security situation in Iraq – or in the country of settlement: ‘There is no point [that my children] should take me back home or bury me there. And that will not only be a [financial] cost, actually – because my father and my mother are buried here, as well, and so … I don't want them to bother really’ (Assyrian/Syriac, Male, 70s, 1.5 generation, UK).

Also very salient were the preferences expressed either for burial beside a deceased spouse, sibling(s), child(ren), close friends and so on, or in being laid to rest where a living spouse, sibling(s), child(ren), and close friends can easily visit the grave and offer their prayers. This set of considerations is termed *nearest and dearest* in my analysis. Temporally-speaking it characterises a perspective oriented to the present, to those ‘significant others’ who are part of respondents’ daily lives: ‘I don't have any special wishes to be buried in Iraq ... the most

important for me, is that my kids or relatives should have the possibility to visit me' (Iraqi, Male, 30s, 1st generation, Denmark).

A more radically future-oriented conception of memorialisation is seen in responses expressing a preference based on affiliation with the genealogical line, but projecting forward in time towards future *descendants* rather than back in time towards ancestors. For the first-generation, such a burial location preference indicates a respondent's self-understanding as 'the new first ancestor' in the country of immigration; second-generation respondents can also express an orientation to descendants. In the following example, a young Iraqi male, who grew up in Denmark credits his grandmother as the 'new first ancestor' around whom other relatives have 'gathered round':

> well I have my grandmother who – who lived in Germany, but because she has 3 daughters here in Denmark she actually chose to be buried in Denmark, so she is buried in [name of] churchyard. There where one of my aunts lives, so then it is like gathering around it (Iraqi, Male, 20s, 2nd generation, Denmark)

I have shown that when discussing the familial considerations influencing preferred burial location, temporal perspectives are paramount. The question of time is also crucial when discussing territorial attachments in terms of burial: the weight of the years spent in a given place has a heavy influence.

Territorial Considerations: at peace with place

The category of *preponderant presence* expresses significant attachment to territory defined either in individual terms as the time spent in a given location or in collective terms as the size of the community which is present in that given location. The term preponderant is chosen to

indicate not just a quantitative significance but also a qualitative significance, e.g. for young people, spending their formative years in a given location. Collectively, the geographical weight of numbers of a community, be that a community of the living or the dead, can be a strong enticement to consider burial in that location.

It was mentioned earlier that Södertälje, in Sweden, is a major population centre for Assyrian/Syriacs as well as other Middle Eastern Christian denominations in Scandinavia. Given the high proportion of Södertälje's population who are Assyrian/Syriac, burial there becomes more self-evident, as recounted by a young Assyrian women: 'I think that there are so many people here that [in death] they will feel home here too' (Assyrian/Syriac, Female, 20s, 1.5 generation, Sweden). In individual terms, the significance of a given location for burial was often recounted in terms of the time spent and invested by individuals there:

> In the UK, not in Egypt, no. Because I've lived here all my life (Coptic, Female, 40s 1st generation, UK).

> Bury me here, by all means. For no reason whatsoever but just being casual and thinking quick off my head given I've had two third of my life here and one third there (Iraqi, Male, 60s, 1st generation, UK).

Narratives invoking *the nation*, broadly defined, featured in many respondents' rationales for choosing one national soil over another. In explaining his preference to be buried in Britain, a dual national Coptic respondent contrasted the discomfort he feels regarding his Egyptian nationality and the ease with which he assumes a British belonging:

> I'm British. In fact I'm ashamed to say that my Egyptian passport has expired and I haven't bothered to renew it. And the reason is if I have to use it, I use it once a year for three days, four days I spend in Egypt but I use my British passport everywhere,

> I'm very comfortable with it and eh I am very loyal to Britain ... Anyone ask me a question at the airport, for example, I'm British. (Coptic, Male, 50s, 1st generation, UK)

Similarly, a female, Assyrian/Syriac respondent eloquently expressed her attachment to Denmark by highlighting the tranquillity which she had found there and to which she aspired for her final resting place:

> Here in Denmark, 100 percent yes, I'm not even in doubt about it, because you can believe me when I say, that – I feel this is my country, because I have received the things I was lacking. It is very important what I am saying it is peace and quiet, what you wish for (Assyrian/Syriac, Female, 50s, 1st generation, Denmark).

Other respondents expressed a burial location preference based not on national characteristics but rather on more emotional or aesthetic resonances with (or rejections of) a specific place or landscape. In the above typology I use the term *emotional landscape* to describe this type of narrative. In other studies, emotional landscapes may correspond with where individuals have bought second homes (Marjavaara 2012). Some 1.5 and second generation individuals mentioned happy childhood holiday memories visiting historic or scenic tourist sites in their parents' places of origin. Another simply stated: 'we have a lovely cemetery here' (Coptic, Male, 60s 1st generation, UK). Conceiving of cemeteries as places of tranquillity and transcendent beauty marks an appropriate introduction to the final part of this section, in which I explore the specifically sacred dynamics of place-making through diasporic burial.

