TAKING IT TO THE GRAVE: GENDER, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND ETHNICITY IN TURKISH DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Popularly considered a great equalizer, death and the rituals around it nevertheless accentuate social distinctions. The present study focuses on a sample (N = 2554) of death announcements in a major Turkish daily newspaper (Hürriyet) from 1970 to 2006. Out of the liminal position of Turkish death announcements between obituaries and death notices emerges a large decentralized collection of private decisions responding to death, reflecting attitudes toward gender, ethnic/religious minority status and cultural capital, and echoing the aggregate efforts of privileged groups to maintain a particular self-image. Class closures lead to openings for traditionally under-represented minorities, such as Jewish Turkish citizens and citizens of Greek or Armenian origin. Results reveal that signs of status and power in announcements are largely monopolized by men of Turkish-Muslim origins. Although the changes in the genre-characteristics of death announcements are slow, they correspond to major turning points in Turkish social history.

INTRODUCTION

Despite their unfailing daily appearance in newspaper pages, death announcements in Turkey, with their formulaic sentences and unimaginative language, rarely become newsworthy. The few exceptions help us demarcate the rule in terms of the limits of the genre and the symbolic world of death. In one example,
recent newspaper article narrates the story of a female cancer patient and of her death announcement that she carried with her for 12 years, until the day she died. The text of the announcement reads (Demirci, 2004):

**DEATH**

I, ‘Nazan Arda’,
have mistreated my soul, which I just surrendered to God, for my loved ones in the name of perfectionism all my life.
There was no time to love myself and pursue freedom.
I wonder if I became that ‘special someone’ I worked so hard to be.
I await all of you, whom I always hesitated to trouble, to bid me farewell at Erenköy Galipmapaşa Mosque following the noon prayer. I love you all.

The touching story and the emotional tone behind the announcement are intended to set it apart from the repetitive characteristics of the genre in Turkey. Further, the story points to the power of death announcements, in a limited space, to constructing a narrative for evaluating past lives. This article studies the way narratives of cultural distinction are weaved along symbolic boundaries into the reserved language of Turkish death announcements. Although death is popularly considered a great equalizer, symbolically articulated social boundaries, such as age, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion, maintain their acute presence in the world of death; they shape “[t]he timing, place, manner and social implications of an individual’s death” (Field, Hockey, & Small, 1997, p. 1). Funerals, obituaries, tombs, death notices, and other death-related artifacts and rituals reflect and reproduce, rather than obscure and diminish, the patterns of stratification in a given society.

**The Turkish Case**

Death in Turkish culture has received little attention in historical, anthropological, and ethnological research (for exceptions, see, Eldem, 2003; Örnek, 1971; Veinstein, 2007). However, Turkish newspaper announcements as a modern ritual of mourning have attracted no scholarly interest. Turkey is a rapidly changing society with a long and complex history of westernization. While the large segments of the population consist of Muslims, historically non-Muslims constituted a significant minority although their numbers have been declining steadily throughout the republican period (1923 to present). Turkey’s historically-rooted ethnic/religious diversity and its rapid modernization render death announcements a fertile ground to examine the coexistence and encounters of diverse religious, cultural, gendered, and occupational messages.

Further, Turkish death announcements present an important opportunity for revisiting and complicating the established distinction between obituaries and death notices. A life story narrated in an obituary implies “a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition,” in short “a publicly grievable life” (Butler, 2003, p. 34). Newspaper editors act as gatekeepers...
in that process, assessing lives through a nexus of undeclared and mundane decisions, determining whom we remember and whom we forget by assigning publishable worthiness to lives (Fowler, 2007, pp. 105-127). On the contrary, death notices deal with those whose lives were not considered important enough to deserve an obituary. As a textbook on death and dying indicates, “[t]he death of the average Joe or Jill tends to be made known through death notices—brief, standardized statements, usually printed in small type and listed alphabetically in a column of vital statistics […] The deaths of the famous, however, are announced by lengthier obituaries” (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005, p. 19, original emphases). Obituaries, as opposed to death notices, rely on a narrative element of retrospective evaluation in which lives are placed on teleological trajectories. Therefore, the distinction between obituaries and death notices is not only a matter of social significance attributed to the subject of the announcement, but also of form. The narrative style of obituaries contrasts with the reserved style of death notices. For example, in a classic study researchers distinguished obituaries from death notices based on the following criteria: the former varied in length, style, and content whereas the latter included only basic information and contained an indiscriminate (i.e., alphabetical) list of deaths (Kastenbaum, Peyton, & Kastenbaum, 1977, p. 353). In the absence of gatekeepers to assign significance to lives, death notices appear more inclusive than obituaries. Numerous studies found no gender differences in their study of death notices (compared to obituaries) because of the more inclusive and factual nature of the genre (Halbur & Vandagriff, 1987; Kastenbaum et al., 1977; Moremen & Craddock, 1999). But, an important question remains: to what extent are these distinctions between death notices and obituaries “universal” across different cultures?

