





Power, Ownership, and Post-mortem Autonomy: Rethinking the Question of the Dead Body

Adem Sağır |  0000-0003-0763-0518 |  ademsagir@karabuk.edu.tr

Karabuk University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Sociology,
Karabuk, Türkiye

ROR  <https://ror.org/04wy7gp54>

Ebru Gürgen |  0009-0008-2292-7241 |  2428244510@ogrenci.karabuk.edu.tr

Karabuk University, The Institute of Graduate Programs, Department of Sociology,
Karabuk, Türkiye

ROR  <https://ror.org/04wy7gp54>

Abstract

From a sociological perspective, death corresponds to a multilayered process that goes far beyond a biological end, where individual autonomy, family rights, religious references, and social values intersect. In Turkey, written declarations made by individuals during their lifetime regarding organ donation or the use of their bodies for scientific purposes are generally considered an extension of personal rights. However, in practice, the boundaries between the will expressed by the individual while alive and the decision-making authority of family members after death often creates ambiguities, ethical dilemmas, and compatibility issues. This study examines the question of “Who owns the dead body?” in relation to the right to dispose of the body after death, within the Turkish context from the perspective of the sociology of death. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the data collection method, and participants’ experiences, perceptions, and value systems regarding the body after death were examined within their social context. During the interviews, efforts were made to understand how participants relate to the dead body after death, as well as the emotional experiences and decision-making practices that emerge during this process. Participants were selected through maximum variation sampling; and the sample consisted of seven married couples (14 participants in total) who possess a certain level of awareness regarding organ donation and cadaver use. This approach aims to provide a sociological basis for discussing how the dead body is socially interpreted and through which normative and cultural references post-mortem decisions are shaped.

Keywords

Sociology of Death, Dead Body, Post-Mortem Autonomy, Organ Donation, Cadaver

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