



African Migrations Workshop

The Contribution of African Research to Migration Theory

16–19 November 2010, Dakar, Senegal

Rites and Rights in Death: Contemporary Management of the Repatriation of African Human Remains

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Resumé

La gestion de la migration s'attache souvent à trouver des solutions théoriques et pratiques pour les migrants vivants. Nous savons que dans le cas du rapatriement, le rapatriement volontaire est souvent invoqué comme le principal outil de gestion pour mettre soi-disant fin aux situations de migration, cette fin étant censée être le retour des migrants sur leur lieu d'origine (mettant ainsi « fin » au cycle migratoire). Toutefois, que se passe-t-il si le migrant africain est décédé à l'étranger et que, parmi les autres facteurs qui gouvernent les processus et les décisions en matière de rapatriement, il a perdu sa capacité d'action et de mobilité ? Ce rapport s'appuiera sur l'hypothèse que le migrant vivant et le migrant décédé possèdent un point commun en ce qui concerne la gestion de leur rapatriement potentielle : une multitude d'acteurs qui calculent les résultats spécifiques de ce rapatriement. Ce rapport explore trois groupes-clés d'acteurs impliqués dans le processus de rapatriement des dépouilles mortelles, principalement en analysant les caractéristiques-clés des appels et des arguments contre le rapatriement des corps africains dans deux cas fortement disputés (« El Negro » et Sara/Saartjie Baartman). En explorant trois groupes d'acteurs — l'institut collectionneur (le musée), l'État-nation indigène (la terre natale)/le pays d'accueil, et la famille biologique du défunt — cette étude contribuera à comprendre comment chaque entité revendique la dépouille mortelle en présentant une réalité différente au traitement du migrant lorsqu'il était vivant. En se basant sur ces cas à la fois historiques et contemporains (ils ont été « résolus » au XXI^e siècle), il sera plus aisé d'examiner les motivations idéologiques sur lesquelles s'appuient les systèmes de gestion du rapatriement (ou leur absence) et qui gouvernent peut-être une vision plus générale de la migration africaine, exprimée à travers les divers acteurs qui s'intéressent à la « dernière demeure » des individus africains décédés. Grâce à son ancrage dans l'histoire du rapatriement des dépouilles mortelles, ce rapport parviendra à aborder de manière plus éclairée la manière dont la mort des migrants étrangers dans la ville africain de Johannesburg est gérée aujourd'hui par des mécanismes qui associent plusieurs agences internationales. Cette section du rapport intégrera de prochaines études de terrain qui seront menées dans les funérariums de rapatriement à travers la ville, qui aident à la préparation et à la livraison de dépouilles mortelles dans des pays tels que la Zimbabwe, le Malawi, le Nigéria et la RDC.

Abstract

Migration management generally concerns itself with theoretical explanations and practical solutions for living migrants and migration situations. To “end” the migration cycle, suggested solutions range from high border walls to deter economic migrants to post-conflict voluntary repatriation of refugees. What “end” solutions, however, are available for the bodies of migrants who die while outside their native country? Who asserts agency, how, and to what end?

This paper will explore the phenomenon of international human remains repatriation and the agents active within the process. With the use of two highly debated historical cases of repatriated African bodies (Sarah Baartman and “El Negro”), this paper will examine the way in which the themes within specialised, historical repatriations and contemporary repatriations of deceased African migrants from the city of Johannesburg can be used to reflect upon each other.

With this focus on post-mortem repatriation, this paper aims to uncover some of the practical concerns and key theories that govern the prioritisation, negotiation and finalisation of a resting place for migrants in Africa.

Introduction

Migration, as a field of study, primarily concerns itself with the living, as does migration management. Organisations that work with and for migrants offer theoretical explanations and practical solutions for the problems relevant to the migration situations of the living, and why should they not? Resolutions that aim to alter or “end” the migration cycle also feature prominently in migration management, whether this entails local integration of migrants into host communities, post-conflict voluntary repatriation of refugees, or development in the home country as to stymie the push factors of initial migration. What “end” solutions, however, are available for the bodies of migrants who die while outside their native country? Who asserts agency in such cases, how, and to what end? This paper firstly asserts that using a post-mortem lens to examine repatriation is a worthy theoretical method of exploration within migration studies, primarily because, as the paper will show, the repatriation of the deceased interweaves both the chronology and characteristics of the reasons migrants move, the ways in which their lives have unfolded as migrants, and the desires that surround the management of the deceased’s body.

Further, with the use of two highly debated cases of repatriated African bodies (Sarah Baartman and “El Negro”), this paper will examine the way in which the themes within specialised, historical repatriations and contemporary repatriations of deceased African migrants from the city of Johannesburg can be used to reflect upon each other. The agents involved in repatriation (those that identify with the deceased and those that do not), the temporal elements affecting repatriation, and both the theoretical and practical issues influencing the process of repatriation will be considered in turn, offering a discussion and analysis of African repatriation that is situated *after* the death of the migrant has occurred and may be of use to wider repatriation theory. With this focus on post-mortem repatriation, this paper aims to uncover some of the practical concerns and key theories that govern the prioritisation, negotiation and finalisation of a resting place for migrants in Africa.