Previous comparative research has established the difficulty of identifying uniform genre characteristics across countries (Fries, 1990; Nwoye, 1992). In the Turkish case, for the lack of a better term, I use the term “death announcements” (önlüm ilanı in Turkish) to distinguish the particular genre in question since it sits uncomfortably between obituaries and death notices. Stylistically, the similarity to death notices is hard to miss. Turkish death announcements are brief statements usually in small textboxes, giving basic information about the deceased, her or his family and relatives, and the funeral arrangements. Although the length of the text is almost always brief, the size of the textbox and fonts show greater variability, suggesting that a framework of differentiation relying on the culture-bound selective criteria in obituaries versus nature-bound selective criteria in death notices is suspect, because a rich collection of cultural clues for evaluating past lives appear in death announcements in Turkish newspapers. Two reasons exist for this. First, these announcements cost hefty amounts and hence require considerable financial power from the family, relatives, and friends of the deceased. Second, but closely related to the first, death announcements in Turkey have historically been associated with cultural elites, and thus imply possession of cultural capital for the deceased and for
those who place them in national newspapers. It is safe to assume that death announcements in the Turkish context are not concerned with the lives of the “average Joe or Jill,” but rather reflect the lives of relatively powerful and privileged groups. Therefore, these announcements are neither as inclusive as death notices nor as exclusive as obituaries, since, at least ideally, anyone who can afford it can place a death announcement in a nationally-circulated newspaper. Furthermore, their social exclusiveness has nothing to do with the biases and assumptions of a small group of newspaper editors acting as gatekeepers but rather a function of the financial and cultural positions of relatively privileged groups. The liminal positioning of death announcements along the axis of exclusivity is what makes them so informative. They are not so inclusive as to render the announcements merely lists of natural deaths at the expense of cultural factors; however, the patterns of inequalities in them do not only reflect the ideas of a small group of obituary editors. Instead, the form and content of death announcements emerge as a result of a large decentralized collection of private decisions.

Perhaps the financially “democratic” nature of death notices in Turkey explains their formal inertia. Faced with the uncertainty of death, human beings tend to opt for long-term practices and widely accepted rituals. Death announcements examined in this study display rather standardized tendencies toward incessantly replicating a multitude of pre-established canonical forms and phrases. In the long run, however, they respond to societal level changes in cultural norms and values, as well as in political and economic structures. Especially the transition of Turkish society into a politically and economically more liberal era in the 1980s is expected to make its appearance in death announcements. Turkey experienced its third full-fledged military intervention in 1980. The transition to civilian rule in 1983, however, did not only mark a political change, because Turkey’s export-oriented open economy in that period resulted in deeper integration into global economic and cultural trends, and new forms of consumption corresponding to the creation of new upper and middle classes. Thus, the early 1980s as a significant turning point marked the dominance of economic, political, and cultural liberalism, popularly contrasted to the social and political instability in the 1970s (Zürcher, 1993). Death announcements over a 35-year period from 1970 to 2006 potentially constitute one of the arenas to reflect the transformation of Turkish society in the 1980s, a period ridden with social, political, and economic volatility.

Cultural Capital and Symbolic Boundaries

The “founding fathers” of sociology paid close attention to how individuals and collectivities operate within a web of systems of classification and distinction. Durkheim studied the links and tensions between the “sacred” and the “profane”
in the religious realm (Durkheim, 1965/1915), and extended this symbolic system of classification to the entire social system in which a shared moral order, which goes beyond the sum of individual perceptions, defines a group by specifying those to be included and excluded. Weber placed more emphasis on inequalities generated by groups’ differential access to wealth, power, and prestige. In an endless quest to secure scarce resources and minimize others’ competitive capabilities, human groups distinguish themselves in a number of characteristics ranging from lifestyles and language to race and religion (Weber, 1978/1922). This competitive and discriminatory gesture of closure was later extended by Frank Parkin (1979) and Raymond Murphy (1988). Closure implies a process in which groups attempt to monopolize social rewards and resources through inclusion and exclusion. One of the strengths of closure theory is that the criteria of inclusion and exclusion is not limited to economic resources but could be any social opportunity that has a significant bearing in the life chances of an individual and collectivity. One of the ways in which death announcements examined in this study are important is in tracing the ethnic, gendered, and class-based inequalities in the symbolic world of death.

Previous research on obituaries has paid close attention to how closures based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality are reproduced after death (Kastenbaum et al., 1977; Kearl, 1986; Marks & Piggee, 1999; Maybury, 1996; Moremen & Cradduck, 1999; Spilka, Lacey, & Gelb, 1980; Williams, 1997). Despite the stubbornly succinct, formulaic, and tight-lipped nature of the genre of death announcements, the Turkish case has plenty to offer to this literature as the interstices of death announcements reveal persistent signals of inclusion and exclusion, especially in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity. High fees associated with placing these announcements clearly signal the class dimension. It is important to note that death announcements do not offer tools to establish inter-class relations. Rather than pointing to a vertical hierarchy and competitive status game, the class dimension of Turkish death announcements unfold more in the context of horizontal strategies of maintaining group boundaries and establishing belonging to a specific cultural group. Individual and collective efforts of impression management takes place within the specific class, only to be explicitly compared to those groups who are unable to appear in death announcements. Gender in Turkey is another category of inequality which witnesses closure against women despite improvements in certain domains, such as education (Arat, 2000). As far as ethnic and religious background is concerned, even a cursory look reveals a disproportionately high number of non-Muslim announcements in Turkish newspapers. What is interesting in the case of ethnic/religious minorities is their surprisingly high level of access to death announcements, especially given the discriminatory policies non-Muslim minorities of Turkey have experienced in economic and political domains as well as prejudices they faced in social domains throughout modern Turkish history. Policies of
“Turkification” not only contributed to the declining population of minorities, but also excluded remaining minorities from political processes. Furthermore, policies geared toward economic discrimination materialized to transfer private wealth from non-Muslim to Muslim citizens through governmental policies (Aktar, 2000; Bali, 2006). Interestingly enough, it appears that class-based closures maintained by the hefty fees of death announcements result in openings at least for the wealthier members of ethnic minorities. Since death announcements in Turkey echo the aggregate efforts of privileged groups to manage a self-image in the absence of editorial interventionism, members of generally underrepresented ethnic/religious minorities make their presence in disproportionately large numbers.