Sacred Considerations: pious indifference or purposeful inscription of space

Describing the funeral rituals performed by her Coptic congregation in Sweden, a young first generation female, said: '[The priest] of course has to say the prayer over the deceased, "you

don't miss that person, he's now in a good place" and those things. And it's the same in Egypt ... here it's like in Egypt. We are trying... we are trying to keep the tradition … we are trying to do the same...' (Coptic, Female, 20s, 1st generation, Sweden). This effort to 'do the same' as in the homeland mother church is an orientation which I label *religious conformity*: it expresses a preferred burial location based on conformity with formal and codified religious ritual practices. Equally, as Marjavaara (2012) notes, burial location preferences may be a reaction against religious affiliation in circumstances where the deceased or bereaved are negatively disposed to the religious institutions in which they were brought up. I label this as *religious disassociation*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the focus of the DIMECCE project on individuals who have an active role in representing their religious communities, this motive did not emerge in interviews. It is nonetheless included here so that the typology may better integrate existing insights from the literature.

Although the quantitative analysis by Attias-Donfut and Wolff (2005) shows that personal religiosity is correlated with a preference for burial in the country of origin, qualitative work has shown that it may equally induce a preference for burial in the country of immigration (Ansari 2007). In this regard much depends on the regulation of funerary practices in a given country: historically these have tended to evolve in accordance with the norms of historically-dominant religions, and therefore may not be compatible with the religious practice of migrant minorities. In the following example from Denmark, the practice of grave re-use after a certain number of years provoked anxiety in an Iraqi respondent, for whom a burial plot in perpetuity is preferable:

> After 20 years [the Danish cemetery authorities] can take that grave … one time maybe, I will take my mother's grave [to Iraq] … take it to Iraq and bury her, because you have many rules over here which I wasn't satisfied with regarding that cemetery (Iraqi, Female, 50s, 1st generation, Denmark).

In contrast to this standpoint however a large proportion of Coptic Orthodox respondents expressed a high degree of indifference regarding burial location precisely from a desire to conform to the teachings of their church, notably as regards the nature of the soul and the body after death (summarised above).

> The body is ashes and dust so I don't mind where. [laughs] I look for, you know, for where my soul will be, that's the most important' (Coptic, Priest, 50s 1st generation, UK)

> I live for God. Egypt is like Sweden when I die: the soul is going to God – my body, I don't think about it (Coptic, Male, 40s, 1st generation, Sweden).

Against Coptic indifference regarding the place of interment, a number of Iraqi respondents, exhibited a willingness to 'sacralise' space through their burial choices. The *sacralising* category expresses a preference based on the aspiration to symbolically and/or materially inscribe space with sacred meaning (see also Gardner 2002). This preference is usually expressed toward the country of residence, i.e. the adopted homeland, although sacralisation through burial may also be directed at the country of origin, as the following quote shows:

> Actually for me, er, and even I have told all my family and friends, just in case, that I be buried in Iraq. That's very important. Because I love my monastery. And there is special places to monks and priests. They still there with other, our previous priests and, in monastery near St Matthew's grave. And I don't know, I feel, I feel I belong to that area. It's, the monastery's in the mountain, I belong to that area (Iraqi, Priest, 30s, 1st generation, UK).

The differences between Iraqi Christians and Copts concerning the sacredness of burial location are somewhat puzzling and not fully explicable from the interview data or from church

eschatological doctrine, which as noted is rather similar across the different denominations. One may speculate however that the *sacralising* aspirations of Iraqi Christians are in some way connected to the greater existential threat which faces Iraqi Christianity at the present time. Leaving a material trace after death through burial in specific locations – either in Iraqi soil or in the lands of immigration – appears very intelligible when the legitimacy of lived religion is cast into doubt by destruction and dispersal.

Discussion: Integration through Burial?

As noted in the review of literature above, the decision to be buried in the new country of residence may be interpreted as a major reorientation of identity. It is a shift both in time and space, disaffiliating from the genealogical line of past generations in the place of origin in order to constitute the 'new first ancestors' buried in the adopted homeland, around whom future generations will congregate. As such, it has been argued that this shift in orientation constitutes the ultimate (in all senses of the word) marker of migrant integration. For Yassine Chaïb, discussing the final resting place of North African migrants and their descendants in France, 'the place of burial is the central geo-sociological element in the integration of immigrants to French society' (2000: 164; author's translation). Caroline Oliver (2004) also sees in the choice of burial a marker of integration and assimilation to the host society, in this case the integration of older British lifestyle migrants in southern Spain: 'Choosing burial in the cementerios demonstrate[s] commitment to Spain. It is a sign of assimilation or 'going native,' a clear marker that Spain is their home.' (Oliver 2004: 249). In the remainder of this paper, I will critically evaluate this hypothesis of integration through burial. As will be shown, there are elements in our qualitative data which both support and question the idea that burial in the country of residence should always be considered as an indicator of integration. The nuance

and ambivalence which emerges in interviewees' accounts shows the value of qualitative analysis in revealing the complexities of the relationship between place and identity over the lifecourse.