Human Remains Repatriation: Historical Cases

Sarah Baartman was a woman, believed to be Khoisan (Grinqua), born in the late 1700s in what is today the country of South Africa. After eight years of negotiation with both the museum in which her remains were held and the government of France, the country in which she died, she¹ was buried in Hankey, Eastern Cape, South Africa in 2002. Baartman lived the experience of regional migration long before her eventual international transplantation to Europe, first moving from the Eastern Cape to the region around Cape Town when her master sold her to another, as well as moving between differing households in the region for largely the same reasons (Crais and Scully, 2009). Sarah Baartman left Africa in 1810, having entered into a controversial and questionable contract that resulted in her public exhibition, first in England and then in France, alternatively as a specimen and entertainer in the context of prevalent racist scientific theories about African inferiority, exotica, or both. Upon her early death, the French scientist Georges Cuvier, who had earlier sketched her in life, and others, arranged to have her corpse brought to the Musee de l’Homme (The Museum of Man), where she was sketched, moulded and dissected, her genitalia and brain preserved in jars and her skeleton re-constructed and displayed in the museum until varying points in the 1970s. Both the limited facts and numerous conjectures concerning Sarah Baartman’s life were debated throughout the repatriation process, many ending or circling in continual speculation that was never to be unravelled. Her story of departure, repeat

¹¹ Baartman’s skeleton, preserved genitalia and brain, and body cast made after her death

migrations and post-mortem return, however, clearly emphasise the complications of African migration, linking accounts of the 17th and 18th century with their legacy and re-consideration in the 20th and 21st.

“El Negro,” the uprooted southern African man displayed for nearly a century in Banyoles, Spain, was repatriated in 2000 to the country of Botswana following almost a decade of debate. The generally accepted story of his removal from Africa first finds two French brothers excavating his body from a grave in an undetermined area of southern Africa around 1830, and later finds the man’s remains owned by Spanish veterinarian and taxidermist Fransesc Darder, who donated the body, as part of a larger collection, to the museum that today bears his name. The year before the city of Barcelona was to host the 1992 summer Olympic Games, a doctor named Alphonse Arcelin first became aware of the exhibition and expressed outrage that such an exhibit could be offered to the public in the 20th century to the Spanish newspaper *El País*. It was ultimately the governments of Spain and Botswana that entered final negotiations, though the region from which the body was begrudgingly repatriated was Catalan (Davies, 2003:178), and Botswana never formally claimed El Negro as a direct ancestor, instead performing an “act of collective good will” for Africa in receiving the body (Parsons and Segobye, 2002:251). El Negro was commonly referred to as a Bushman during the repatriation, but evidence has never directly supported this (Parsons, 2002), and the body did not undergo DNA testing to this end prior to burial (Davies 2003:129). Nonetheless, El Negro was relinquished and buried in Tsholofelo Park in the capital city of Gabarone, surprising many when he was not returned as he had been displayed (only his remaining bones were returned, and his accompanying “display items” remained in the Darder Museum). Though El Negro’s is a case of much more uncertain origin than Sarah Baartman’s, and one in which migration occurred only after death, it illustrates the fierce territoriality that surrounds even long-deceased bodies.

Human Remains Repatriation: The Migrant Community of Johannesburg

South Africa, and Johannesburg within it, is a destination for many migrants from the continent, whether internally or cross-border. While migrants from Zimbabwe are currently the largest inflow of foreign nationals, sizable populations from the DRC, Cameroon, Mozambique, Somalia, Nigeria, and other countries are found within South Africa, whether they are economic migrants, migrants engaged in circular migration while pursuing temporary work, or seeking asylum or in possession of refugee status. Some migrants are new to the country and face extreme social, economic and physical hardship; others have lived in the country for decades and describe stability and acceptance in their community and amongst South Africans.

The informing interviews for this paper, primarily conducted between August and October 2010, were undertaken in Johannesburg with employees or managers of funeral parlours, chairpersons of national associations, and community members such as church leaders. These interviews had a dual focus: understanding the repatriation process as it pertains to migrant bodies, and ascertaining the ways in which repatriation and issues surrounding death reflected upon their place in society as migrants. These interviews are limited in number and qualitative in nature, but serve to punctuate the theoretical and practical discussions of human remains repatriation with contemporary migrant voices, where appropriate.

The Prioritisation of Repatriation

Why would—or should—a body be repatriated after death, and who, specifically, should be repatriated?