Although minorities take advantage of the space created by the financial egalitarianism of death announcements, it is important to gauge the extent and nature of this opening. Are there any symbolic borders and limitations distinguishing Muslim and non-Muslim announcements? The horizontal nature of class boundaries associated with the prestige of death announcements should not eliminate the possibility of internal boundaries within the genre. Placing a death announcement is in itself a mark of distinction; however, rendering this act more refined requires cultural work. Death announcements abound with cultural clues that accentuate ethnic, gendered, and occupational boundaries. Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital” is helpful in setting up death announcements as collective efforts of impression management that go beyond the raw power of economic capital. Bourdieu, in his *Distinction*, reiterates the Durkheimian point that societies seek to go beyond the limitations of the individuals of which they are composed, and adds that conventions ranging from portraits and statues to tombstones, from memorial ceremonies to national holidays serve to counteract the bodily limitations imposed by death. In this symbolic constellation, “eternal life is one of the most sought-after social privileges” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 72; also see Fowler, 2007, p. 60). Implicit in Bourdieu’s work is the idea that systems of classification not only reflect but also reproduce social inequalities. The symbolic world of death in this sense can be seen as a domain in which struggles around class, gender, and ethnicity extend to the domain of taste, lifestyle, and privilege. Dominant groups define their own cultural preferences as superior and thus monopolize and legitimize their privileged access to social rewards. A mainly U.S.-based literature extended Bourdieu’s ideas, arguing that cultural distinction is more complex and context-bound than cultural capital theory implies. Lamont (1992, 2000) shows that moral and symbolic boundaries are drawn differently across different class, racial, and ethnic groups. Based on this assumption that cultural capital is not given but requires active boundary work, the context in which boundaries are located gains importance. This article will examine the links between mundane individual choices and large social processes in order to assess the nature of symbolic boundaries drawn in the case of Turkish death announcements.
METHOD

Sample and Coding

This study examines a random sample of death announcements published in the daily newspaper *Hürriyet*. This newspaper, one of the widest-circulated dailies in Turkey throughout the period included in this study, addresses secular audiences who are located at the center of the political spectrum, although its political views have shown some variation over time. It publishes the largest number of classified advertisements compared to other dailies, and thus has readership based on this reputation. As far as death announcements are concerned, *Hürriyet* is the most widely-used medium to publish death announcements, whereas other dailies have only sporadic coverage. Moreover, the relatively small number of death announcements published in other newspapers shows no major difference in terms of form and content when compared to those in *Hürriyet*.

The format of death notices is not particularly amenable to rapid fluctuations, such as summer versus winter, weekend versus weekday, or holiday versus workday. Therefore, a random sample of relatively few days represents an entire month or year. To obtain the sample of announcements analyzed in this study, a simple random sample of 150 dates from January 1, 1970 to December 31, 2006 has been selected. Then, all death announcements in the selected dates have been coded, resulting in a sample of 2,554 announcements. Before the coding started, two coders worked with the author and received instruction until they achieved the desired level of consistency. The majority of coding categories were straightforward, leading to an intercoder reliability of 0.9.

Measures: What is Included in Death Announcements?

Death announcements in Turkey include brief statements manifestly to communicate the incident of death to relatives and acquaintances, to announce the time and place of the burial or a religious ceremony commemorating the death, to extend condolences to the bereaved, and to express gratitude for support and assistance received in the aftermath of death (cf. Al-Ali, 2005; Roniger, 1994). Within the given limitations of the genre that emphasizes brevity, the “typical” announcement can show considerable variability to accommodate individual choice and cultural efforts of boundary drawing. Although the text of announcements is almost always brief, the size shows enormous variability, ranging from tiny ones to those covering an entire page. A large number of announcements rely on a distant and matter-of-factly tone, refraining from emotional overtures and merely stating information about the deceased, including religion, gender, and occupation. Religion works as a proxy for minority status, distinguishing Muslim groups from non-Muslims (Turkish citizens of Armenian, Greek, and Jewish origins). In the majority of cases, minority status was easily derived from
the place of the funerary rituals (mosque, church, or synagogue). When that information was unavailable, names of the deceased were used to identify their religion. Age rarely figures in these announcements. At the end, a brief statement indicates whether an individual, the family, or an organization placed the announcement. The goals of death announcements range from simply announcing the death and the details of funeral arrangements to offering condolences to the bereaved. Some announcements place a strong emphasis on the occupation and life accomplishments of the deceased, whereas in others his or her close kin are listed in great detail. Finally, some choose to include a statement to discourage the attendants to send flowers to the funeral, or instead urge them to make a donation to a charity. Such variation interfaces with class-based, gendered, and ethnic boundaries drawn in the symbolic world of death (see Table 1 for a list of measures). The following section will outline how the various goals and messages of announcements establish these boundaries.