The term migrant integration likewise merits nuanced consideration. The term is commonly deployed to describe the process by which migrants' cultural and ethnic difference – what Modood calls 'post-migration difference' – ceases to be problematic in the context of the receiving society (Favell 1998; Modood 2012). A process of adaptation ensues: in more assimilatory contexts, the direction of adaptation is uni-directional, with migrants expected to adjust to the majority society with a minimum of disturbance to the latter. In more multicultural contexts accommodation is mutual and two-way, with majority institutions also recognising the social significance of migrants' group identities (Modood 2012). Given the broad scope of the concept, processes of integration take place in a very wide range of settings. Esser identifies four principal domains: cognitive (language, skills); structural (labour market participation, educational level, legal status); social (marriage, friendship, clubs, associations); and identificational (claims of belonging and identity) (Esser 1980, cited in Bommes 2012). It is in this latter identificational domain that the above-cited claims of integration through burial are best categorised.

Turning initially to evidence which questions the assumption of integration through burial, two points discussed above stand out. Firstly, as was seen above, the *security situation* in places of origin may inhibit the wish for a final resting place there, thus leaving the individual with little choice but to opt for burial in countries of immigration. It is therefore not a positively chosen active identification with an adopted homeland, but a decision which is constrained and provisional. *Religious conformity* is the second instance where burial in the country of residence does not necessarily equate with an integration perspective. Indeed, as was seen above in the case of the Iraqi woman who had deep misgivings about the practice of grave re-

use in Denmark, and specifically insofar as it risked ontological security for her mother who is buried there, religious conformity can prompt individuals to exhume and repatriate their deceased loved ones. Similarly, for a large proportion of Coptic Orthodox respondents, burial in the country of residence does not constitute a deep sense of attachment or identity: rather, as was noted above, many Copts' testimony displayed a high degree of indifference as to where burial occurs.

Notwithstanding these narratives which denied integration through burial in countries of immigration, other interviews with Middle Eastern Christians included several data points which give strong backing to the contention. While sacred considerations, particularly conformity to church teachings, may impede a disposition towards integration through burial, they may also work in favour of interment in the adopted homeland. It was shown above that a 'sacralising' desire to make a particular place more holy was a strong rationale for an Iraqi priest to be buried near a monastery in Iraq. Another Iraqi priest, however, wished to sacralise a small corner of Britain which he had made his home:

> But I prefer to be buried in [the crypt of] my church, because I feel happy – why? Because I built it – it is my home. (Iraqi, Priest, 1st generation, 50s, UK)

It was also noted above that the weight of the years spent in the country of residence, which I labelled *preponderant presence*, is also a factor in opting for burial there. 'For me personally to live two thirds of my life here and one third over there, this is where I belong' (Iraqi, Male, 60s, 1st generation, UK). The size and concentration of a community of believers was also an indicator of 'preponderant presence'. The testimony of the young Assyrian/Syriac woman in Sweden mentioned above, to the effect that 'there are so many people here that [in death] they will feel home here too' shows how a sense of belonging is achieved over time and through the gathering together of the dead. A similar sense of belonging was aspired to by London's

Assyrian community, who successfully lobbied the municipal authorities for a separate Assyrian section in a West London cemetery. In Denmark, however, where Middle Eastern Christian communities are less spatially concentrated, this effect did not materialise. These differences reveal the value in conducting a cross-country comparative analysis.

Conclusion

In a world where more and more people are physically mobile within and across national borders, the possibility to forge meaningful identifications with multiple places extends over the lifecourse, up to and even beyond the end of life. This opens up multiple options for where people envisage their final resting place to be. For migrant communities, especially those in which burial is the norm, the question of where to conduct funeral rituals may represent a stark existential choice: resolving this dilemma reveals much about how identities are negotiated in and through place.