In other words, what conditions create a priority for the repatriation of a particular person? Both the historical cases of Sarah Baartman and El Negro and many recently deceased migrants of Johannesburg were persons who, it is uncontested, a) died outside their place of origin and b) were repatriated (if not entirely negotiated) during the 21st century. This leaves all cases to operate under the influence of contemporary—if differing—national and international sensibilities on repatriation. And though the questions of *why*, *who* and *how* will be addressed throughout this paper from multiple angles, if we begin with a contemporary human rights framework, we may begin to comprehend the importance of repatriation today to those involved in the process.

Barbara Harrell-Bond, in the late 20th century, exemplified a human rights perspective on repatriation with her statement that, “Every refugee should have the right to return voluntarily to his homeland” (Harrell-Bond 1989:42). *Voluntary repatriation* went on to be privileged by the UNHCR as the desired solution for an “end” to refugee situations, if feasible, though Harrell-Bond noted that she believed the more protracted a situation, the more difficult such a solution could become. (This resonates temporally with both the length of time that has passed since El Negro and Sarah Baartman’s displacement as well with the shifting prioritisations of long-settled migrants in Johannesburg.) Nonetheless, this human rights view falls short of being fully applicable to international human remains repatriation for several reasons. Voluntary repatriation is, on its own, a problematic exercise (often it is not truly voluntary), refugees are a particular type of migrant who generally have certain legal rights in their host country (whether or not they are adhered to), and, lastly, Harrell-Bond is speaking of the living.

Janet Blake, in her article *Beyond Death: The Treatment of Indigenous Human Remains—a Human Rights Perspective*, links human rights to human remains. She notes the history of disinterred indigenous remains being taken abroad, and their status as “movable cultural heritage,” a similar classification under which El Negro was then legally allowed to be repatriated from Spain. The paper’s abstract further claims a general acceptance of the belief that “the rights associated with culture as well as certain other human rights...are applicable directly to cultural heritage” (Blake, 2007:367). Such a belief fares poorly, however, when variations in personal and cultural belief reject such a theory outright during repatriation. During the long negotiation for El Negro’s repatriation to Botswana, the town councilor and then-curator of the Darder Museum in Banyoles, Spain commented that “human rights only apply to living people, not dead” (Parsons, 2002:24, Davies, 2003:81). This statement introduces—by omission—the way in which the desire for an application of human rights to human remains *is* a key motivating factor for many who request the return of a body to its place of origin.

A more justifiable statement may have included the realisation that, for many, human rights—such as right of return or the varying constructions of restoring and maintaining human dignity—are often applied to the dead body, for two interrelated reasons. One, there may be little distinction made between the living and the deceased in African cultures. Whether this means a comprehension that death practices involve a complex arrangement of needs for both the living and the deceased in a society (Lee and Vaughan, 2008), or a stated spiritual similarity between the two states (Wheeler 2010e), such a belief may require that a varying but pervasive set of acceptable standards be applied to the deceased. A general imperative for the body to return home is clearly a present standard in the minds of many living Africans—expressed as an expected, almost casual prioritisation. It is not unusual, then, when a Zimbabwean man managing a funeral parlour in Berea interjects on behalf of himself and others that, “we always believe if some[one] dies [he] has to be buried in his forefather’s land” (Núñez – Carrasco, 2010a), nor for a Cameroon man that heads a national association to explain that:

Culturally, we in Cameroon, we believe that death [sic] are not died. People still respect them, people still call children after them and so on, so it will be very seldom that you have a family saying, Oh we cannot bring the corpse home. If the community will not, which is quite impossible, the family will pay the money to send home; we want our corpse back here.
(Wheeler, 2010e)

Two, treating the deceased body in an appropriate way may reflect a reversal or symbolic, post-mortem correction of human rights violations, injustices or unhelpful conceptualizations that occurred *during* the life of that person. Some injustices may be reflected in the migration itself, whether persons are forced by violent conflict, motivated by economic difficulty (as is the case for many of Johannesburg's migrants, or even Baartman's migration story), or, in the case of El Negro, robbed from a grave in the context of collecting remains to support racialised science. Law professor David Rudenstine makes a direct connection between the past and the present when he argues that repatriation "may be the right thing to do in that it responds to an historical episode that, in the opinion of many, should not have occurred" (Rudenstine, 2001:70),² and if left undone, runs the risk of leaving the wrongs within displacement unhealed. Social science theory also addresses such a point of view with the notion of "colonial debris," wherein a post-colonial world is an unacceptable construction for the fact that there are "protracted imperial processes that saturate the subsoil of people's live and persist, sometimes subjacently, over a longer dur'ee" (Stoler, 2008:192). This protraction may well involve museums in the historical cases here, evidenced by "register[ing] the ongoing processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation" (ibid, 2008) by way of the exhibition of Africans. As then-president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki made clear in his speech at the burial of Sarah Baartman, one of the present tasks of repatriation, and a reason it is prioritised, is because it acts as an opportunity to ensure a different future by means of healing—and thus altering, to a degree—an unfortunate past. For Mbeki and the government of South Africa, this single bodily repatriation stood for much more, and enveloped the past, the present and the future:

The struggle for the return of the remains of Saartjie Baartman to her motherland was a struggle to uproot the legacy of many centuries of unbridled humiliation. It was a struggle to restore to our people and the peoples of Africa their right to be human and to be treated by all as human beings. Her return stands out as a defining moment in the continuing process of our emancipation (Mbeki, 2003).