RESULTS

Goals of Announcements

Death announcements in Turkey have five distinct goals which also correspond to distinct stylistic forms. The most common form, the informational announcement, aims to spread the news of death and provide information on the date, time, and place of the religious ceremony before the burial, be it a mosque, a church, or a synagogue. These announcements appear either a few days before the funeral or even on the day of the funeral for many Muslim burials, as Islamic practice encourages a speedy disposal of the corpse. Informational announcements harbor implicit calls to participate in funerary ceremonies.

The second and third most common forms, announcements of condolence and announcements of recognition, mainly serve to strengthen solidarity between family members, acquaintances, friends, co-workers, and ethnic, religious, and political groups. Announcements of condolence are placed by friends and co-workers, as well as members of a larger organization, such as political parties, civil society organizations, or religious establishments, to offer sympathy to the bereaved. Announcements of recognition, on the contrary, are usually placed by the family to express gratitude to relatives, friends, or organizations for their emotional support and sympathy. By definition, the latter two types of announcements appear after the funeral.

Ritual announcements are the fourth most common type of announcements, the main goal of which is to secure participation in a religious gathering in honor of the deceased. Similar to informational announcements, ritual announcements communicate an event in which attendance is expected; therefore, detailed information concerning the date, time, and place of the event is provided. Taking place after already consummated burials, ritual events may be commemorating a
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics ($N = 2554$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1) Male</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>The gender of the deceased was determined based on kinship titles or, in cases where the former was unavailable, on names. In case of gender-neutral names, the announcement was coded as unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Female</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Unknown</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority status</td>
<td>1) Non-Muslim</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>Religious affiliation of the deceased was deduced from either the name of the deceased only or from information provided in the announcement regarding the place of funerary ritual or the burial. The former accounts for 42% of the cases for Muslims and 16% of the cases for Non-Muslims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Muslim</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Unknown</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of announcement</td>
<td>1) Informational</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>Announcements are categorized based on their main goal: Spreading information on the funeral arrangement, offering condolences, expressing gratitude, announcing a death-related religious ritual or other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Condolence</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Recognition</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Ritual</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Remembrance</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6) Other</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author of Announcement</td>
<td>1) Family members</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>Announcements are categorized based on who placed the announcement, the identity of whom is always indicated at the end of the announcement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Friends</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Organization</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Other</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of announcement</td>
<td>1) Small</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>The size of the announcement was determined based on the space it covers on a newspaper page. Only announcement larger than half a page was coded as large.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Large</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>1) Civil servant (bureaucrat)</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>This variable records the occupation of the deceased based on the information provided in the announcement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Military</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Business</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Other occupation</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Not mentioned</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower/donation statement</td>
<td>1) No statement</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>This variable refers to whether the announcement included any statements regarding flowers to the funeral or donation to charity. Category 2 refers to announcements only with a request to not send flowers to the funeral. If an announcement both includes a flower statement and requests a donation, it was coded into category 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Do not send flowers</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Make a donation to charity</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note*: Total percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
relatively brief period after the death, such as the seventh or the fortieth day, or a certain anniversary. Finally, the least common type among the announcements intends to express deep grief for a past death. Remembrance announcements generally serve as emotional outlets for the bereaved, occasionally directly addressing the deceased. They also may announce a memorial dedication at the grave. Table 2 shows the distribution of death announcements over time.

Almost half of all death announcements from 1970 to 2006 were published before the funeral, with the goal to communicate the news of the death and inviting others for various funerary practices. Announcements of recognition and condolence together include more than 40% of all announcements, attesting to the gestures of solidarity around the time of death. Finally, ritual and remembrance announcements collectively take up approximately 10% of death announcements, showing the rather limited space for religious and emotional uses of the genre.

Even a cursory look at the time-series data arranged in 5-year intervals reveals the way in which the goals of death announcements have changed over time (see Figure 1). Informational announcements consistently represent approximately half of all death announcements. Thus, announcing deaths and funeral arrangements remains a major goal of the genre over time. Solidarity-building announcements (announcements of condolence and recognition) also maintain a strong presence overall; however, when analyzed separately, messages of condolence and recognition seem to change in opposing directions. As the data indicate, bereaved families nowadays feel less obliged to offer their gratitude to others, as evidenced in the steady decline of the percentage of announcements of recognition. However, gestures of solidarity are more likely to be offered to bereaved families by friends, acquaintances, and co-workers, possibly in search of impression management, establishing and strengthening social ties with the bereaved, associating with the legacy and reputation of the deceased, or claiming a small piece of the privilege of eternal life. Although the overall share of ritual and remembrance announcements is relatively small, changes in their representation are telling. The decline in the former hint at the secularization of funerary spaces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Informational (%)</th>
<th>Condolence (%)</th>
<th>Recognition (%)</th>
<th>Ritual (%)</th>
<th>Remembrance (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-79</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-89</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-99</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-06</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1206 (47.8%)</td>
<td>770 (30.5%)</td>
<td>284 (11.3%)</td>
<td>217 (8.6%)</td>
<td>47 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 2524.
in the domain of death announcements, as the privileged groups who can afford placing death announcements wish less and less to be associated with religious rituals. The rise in the latter possibly bears witness to the coming of “postmodern” days where individual responses to death seek novel ways to express grief in ways that push the discursive boundaries of the genre (Phillips, 2007).