This paper has explored this relationship between identity and place through the prism of preferred burial location. The contributions of the paper have been three-fold, respectively in terms of methodology, theory-testing, and analysis. The paper's first contribution has been to synthesise the few existing sources of literature on this topic, primarily qualitative but also quantitative: sources which, by and large, have not been in dialogue with each other thus far. In addition to establishing the current state of the art, I have developed a new empirical strand in this literature beyond the predominant focus on Muslim communities in Europe, by studying the question of preferred burial location in Middle Eastern Christian migrant communities. Secondly, I have sought theoretical clarity by examining the hypothesis that burial in the country of residence constitutes a straightforward indicator of migrant integration. Last but not least, my third aspiration with the paper, demanding the greater share of analysis, was to aid

future reflection and analytical clarity by developing a typology of motivations for different burial location preferences.

In this latter regard, various sets of rationales for preferred burial location were elaborated. The analysis of the data first of all puts centre stage the practical considerations which influence burial location, namely financial and organisational costs, as well as security concerns. These practical considerations have been underplayed in the existing literature to date. I then moved to elaborate further categories of importance which emerged in the interview data, drawing on existing studies which have given priority to family, territorial and religious considerations. When discussing family factors, it was shown that temporal orientations are paramount: respondents were variously oriented to a past perspective, via forebears in the place of origin and deceased parents; others gave priority to 'significant others' in the present, while a third position was to construct an identity of 'new first ancestor' in the country of immigration, around whom future generations would gather. Territorial considerations stressed the weight of the presence of a migrant community in a given location, in quantitative and qualitative terms. Others evoked allegiances to the nation, or emotional connections to a particular place or landscape, as rationales for preferring one burial location over another. Sacred considerations were also a strong feature of the qualitative data, and a number of respondents expressed a desire to 'sacralise' space through their burial choices, i.e. to symbolically and/or materially inscribe space with sacred meaning. The concern to conform to religious orthopraxy was a key finding, particularly for Copts, for whom there was a high degree of religiously-justified indifference to the question of burial location.

This indifference speaks to a broader question in the literature, namely whether we can consider burial in the country of residence as an ultimate indicator of integration (Chaïb 2000; Oliver 2004). There were elements in the data which both supported and challenged this hypothesis. Given the dire security situation for religious minorities, including Christians, in several parts

of the Middle East, burial in Europe is not necessarily always a positively chosen active identification, but rather a decision which is constrained and provisional. Interestingly, this ambivalent finding on integration finds an echo in another contested literature, namely the question of the sustainability of diaspora communities. When the full range of lifecycle-based rites of passage, up to and including death rituals, can be enacted in countries of immigration, then the rationale for return to the 'homeland' becomes less self-evident (Hunter 2015). If it is accepted that diasporas are predicated in part on this desire for eventual return (Safran, 1991), then it follows that the enactment of these lifecycle rituals in countries of immigration may lead to the dissolution of the very ties of diaspora which they purport to uphold.

Acknowledgements

This article was written during a visiting fellowship held at the Institut national d'études démographiques and generously funded by the Ville de Paris. I am particularly grateful for the support of my colleagues Fiona McCallum, Lise Paulsen Galal, Marta Wozniak-Bobinska and Sara Lei Sparre in carrying out interviews for this research. I am equally grateful to Anne Rosenlund Jørgensen for translating interview material from Danish into English. This article has also benefitted greatly from the insights of Eva Soom Ammann and the two anonymous reviewers.

Notes

[1] See https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/dimecce/. This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 291827. The project Defining and Identifying Middle Eastern Christian Communities in Europe is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme (www.heranet.info) which is co-funded by AHRC, AKA, BMBF via PT-DLR, DASTI, ETAG, FCT, FNR, FNRS, FWF, FWO, HAZU, IRC, LMT, MHEST, NWO, NCN,

RANNÍS, RCN, VR and The European Community FP7 2007-2013, under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities programme.

[2] One exception is Yasmin Gunaratnam (2013), who gives the example of a Kenyan man diagnosed as HIV positive whose wish to be repatriated from Britain to Kenya for burial could not be fulfilled due to the administrative difficulties of repatriating bodies with HIV infection.

[3] The vast majority of our interviews took place between February 2014 and July 2014, i.e. just before the advance of the Islamic State Organisation (also known as ISIS) through Northern Iraq. It may be speculated that security would have been mentioned by our respondents even more had we conducted interviews after July 2014. Numerous acts of desecration of Christian graves have been reported since the organisation's occupation of large swathes of Northern Iraq. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3043255/ISIS-destroy-Christian-graves-headstones-sledgehammers-Islamist-terror-group-continues-purge-against-religions.html

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Table I

Practical Considerations	**Family Considerations**	**Territorial Considerations**	**Sacred Considerations**
Financial costs	Ancestors	Preponderant presence	Theological conformity
Organisational costs	Parents	The nation	Religious disassociation
Security situation	Nearest and dearest	Emotional landscape	Sacralising
	Descendants		

Table I. Typology of motivations for preferred burial location