Repatriations of those that have died contemporaneously in Johannesburg may exhibit a more subdued sense of needing to correct the past. The ambiguous, colonially-drawn borders of the African continent—a late 19th-century activity which "in all...cut through some 190 culture groups" (Meredith, 2005:1)—has affected stability in numerous nations, which affects migration patterns around the continent and into South Africa to varying degrees, depending upon a host of factors beyond the scope of this paper. Interviewees in Johannesburg at times noted a shift in the reasons why their countrymen left their home country (Wheeler, 2010i,e) or the way in which they conceived of South Africa as a destination or residence (Wheeler, 2010c), both of which affect the individual prioritisation of repatriation. In the latter case, the possibility of South Africa acting as a realistic settling place for migrants seemed on a general increase, with an extreme example found in a long-residing Congolese minister noting that only about fifty percent of migrants in his church seeking burial assistance through the church requested repatriation (Wheeler, 2010l).

² Rudenstine is using this argument while discussing the repatriation of *objects* of cultural patrimony from museums to their places of origin.

Even if a person was not mistreated in life, the process by which they are interred in death is important, and *not* being repatriated may be problematic both theoretically and practically. The complicated nature of both aforementioned historical repatriation cases meant that certain individuals and groups felt that the repatriation *did not* occur, at least not the repatriation they had prioritised: one in which the body was returned physically complete. Baartman's remains, it was known throughout the negotiation for her return, were limited to her skeleton, brain and genitals, and El Negro, much to the surprise of the populace, if not the negotiating government, was returned as a stripped, very partial skeleton rather than as the figure of taxidermy that had been on display, and also without his possible "grave goods" with which he had previously been displayed (Davies, 2003).

The contemporary African migrant rarely sees a situation in which a body is not buried as physically desired, as family or community generally regulate the repatriation and burial process with a funeral parlour on behalf of the deceased. Nonetheless, these repatriations do illustrate the ways in which unacceptable burial in an unacceptable place (perhaps most especially in avoidance of the pauper burial, where three bodies are buried at once in individual bags (Núñez –Carrasco, 2010b)) would be contradictory to priorities surrounding death. Garry Dennie has documented the history of the role of burial societies for blacks within South Africa under Apartheid, where "white municipal authorities and bereaved Africans sought to articulate profound and competing narratives of the sacredness of the dead bodies and the value of their lives" (Dennie, 2009:310). Burial societies "offered Africans a single guarantee" with their membership, he writes: "one's corpse would not be debased" (Dennie, 2009:310) by systems that left blacks disempowered. Where burial societies exist today, they are likewise a machination of the prioritisation of beliefs surrounding death, whether they are representative of a structure in the home country (Wheeler 2010a) or insurance against the uncertainties of life in a foreign country (Wheeler, 2010a,l). Regardless of the system in place—funeral parlour, burial society, church, community organisation—a general sense of graduated possibilities for burial pervaded the explanation of the arrangement and routines of the repatriation process for migrants in Johannesburg, with repatriation generally placed at the top.

Increased organisation and awareness, lastly, seem integral to the prioritisation of repatriation. Groups such as the Ivoirians, Cameroonians and Congolese all noted an increased organisation within their groups in South Africa with time (Wheeler 2010c,e,i), as well as through umbrella organisations such as the African Diaspora Forum, whose website contains the contact information for local leaders in twenty-two African nations (African Diaspora Forum, 2010). In a similar fashion, when funeral parlours were questioned as to what the consequences would be if their businesses closed their doors, their consensus confirmed organisation in two ways: they first said there would be a hole left due to the strong connections they had in the community with many people (Wheeler, 2010a,l), but also noted that they were confident migrants would be able find another repatriating funeral parlour (Wheeler, 2010l). Even those unconnected by ancestry or business/political gain may play a role in assisting repatriation, if they share a view of its prioritisation. Dr. Arcelin, the progenitor of the El Negro case, was a Spanish citizen of Haitian ancestry, not African, a point that was brought up by his detractors to limit his qualifications for comment (Davies, 2003:134), but which for him did not change the worth of his views on the insult of displaying an African man in a museum. A general prioritisation of repatriation may likewise be reflected in the way in which certain repatriating funeral parlours occasionally allow bodies to stay in their morgues for longer than is customary in exceptional cases where a family cannot be easily located (Wheeler, 2010a,h,l). Within the paradigm of historical repatriations, the machinations of international repatriation are generally more difficult to recognise and point out, each taking on a regional and singular organisation. The complicated nature of the relationship between the recognised and unrecognised relative groups, the government, the museum, and the cities of burial meant that, in

large part, the expression of the gradations of what constituted a worthy repatriation were more often displayed in the negotiation and aftermath of the process.