Gender and Ethnic/Religious Minority Status

Gender has been a central aspect of Turkish modernity (Kandiyoti, 1997). Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the modernizing elite assumed that the condition of women would improve steadily as the country pursued the goal of modernization. It is interesting to test whether this expectation materializes in the form of increasing gender balance in death announcements. As a result of liberalization in the early 1980s, Turkish society witnessed the rise of a multitude of feminist movements that demanded a separate voice from state-imposed discourses of emancipation (Arat, 2000). Given the persistence of gender inequality in Turkey, one can hypothesize that women will be underrepresented in death announcements. However, an interesting question is to see whether the liberal atmosphere of the 1980s had any effect on the representation of women in death announcements.

The data indicates a pattern of persistent gender inequality. In our sample, males were significantly overrepresented: in 71.1% of the announcements, the deceased was male, compared to 28.9% for females. Even assuming a roughly 20% higher death rate for males, which was the case in 2006 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2006), the difference is significant ($\chi^2 = 244.5$, $df = 1$,
$p < .001$). Although this finding replicates gender inequality found in a multitude of other studies on obituaries, the difference between men and women in the Turkish case is quite pronounced, especially considering the fact that, as elite instruments, death announcements are open to anyone who can afford them. Therefore, gender inequality in this case is more likely to represent a general attitude and an institutional configuration regarding gender, rather than the prejudices of individual newspaper editors as gatekeepers. As far as attitudes are concerned, the post-1980s are marked with the rise of a new and more conservative middle-classes emerging from Anatolian cities (Keyder, 2007). It is likely that death announcements become one of the venues in which these new groups seek distinction on par with their wealth. In addition, the lopsided gender representation in death announcements closely echo structural tendencies, such as women’s traditionally low and declining labor force participation in Turkey. Death announcements tend to reflect the occupational achievements of the deceased. Low female labor force participation, especially in urban areas in comparison to the agricultural sector, may have contributed to the asymmetrical gender balance in death announcements. Moreover, there is no significant improvement in women’s representation over time (see Table 3). This finding may have affinities with labor force participation. Factors, such as women’s longer stay in education, the economy’s transformation from rural to urban sectors, legal obstacles, and change-resistant traditional norms and attitudes, contributed to women’s declining levels of labor participation from 34% in 1990 to 25.4% in 2004 (Berber & Yılmaz Eser, 2008). Death announcements reveal that general structural tendencies closely interact with representations in death and that middle- and upper-class women are not immune to gender discrimination. Despite women’s increasing participation in a multitude of social domains in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>95% Cl (Male %)</th>
<th>Muslim (%)</th>
<th>Non-Muslim (%)</th>
<th>95% Cl (Muslim %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-79</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>64-70</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>77-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-89</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>74-80</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>85-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-99</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>67-73</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>86.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-06</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>67-77</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>88.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>69-73</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>84-87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N* = 2501. In 53 cases, information on gender was not possible to deduce. 

*N* = 2539. In 15 cases, information on minority status was not possible to deduce.
contemporary Turkey, their accomplishments tend not to receive recognition in the event of death. Thus, death announcements as an elite medium reflect the continuing inequalities in gender representation after death.

In Table 3, in conjunction with the changing attitudes of newly rising middle classes and institutional factors, the 1980s emerge as a significant turning point. As the distribution of confidence intervals indicates, there is a significant decline in women’s representation in death announcements after the 1970s. In fact, rather than being a period of opening and liberalism, the 1980s appear to be the most restricted period for women’s access to cultural capital after death. A separate comparison of the pre- and post-1980 periods supports this finding: in figures not reported in the tables, death announcements dedicated to males increase from 66.9% in the 1970s to 72.9% in the post-1980 period ($\chi^2 = 8.9, df = 1, p < .01$).

As far as type of announcements is concerned, males are especially overrepresented in remembrance (80%) and condolence (78.1%) announcements. The small sample of remembrance may lead one to question the robustness of the former finding; however, the male dominance in condolences (95% confidence interval: 75-81) signal the willingness of bereaved friends, acquaintances, kin groups, and colleagues to bask in the status and power of males.

Considered in the context of the increasing share of condolence announcements in post-1970s Turkey in general (see Table 1), the gendered nature of the announcement type becomes clearer. The rising proportion of condolence announcements and of announcements for males in the 1980s indicates a pattern in which death announcements were no longer merely meant for spreading the news of death and death-related rituals. Offering symbolic gestures to others became a major objective that rivaled communicative goals. To further clarify this distinction, I combined death announcements into two categories: announcements of communication and of gesture. Informational and ritual announcements both aim to communicate death-related news and rituals. Announcements of condolence and recognition, however, are not intended as invitations for death-related events but rather are placed as symbolic gestures to third parties. Therefore, the former goal resonates with community building around participation in death-related rituals, whereas the latter goal builds alliances of status around shared grief and accumulates cultural capital by participating in the mourning for the privileged (mostly male) members of society.

Table 4 reveals the significant relationship between gender and the goals of death announcements. As a characteristic of the genre, announcement of communication appears in the majority of cases for both genders. However, the male dominance in announcements of gesture is unmistakably clear. Compared to 36% female announcements, men’s announcements of gesture comprise a significantly higher 45%. Community-building is emphasized by announcements for women. On the contrary, announcements for men are more likely to tap into the nexus of power and status associated with male deaths.
Confirming cursory observations, non-Muslim minorities display a disproportionately high presence in death announcements compared to their percentage in the population (see Table 3). Although Christian (of Greek and Armenian origin) and Jewish citizens of Turkey account for less than 1% of the population, 14.2% of all announcements refer to a non-Muslim person, which is significantly different even from an expected 1% representation ($\chi^2 = 4560.7$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Although non-Muslim representation in death announcements is disproportionately high, time-series data indicate a decline, especially in the 1980s. The comparison of the pre- and post-1980 periods (not reported in tables) indicate a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 34.2$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). As we have seen above, the 1980s also witnessed a similar decline in female representation. Therefore, the post-1980 period marks death announcements as an increasingly male and Muslim domain. One may ask whether these two trends are related. Under the assumption that the gender gap for non-Muslims is smaller, one can expect the declining proportion of women to be linked to the declining non-Muslim announcements. However, the data do not support this assumption. Muslim and non-Muslim death announcements are equally male-dominated and the gender differences between them (not reported in tables) are too small to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.05$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$).

Death announcements help the members of these small and dispersed minorities maintain contact with the larger community while also maintaining distinctiveness in mainstream society. An analysis of ethnicity and type of announcement underscores this factor behind the high level of minority representation: informational and ritual announcements of death have the highest proportion of non-Muslim presence. In findings not reported in tables, non-Muslim individuals are represented in 19.1% (95% confidence interval: 17-21) of
informational announcements and in 20.7% (95% confidence interval: 15-26) of ritual announcements, both significantly higher than their 14.2% overall representation. This finding hints at the fact that non-Muslim announcements serve a communicative purpose. Table 4 elaborates this claim by comparing the twin goals of communication and gesture in light of ethnic-religious minority status.

Religious/ethnic minority status follows a pattern similar to gender in which announcements of communication are more common for the minority group. Announcements of gesture, on the other hand, are placed for the more powerful categories in each group (male and Muslim). It is likely that the difference between men and women corresponds to social importance assigned to men in general and to male deaths in particular. In this sense, the higher socio-economic status of men translates into the higher representation in announcements of gesture, as third parties recognize the support or appreciate the condolence extended for the death of a man. However, the difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in terms of announcements of gesture and communication partially corresponds to the minority efforts of building and maintaining community ties. As members of minority groups who feel assimilative pressures in their daily lives, non-Muslims are more likely to employ death announcements to garner communal support networks, to maintain their religious customs, and to emphasize their cultural distinctiveness. However, this is not the full story. It is likely that a history of discrimination against non-Muslim minorities render it difficult for the members of these groups to set claim to symbols of status, power, and cultural capital in a highly visible arena like death announcements. Popular perceptions of minorities as wealthy internal enemies may contribute to their hesitation to diverge from the dominant tendencies of announcements of communication. An analysis of the likelihood to divulge information on occupational status further evaluates this claim.

**Occupational Status**

Attempts to accumulate cultural capital explain a number of patterns in death notices as an elite form of communication and class distinction (Fowler, 2007). Stating the occupation of the deceased in death announcements is one of the major ways of assigning status not only to the deceased but also those who are associated with him or her, such as the family, co-workers, and acquaintances. Even within the limited textual space available in brief announcements, jobs appear to attach meaning to lost lives and help construct a teleological life story in which individuals appear to yearn toward accomplishing their (retrospectively created) destiny. In the present sample, 42.8% of announcements include information about occupational status. Compared to other occupations, business people and bureaucrats are greatly overrepresented. In our sample \((N = 2554)\), business people appeared in 28.9% of the announcements, bureaucrats in 12.1%
(comprising civil servants in 8.6% of cases and military officers in 3.5%), and other occupations in 1.8%, while more than half (57.2%) of the announcement had no occupational information.

Occupational data are most revealing when analyzed in light of gender and ethnicity. Table 5 presents the results of multinomial logistic regressions that predict the odds of one’s occupation being mentioned in a death announcement versus gender and membership in ethnic minority groups. In order to fully explore the way occupation is relevant for establishing status and building symbolic capital not only for the deceased but also for the family, friends, and colleagues, I included two additional variables. The first variable focuses on authorship by measuring whether the announcement was placed by the family of the deceased or other parties such as friends, colleagues, acquaintances, or organizations. In the sample, 61.8% of all announcements were placed by the family, and the rest by third parties. The second variable has to do with the size of the announcement, measured in a simple dichotomy of large (more than half a page) versus small. A rather small percentage of the sample (1.3%) included large announcements. Finally, the model below also controls for time, as the data show a slightly declining tendency to mention occupation in announcements, especially after the 1980s. In findings not reported in tables, in the 1970s and the 1980s, respectively 42% and 48% of announcements included occupational information. This percentage decreases after the 1980s (approximately 40% for both the 1990s and 2000s).