The Negotiation of Repatriation

Classifying contemporary human remains repatriation in Johannesburg as *easier* than repatriations involving the long-deceased has some truth to it. As this section depicts, the number of agents increase with time, and an ambiguity concerning ancestry and geographic origin expands. The deceased migrants of today, on the other hand, generally have a finite and recognisable number of agents and burial options in either South Africa or their home country. To conceive of the comparison in this way alone, however, overlooks the nuance in individual cases as well as the comparisons to be drawn between cases of fanfare and cases of quietude.

The moral authority of home plays a large part in defining the prioritisation of repatriation, but it also has a significant role in the negotiation that makes repatriation possible or impossible. For contemporary repatriations from Johannesburg, the return home has even been described by one Congolese interviewee as “a morality” (Wheeler 2010d), which aids processes such as the gathering of funds to repatriate (Wheeler 2010a,c,d,e) but also may reflect negatively on a family in the home country that has been unable to repatriate a member, whether in terms of personal grief and lack of closure (Wheeler, 2010a,d), or castigation directed at them from their community (Wheeler, 2010a,c). The morality of home can become further complicated by the duration of time a migrant spent in a new location, sometimes materialised by marriage to a South African who may have different wishes than the family outside the country (Wheeler, 2010i,l). In the case of Baartman and El Negro, the temporal aspect of moral authority appeared more contentious. Both France and Spain, especially by way of their respective holding museums (Musée de l’Homme and the Darder Museum), claimed the bodies as part of their *own* culture and narrative in light of the time they had spent with these bodies. In Spain, this extended to a commodification of El Negro meant to show affiliation; El Negro “chocolate reproductions” were minted at Easter and t-shirts reading, “Banyoles loves you, El Negro” and “Keep El Negro” appeared (Pyne, 2001, Rawlins, 2000). The moral authority of home was more complicated for Botswana, not only because the country never claimed to be a sure source location, but because the Darder Museum and reporters alike condemned the current human rights abuses suffered by the Bushmen in Botswana and questioned whether such a country was the rightful home for a purported Bushman to be returned. Some, such as then-University of Botswana professor Kenneth Good, noted the discrepancy between this specialised repatriation and the displacement of the San in Botswana (Good, 2002), and others noted that as Banyoles fought to retain “their” African, contemporary African refugees were being externalised (Davies, 2001:101). It is a complicated situation perhaps best interrogated with the possibility of defining “post-colonial” as “a trans-historical thing, always present and always in process of dissolution in one part of the world or another, so that everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later, one time or another, of being coloniser, colonised and post-colonial—sometimes all at once...” (Childs and Williams, 1997:2, quoting Ahmad, Aijaz).

The moral authority of home is wrapped within another factor important in the negotiation of repatriation: precedent. Precedent, as I will consider it here, is the way in which a particular repatriation is related to others that came before it in the same area. South Africa, in its negotiations with the French government, was able to reach an agreement upon past injustice, but it is likely this would not have come to bear without South Africa’s assurance that “Sara Baartman was *sui generis* and not part of a wider effort to repatriate the remains of people whose bones lay in so many public and private collections around the world” (Crais and Scully, 2009:154-5, quoting the French Ambassador to

South Africa, Nicolas About). The praise for recognising Sarah Baartman's both factual and presumed trials in life, lavished upon France formally by the Deputy Minister of Culture, Science and Technology, Brigitte Madablka, were tempered by the way in which her repatriation was made definitively singular and claimed from the outset to set no future precedent. The very theoretical models that governed a final agreement—a right to home, belonging, and memorialisation, and the recognition of a post-colonial world—were not taken to their logical extremes; precedent would be dangerous for international relations if all the rights that were applied theoretically were repatriated practically.

With migrants passing away in the here and now, precedent has rather become both a cornerstone of the repatriating business and a way in which a once-complicated or time-consuming process was streamlined, while remaining individually variable according to familial wishes. Some repatriating funeral parlours in Johannesburg have been in operation for a decade or more (Wheeler, 2010f,h,j); others are newer but reflect the experiences of those that have been in business longer (Wheeler 2010a,l). Funeral parlours can easily name the migrant groups they most commonly work with (Wheeler, 2010a,f,h,j,l), and none, in the interviews conducted, expressed that advertising their services was necessary at this point, due to their reputations and connections within various communities (Wheeler, 2010a,f,h,l). Burial societies, generally grouping persons of common origin together and formally adhered to particular parlours, are maintained and meet regularly at these funeral parlours (Wheeler, 2010a,f,l). Many shared that, with time, the repatriating process became very clear; funeral parlours can now easily act on behalf of the family by providing the necessary paperwork for the Department of Health, the Department of Home Affairs, and the embassy of the country to which the person is being repatriated in a timely fashion of a few days (Wheeler, 2010l). Even for those that do not rely on formal, collecting burial societies, such as several Congolese interviewees who spoke on behalf of their community, organisational groups such as churches were clearly known to act with educated assistance (Wheeler, 2010d,g,i).

The primary barriers to repatriation during negotiation generally fall into two categories: financial and familial. Having family that are aware of your decease—an overwhelming majority of the cases today—means that money may flow from the home country as well as within in South Africa, combining to make repatriation easily accessible and ready to be taken to a funeral parlour to be carried out. Interviewees stressed the rareness of relatives that would be unwilling or unable to eventually negotiate the finances necessary to make repatriation feasible (Wheeler, 2010a,e), sometimes, as previously mentioned, with the added assistance of a funeral parlour (Wheeler, 2010a). The relationship between the Central Methodist Church and the funeral parlour Wings of Deliverance, for instance, navigated by Pastor Verrain, appears built upon the idea that finding family for the deceased is a top priority if a repatriation—or even a non-pauper burial—is to be negotiated (Wheeler, 2010k). For this reason, a volunteer with the MSF (Medecins Sans Frontieres) clinic adjacent to the church stressed the importance of taking the person's contacts upon their arrival in South Africa (Wheeler, 2010k). Nonetheless, interviewees presented disconnected migrants as the exceptional cases, though they also stressed that the more well-known a person was, the more likely financial resources would be found for their repatriation (Wheeler 2010d,l). A well-known status and its relationship with the negotiation process also occurs in our historical cases, where each body went from obscurity, even among supposed ancestors, to cases of high national and international importance. The financial investments were high; the South African government, for instance, found the repatriation of Sarah Baartman worthy of a budget of R8,700,000, later extended to R10,350,000 (Crais and Scully, 2009:155). For historical repatriations, no fees would be incurred for a body resting in a morgue awaiting decision-making, therefore making these repatriations from museums, if not emotionally, then more literally able to “afford” a slower repatriation process. The barriers here, while still familial (claims of kinship) and

financial (claims of waste when more pressing issues were present), were shown to be more contentious inter-governmentally.

The agents behind repatriation, who have been mentioned throughout this section, also deserve close attention themselves. Some, in comparing the historical and contemporary cases, seem diametrically opposed in mission. The collecting museum, although sharing a preservation initiative with a morgue, is often legally bound to *retain* the items in its care, whereas the funeral parlour's morgue endeavours to remove bodies as expediently as it can in service to its clients. A funeral parlour's morgue capacity is not about expansion but removal, and the aforementioned exceptions in holding bodies beyond a time frame of a week or two are unusual, with government morgues in South Africa are even less likely to do so. The business of *holding* as compared to the business of *releasing* means that the speed of negotiation is likely to be much different in historical and contemporary cases. We know that both France and Spain claimed cultural affiliation with the bodies in their museums, but their reasoning also speaks, once again, to a sense of colonial entitlement that is not exceptional to these institutions alone. Museums as old as Spain's Darder Museum and France's Musée de l'Homme at times conceptualise themselves, rightly or wrongly, as institutions of great importance to communities, nations and the international world at large, a mentality once encapsulated by a curator of the British Museum, who noted that the institution was "older than most nation states" (Kingston and Mack, 2003:17). And while sentiment and legislation around the world may be slowly shifting towards an understanding of the role that repatriation plays in righting past wrongs and creating a new relationships between citizens and museums—notably in places like the United States, where 1990's Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act is utilised in repatriation—a proven ancestral affiliation, in some cases, is still a challenged claim.

Governments, as actors, behave very differently when handling historical repatriation as when involved in those happening today in Johannesburg. Though the government, in the form of the Department of Home Affairs, might slow down a repatriation process by questioning the documentation of a migrant or insisting on family members of the deceased coming to their downtown office to re-confirm association (Wheeler, 2010a), governmental involvement in everyday repatriations is primarily limited to the necessary paperwork such as the certificate of death, certificate of embalming, and permit for repatriation (Wheeler 2010a,b,f,h,l). Politics, and eventually the government, played a significantly different role in the historical cases. The mass popularity necessary for Baartman to become representative of South Africa and its new relationship with the world, coupled in some minds with a "feminist, post-structuralist moment" (Moudileno, 2009:202)³, meant that the government would function at a higher priority than relative groups. These groups were included—but only considered to a contested degree—represented among the other members of the DAC Reference group that oversaw her return, including government figures, the deputy chairman of the Human Rights Commission, the representative on gender equality, representatives of the Khoisan community, and a poet. Though the Khoisan had wanted Sarah to be buried with the moon, according to tradition, the government performed a daylight event, covered by the media and coinciding with Women's Day (Crais and Scully, 2009:162-4).

³ Moudileno also counts Sander Gilman's 1985 essay *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature* as a pivotal influence upon Sara Baartman becoming "a late-century icon for violence done to women of African descent" (Moudileno 2009: 202-203, quoting Z.S. Strother in "Displays of the Body Hottentot" in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show*).