The likelihood of mentioning the occupation of the deceased, argued here to be an important method of claiming status and symbolic capital in death announcements, is closely related to four variables: gender; ethnic/religious minority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors (occupation mentioned)</th>
<th>Exp (β)</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Men)</td>
<td>8.13***</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>283.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (Muslims)</td>
<td>2.38***</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>37.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Third parties)</td>
<td>2.99***</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>125.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size (Large)</td>
<td>2.55*</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decade (1980s)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decade (1990s)</td>
<td>0.61***</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>16.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decade (2000s)</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>16.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Comparison group for the variable decade is the 1970s.  
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
background; whether the announcement was placed by the family of the deceased or a third party; and the size of the announcement. Gender appears to be the most important factor. The odds of including occupational information in announcements are more than eight times higher for men compared to women. Even considered in the context of relatively low female labor participation, the ratio is extremely high. Death announcements define women primarily, and in the majority of cases exclusively, through their familial and kinship relations. For example (*Hürriyet*, June 10, 1998):

**DEATH.** The wife of late retired Colonel Kazim Kaya, the beloved mother of Nusret, Saffet, Zerrin Kaya, and Yıldız and Seçkin Aybars, the dearest grandmother of Karhan, Ece, Aral, Aslıhan, İdıl, Evren and Artun has passed. Her funeral will take place on 10 June 1998 Wednesday after the noon prayer at the Aşağı Kayı village of Tosya. To the attention of all her loved ones. The family.

As the announcement exemplifies, deceased women are sometimes allowed to acquire status through the occupation of their husband; however, women’s lives tend to attain meaning and narrative direction in terms of their being mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, or aunts of their relatives. Although these relationships are also important for men, kinship is rivaled by occupational achievements to assign status and meaning to male lives. For example (*Hürriyet*, 28 April 2008):

**OUR PAINFUL LOSS.** Chemical engineer Verşan Şükür Laçın, the beloved son of Kemal, one of the notables of Erzincan, and of teacher Aysê Laçın, has been reunited with the blessings of God. The funeral of the deceased will take place on 28 April 2002 (today) at the Merkez Efendi Cemetery (in Zeytinburnu) following the noon prayer at the Merkze Efenci Mosque. God bless him. The family.

Similarly, the odds of Muslim announcements to include occupational information are 2.38 times higher compared to non-Muslim announcements. This finding should also be considered in light of non-Muslims’ under-representation in announcement of gesture. The fact that minority announcements systematically encounter closure in symbolic attempts to acquire gesture and occupational prestige cannot merely be explained by non-Muslim efforts to maintain community ties and to accomplish communicative goals. Historically, established patterns of exclusion and prejudice render minority announcements much more formulaic and uninformative, possibly as a result of efforts to prevent sticking out of the crowd. Turkey’s republican history abounds with governmental efforts of “Turkification” of minorities (Aktar, 2000; Bali, 2006; Minority Rights Group International, 2007), which led to an atmosphere of discouragement for the public display of minority identities. Historically, Muslim Turks have been favored for governmental occupations, especially those considered critical for the security of the state (Okutan, 2004). Exclusion from the governmental sector
resulted in non-Muslim concentration in business and trade. Death announcements affirm this tendency, as the present sample included no non-Muslim individual in civil or military bureaucracy. Still, the non-Muslim hesitance to use their successful business careers as sources of respectability in announcements may appear surprising at first. Given that successful business careers are proudly displayed in Muslim Turkish announcements, the roots of this hesitance should be sought in the historically solidified prejudices against non-Muslim wealth in Turkey. Examples like the Capital Levy in 1942, a one-time tax that specifically targeted non-Muslim groups, point to a pattern in which the government attempted to create a Turkish-Muslim bourgeoisie at the expense of non-Muslim groups (Aktar, 2000). Suspicion and hostility toward minority wealth is embedded in Turkish culture today and partly explains the limitations for non-Muslim announcements to display pride in business accomplishments.

The links between occupational achievements and prestige become more evident when we consider authorship and size of announcements. Death announcements placed by third parties, such as friends, acquaintances, co-workers or organizations, are more likely to contain occupational information than those placed by the family. The odds ratio for the former is three times higher. While families tend to emphasize relationships in announcements, third parties place vicarious claims to the occupational status of the deceased. Announcements of condolence offer friends, coworkers, acquaintances, or companies to reaffirm their ties with the deceased and their perceived accomplishments. Similarly, announcement size and providing occupational information, as two acts of status-building after death, are related. The odds are 2.55 times higher for large announcements to mention occupational information and achievements. Table 5 also indicates that the 1970s and 1980s are similar in terms of the likelihood of mentioning occupational information; however, there was a slight but statistically significant decline in the 1990s and the 2000s in this regard.