The Finalisation of Repatriation

How is repatriation completed? When do the various agents engaged in the negotiation retire?

Repatriation is an effort toward eventual burial, and so the funeral itself is of great importance in reaching a completion in the repatriation process. In both historical cases, the arrival of bodies and funerals were productions. Baartman's return to South Africa, "a nation that, during her own lifetime, did not exist" (Crais and Scully, 2009:163-164), was national and international; the footage shot by the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) and others. El Negro, buried in Tsholofolo Park in urban Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana, was similarly documented; arriving by plane (the unexpectedly small wooden crate holding his remains needing only four of the six members of the Botswana Defense Force on hand to carry it (Davies, 2003:124), and later at the funeral. Both entities were the subject of ceremony prior to the burial, one of which included a symbolic handover of Sarah Baartman during which the Ambassador to France, Thuthukile Skweyiya, posed with a French official at the sides of the open crate holding Sarah Baartman body cast, its bottom half draped with a leopard-print textile (BBC News 2002). Neither funeral ceremony was free of contention, despite ultimate agreement that return was the best solution. Mbeki freely criticised the history under which Baartman was made victim and noted that repatriation could not undo all of this injustice (Mbeki, 2003), and the Spanish ambassador, who attended El Negro's funeral and made a statement, felt the need to exculpate Spain of its culpability for the initial trafficking and mistreatment of this African man (Parsons and Segobye, 2002:251, Davies 2003:132). Further, many considered these repatriations incomplete, given that the person in question was not completely returned bodily, and in neither case was DNA testing undertaken to either confirm the body or pin a more precise ancestry to the individual. Neil Parsons closed his article *One body playing many parts—le Betjouana, el Negro, and il Bosquimano* with the dejected statement, "At least a Tswana man has been returned to a Tswana country" (Parsons, 2002:28).

In contemporary cases, the place at which involved actors cease their involvement varies, generally according to the family's wishes. At times, this means those transporting the body to the border of another country or those that hand over the body to the repatriating airline as cargo via the funeral parlour are the last step in the process, while in other cases the family arranges all the transportation themselves, including that which is usually involved from the border to an interior location (Wheeler, 2010i,j,l). Certain funeral parlours, however, will not consider their duties of repatriation complete until they have stayed for the funeral itself (Wheeler, 2010f,h). It is far from a media presentation, but MK Massasanya noted that when those who have performed the transportation service return, they should be able to report to him what happened at the funeral (Wheeler, 2010f). Another funeral parlour's manager stated that the repatriation was complete when the primary members of the family that had accompanied the body home for repatriation had returned back to Johannesburg (Wheeler, 2010a). There is no discernable question as to whether the person was completely returned, but there is the possibility that repatriation will not be the final outcome. Though many interviewees expressed a self-proclaimed black African belief that repatriation was preferred, as noted, the reality appeared to be taken in stride, and no separate burial place, segregated from South Africans, is allotted for migrants in Johannesburg (Wheeler, 2010a,l), aside from the digital: one funeral parlour is aiming to initiate a website, in order to make a viewable and downloadable memorialisation of the deceased if they are not able to be repatriated (Wheeler, 2010a).

Some actors and agents in the repatriation process live with the consequences of repatriation to a larger degree than others. For those in the business of repatriating, their handling of the repatriation

determines future customers and trust, and for those that assist the process through community channels, such as the church, the ability to repatriate one person and not another may be heard in complaint (Wheeler, 2010i). Family members, whether they manage to raise funds for repatriation or must leave their loved ones unrepatriated, must generally live with the location they have chosen (though in very rare instances a body may be exhumed). Those most deeply involved in the historical repatriations also face consequences. Dr. Arcelin was personally bankrupted following the repatriation, as a result of a case he was encouraged to take against the town council and lost (Davies, 2003:193-4). The curator of the Darder Museum, in an interview that took place following the repatriation, was still unhappy with both the repatriation itself and the handling of the repatriation, though she seemed to have prized the “grave goods” that remained a part of the museum (Davies, 2003:196-211). The people of Hankey, South Africa, whom it was proposed might benefit from tourist ventures to be associated with a historical grave, have yet to see such returns or development (Crais and Scully, 2009).