Flower/Donation Statements

Some announcements contain brief statements, usually at the very end in the form of postscript, suggesting that prospective attendees at the funeral refrain from sending flowers. Occasionally, announcements also ask readers to give donations to a preferred charity instead of sending flowers. In fact, it is not unusual to specify a particular charity in the announcement, usually an educational or a military one. In the present sample, 11.8% of announcements contain a statement regarding flowers or donation to a charity. Within this group, 28.8% (3.4% in the total sample) simply included a statement regarding the undesirability of flowers. The rest (71.2% within the same category, 8.4% in the entire sample) specifically mention that donations to a charity are preferred. Two possible explanations come to mind about the flower/donation statements. First, as indicators of a positive attitude toward philanthropy, these statements
represent claims to class respectability and cultural capital. After all, to be in a position to help others implicitly implies the philanthropist’s superior position in social standing. It is possible to consider these statements in the context of the post-1980 liberalization, increasing variety of avenues to express status and cultural capital and a proliferation of consumption to display wealth and prestige (Öncü, 2002).

The families of the deceased, who in many cases are responsible for funeral arrangements and have considerably greater stakes in funerary messages of status and cultural distinction, command the ultimate authority in flower/donation statements and in fact duly account for an overwhelming majority of authorship in announcements with these statements. Therefore, only announcements placed by family members are included in the following analysis. Data reveal a steady increase in the percentage of announcements that include flower/donation statements over decades (see Table 6).

The percentage of announcements with either a flower or a donation statement climbs from 11.1% for the 1970s to 28.5 for the 2000s. Especially the 1990s and 2000s witness increasing numbers of announcements with flower/donation statements. When the difference between the pre- and post-1980 periods is compared in figures not reported in the tables, the difference again is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 24.3, df = 1, p < .001$). Moreover, the flower/donation statements are more likely to appear in large announcements ($\chi^2 = 7.7, df = 1, p < .01$), suggesting that symbols of distinction tend to correlate. The increasing popularity of flower/donation statements hint at the fact that Turkish death announcements do not merely serve as a tool of communication alone but are slowly transforming into a domain where messages of philanthropy are exchanged, cultural boundaries drawn, and symbolic gestures are extended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Statement included (%)</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-79</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>9-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-89</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>14-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-99</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>16-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-06</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>22-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>15-19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 1578$. Only announcements placed by family members are included.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Rituals around death accentuate, rather than erase, social divisions, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and religiosity. The present study focuses on death announcements in a Turkish daily newspaper (Hürriyet) in terms of gendered, class-based, and ethnic inequalities and the corresponding efforts to draw symbolic boundaries within and across social groups. Death announcements in Turkey are particularly suited for this goal because, as opposed to European and North American obituaries, no individual editorial decision as to the “significance” of a particular death is involved in the process of publication. However, Turkish death announcements are not indiscriminate lists either, not only because placing them in nationally circulated dailies entails large fees but also the announcements act as symbolic vehicles of life-time achievements that signal class status. This liminal position of Turkish death announcements extends opportunities to study a large decentralized collection of private decisions that reflect attitudes toward gender, ethnicity, and class distinction during the time death. In the absence of editorial interventionism, death announcements in Turkey tend to echo the aggregate efforts of privileged groups to maintain a particular self-image, and this class exclusivity results in openings for the traditionally under-represented religious and ethnic minorities such as Jewish Turkish citizens and citizens of Greek or Armenian origin.

Findings uncover clues as to significant social and cultural changes in Turkish society across the 1980s. The 1980s in Turkey signify the country’s opening toward global economy and consumption patterns. Changes in types of announcements over time signal these changes. Announcements of condolence, the type of announcements that are geared toward directing symbolic gestures toward the bereaved as well as associating the third parties with the prestige of the deceased, became a major form in the genre at the expense of other types of announcements. The post-1980 period also signals the rise of announcements of remembrance. These announcements usually go beyond the established formal tendencies of the genre, using an emotional language that signal a postmodern attitude toward individual choice vis-à-vis death. However, further research is required to analyze this trend. The post-1980 death announcements also make liberal use of another source of prestige and distinction: philanthropic messages. Announcements, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, are more likely to address their intended audience with messages specifying the desirability of donations to a charity rather than sending flowers to the funeral.

The signs of status and power in Turkish death announcements are largely monopolized by men of Turkish-Muslim origins. Death announcements are not only dominated by men, they have become more so in the post-1980 period. Those women who make it to a death announcement are predominantly presented as mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, or grandmothers of men. Compared to women, men tend to appear more frequently in announcements of recognition,
which allow third parties, such as friends, colleagues, and organizations, to bask in the occupational prestige of men. It is not surprising to find that men are more than eight times more likely to have their occupations mentioned in death announcements. In terms of ethnic-religious background, non-Muslim citizens of Turkey are still overrepresented significantly, although this trend has witnessed a major downturn in the post-1980 period. Similar to women, non-Muslims are more likely to be featured in announcements of communication, which serve important functions to maintain communal ties and emphasize differences for non-Muslim minorities. Because of widespread prejudices against non-Muslim wealth, announcements placed for non-Muslim Turkish citizens are conspicuously absent of major signs of social prestige, such as occupational status. In general, these findings, especially the tendency of announcements to become increasingly male and Muslim spaces, reflect broad societal changes in terms of the continuing and solidifying obstacles against minorities.

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