The post-burial condition and consideration of El Negro in Botswana and Sarah Baartman in South Africa leave something to be desired if they are measured against what public officials said might happen around these sites. In Botswana, the mayor of Gabarone stated his desire to plant trees, add nearby restaurants and build a bridge that would link the area to another, which he noted he had discussed “with a delegation from China at the time of the reburial” (Davies 2003:226), though there is no physical evidence of this at the time of writing this paper, though the park is attractive, very well maintained and in better condition than described in Caitlin Davies’s 2003 book on the subject of El Negro. The grave itself appears fairly neglected, with sun-damaged signage and overgrown grass, but sits quietly at the edge of the park without disturbance. A Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children, which works to end violence against such groups, was established in 1999 in honour of “a woman who has become an icon, not only to her own Khoikhoi people, but to all women who know oppression and discrimination in their lives” (Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children, 2010). As of August 2010, the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance, aimed to be “a centre of remembrance, human rights memorial and Khoi-San Heritage Route” (Ndawonde, 2009), is reported to have a design model (Ndabeni, 2010), though public information is scarce. For some, however, less attention and regular touristic visits might better coincide with beliefs that a grave should not be well-trafficked (Davies 2003:135); leaving questions of the ultimate finalisation of these repatriations a mix of satisfaction and lack of satisfaction, depending upon the perspective.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has used three organisational categories—prioritisation, negotiation and finalisation—that allow for a discussion of both theoretical and practical factors present within the phenomenon of international human remains repatriation. The descriptive and analytical nature of the conclusions given here vary, but key among the prevalent findings that shape human remains repatriation are: 1) a largely pan-African prioritisation of returning the body to its place or origin, 2) a connection between the living and the dead, 3) the application of human rights, as determined by culture, to the deceased body, 4) the mobilisation of migrants toward an end goal (death management) through community and business, 5) an expansion of the number of agents involved in repatriation/increased organisation of living migrants with time, 6) the role of post-colonial theory in negotiating the return of bodies long displaced, 7) the necessity of familial connection or ancestral linkages, and 8) differential consequences for the parties involved. Some characteristics of repatriation engage heavily with both theoretical and practical motivators, making the line between the two difficult to discern. The concept of family, for instance, is a theoretically necessary one if countries hope to find common ground based upon

agreements of bodily affiliation within a post-colonial framework, wherein certain behaviour, such as exhibiting a human being, is unacceptable. It is also practically necessary in that it may be directly connected with the financial contributions that arise as the capital with which to fulfil these theoretical demands for the body (or some bodies) to return home.

The word 'diaspora' was mentioned only one time within the paper, when referencing the African Diaspora Forum that joins together migrant groups in Johannesburg. The concept, however, is of great underlying importance to today's various migrations, an effect of history and an indictment of present conditions to varying degrees. The nature of Africa's diaspora has some well-defined corners, such as the study of trans-Atlantic slavery, but the bodily remains born of both forced and voluntary movement in this ongoing diaspora seem a surprise to many, whether they appear beneath federal buildings in downtown Manhattan (now memorialised as the African Burial Ground) or in museums that once organised and collected under very different procedures than would be acceptable today. The deceased body is inherently related to diaspora, if "modern" diaspora is defined as "ethnic minority groups of migrant origin residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin" (Shuval, 2000:43, quoting Chailand and Rageau 1991:xiv-xvii). The body itself can easily be considered one of these material links, coming into play post-mortem but often being considered long before as a way in which to secure a diasporic finality.

When bodies *are* considered, and the weight of the historic diaspora is admitted, it is no surprise that museums and former colonising countries fear a precedent being set in which they see their museums drained of content and their treasuries depleted by constant repatriation claims, however unrealistic this might be. It is also to a point understandable how host nations enact a type of reverse diasporic allegiance with remains that have long been under their care, even if it was in a condition that was unacceptable to those in the home country. We should also not be surprised by contemporary cases where non-South Africans state that their host country is growing increasingly more like home while at the same time prioritising return to their other "home" in death; for "a group may acquire a sense of diaspora, lose it, regain it, change it and so on, over an undefined period of time" (Shuval 200:48-9). And, when displacements of the present day—enacted between Africans (such as Botswana's relationship with the San)—are considered *while* other historical cases are being examined in retrospect, some may try to reconcile the two contemporaneously. This is a method that fell flat during the repatriation of El Negro to Botswana, likely because it asked the government to take a multi-temporal view of a repatriation that they were attempting to simplify against the host country's claims of this one descendant of the diaspora.

From here, memorialisation may become the key issue, in part because the scope of diaspora, and migration within it, limits the injustice that can be undone and the contemporary burial wishes that can be performed. Physical memorialisation may be convoluted with aspects of the past, such as when the community of Hankey memorialised Sarah Baartman with a mural that copied "the very drawings made under Cuvier's supervision" (Davies 2003:168). Emotional memorialisation may supply, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did in South Africa just years previous to Sarah Baartman's rise to prominence, a way of "listening to, validating, archiving and offering institutional acknowledgement to the stories of violence, inconsolable loss, suffering and oppression" (Grunebaum-Ralph, Heidi, 2001:198). For many of the African migrants laid to rest here and abroad, however, we will never know their final locations, as paper trails of their lives disappear, or, as the funeral parlours of Johannesburg do time and time again, we leave those that name themselves as family to their own, quiet memorialisations.



El Negro's final resting place in Tsholofelo Park, Gabarone, Botswana, ten years after his re-burial (Wheeler 2010)

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