

“The *Móodu-móodu* (Émigré) Deserves a Decent Burial Too”: Senegalese Migrants and the Politics of Repatriation during COVID-19

Gana Ndiaye*

Abstract

Senegalese abroad invest in solidarity networks that ensure their deceased compatriots are repatriated. Whether through secular or religious initiatives, these efforts reflect a general expectation that one needs to be buried at “home,” “near one’s kin,” and preoccupations with burial following certain rites. In March 2020, however, the Senegalese government halted repatriations of corpses as a COVID-19 prevention measure. The decision sparked huge controversy, leading to the creation of a collective for the repatriation of coronavirus victims, which unsuccessfully sued the government. Based on media analysis and ethnographic fieldwork among Senegalese in Brazil between October 2019 and June 2021, this paper argues that the temporary ban on repatriation of corpses and the stigmatization, at the beginning of the pandemic, of the Senegalese émigrés accused of bringing home “a foreign disease,” lay bare a deeper crisis in the social contract between Senegal and its diasporas. This crisis is epitomized by the gradual loss of prestige of the figure of the émigré and has forced the latter to grapple with the complexity of living where one does not wish to be buried.

* Gana Ndiaye, Beloit College, Department of Anthropology. Contact: ndiayeg@beloit.edu

© 2023 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, a link to the license is provided, and it is indicated which changes were made.

Ngunjaay Faama, yes,
Those who are abroad are not at home.
In the end, you will return to Senegal.
~Youssou Ndour, *Émigrés* (1988)

On June 27, 2020, the Senegalese community in Brazil learned that there was a fellow countryman named Móodu¹ who was suspected of having died of COVID-19 in Cuiabá in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul in Brazil and was buried in a non-Muslim cemetery without the community or the Senegalese Embassy being notified. The Senegalese community was appalled to learn about such a lack of respect for what Posel and Gupta (2009) called the “etiquette of the corpse,” i.e., proper burial rites. Senegalese mobilized to require that the body be exhumed and given a proper Muslim burial. The community only learned about the situation because a worker at the hospital circulated a video talking about the death of a “Senegalese immigrant” and showing what is said to be his body being taken to a hospital morgue.²

As the Senegalese community in Brazil discussed the case, leaders of the *dahira* (a Senegalese migrants’ Sufi organization) took the opportunity to emphasize the need to be integrated within the local community but also to maintain strong ties with fellow countrymen. Migrant association leaders emphasized that the ties with fellow Senegalese migrants must be maintained, if not for *diine ak caada* (religious and cultural purposes),³ then at least so that if people die, the community will be able to take care of them. This preoccupation with death and proper burial is not specific to the Senegalese migrants in Brazil. However, given the high mortality rate of Senegalese migrants in the country, it is inevitable that the leaders emphasize the need to maintain strong ties with the community for proper burial rites in case of death. Between 2015 and 2020, for example, twenty-five Senegalese died in Brazil, most of them victims of homicide.⁴ Based on my research since June 2016 with Senegalese migrant organizations across Brazil, I

¹ Because the male name *Móodu* is so common in Senegal, its reduplicated form *móodu-móodu* is now used to refer to Senegalese men with little or no formal education in French and who live abroad.

² The video can be found in this blogger’s discussion of the issue: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaOcPvH9P4g> [Last accessed: 3 April 2023].

³ Migrant associations such as the *dahira*, which bring together disciples of the same Sufi brotherhood, play multiple roles. They can promote the culture (*caada*) of Senegal in the host country or allow migrants to continue their religious education (Babou 2002).

⁴ Personal interview with the Senegalese Consul in São Paulo, April 13, 2021.

estimated the number of Senegalese in Brazil to be about 13,000 as of January 2019.⁵

The Senegalese migrant population in Brazil is overwhelmingly made up of males in their late twenties and early thirties, with very few women who come through family reunification. These young migrants tend to be highly diverse in terms of education, geographic origins within Senegal (urban and rural), and religious belonging (Muslim and Catholic primarily). Perhaps the most significant marker of difference among Senegalese émigrés is Sufi group affiliations; Tijanis, Murids, Qadris, and Layéen brotherhoods are the numerically most significant. These differences are apparent in Brazil, where most of the ethnographic observations described in the article took place. This diversity makes it challenging to speak of a Senegalese community in Brazil (Ndiaye 2020: 158, 161). Yet, there are many unifying factors. Chief among them is an attitude toward repatriation, and the way migrants regularly contribute funds to cover repatriation expenses and sometimes send money to their deceased peer's family in Senegal. Whenever someone dies, the Senegalese community makes sure that the body is repatriated. The person is offered a proper burial by relying on membership, especially *dahira* members, and with the occasional support of the Senegalese Embassy.

Starting in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the structures of solidarity and mechanisms of repatriation. First, community members began losing their jobs. Most of these migrants worked in the informal economy as street vendors, whose sales evaporated as the pandemic forced them to isolate. Others worked in factories that closed down. Thus, there were fewer resources, which made it almost impossible for migrants to mobilize funds. Second, the Senegalese government issued a decree on April 9, 2020, banning the repatriation of corpses as a prevention measure against COVID-19 (Dakaractu 2020). Many people, including government officials, thought that corpses could spread the disease and that in the process of transportation, bathing, and shrouding them, people could be contaminated.

The documentary research and ethnographic data I collected in the Senegalese community in Brazil between October 2019 and June 2021 reveal that the crisis brought about by COVID-19 engendered growing tensions in the relationship between Senegalese society and its diasporas. First, I offer an overview of the infrastructures Senegalese migrants rely upon to repatriate the remains of their

⁵ The Brazilian Refugee Committee reported that there were 7,206 Senegalese asylum seekers in Brazil between 2010 and 2015 (CONARE 2016: 8). Other data sources suggest that 8,486 Senegalese individuals applied for asylum in Brazil between 2010 and 2018 (Brasil 2021).

deceased. Then I explore the social, cultural, and religious factors that make burial abroad undesirable. Finally, I show how the Senegalese government's decision to ban the repatriation of corpses and the ensuing reaction from the Senegalese diaspora claiming their right to return "home"—"dead or alive"—is a manifestation of a deepening crisis in the Senegalese social contract with its diasporas. The situation has led many Senegalese abroad (commonly known as the *móodu-móodu*) to confront a condition that the editors of this special issue captured with the term "im/mobility," that is, "the indeterminate conditions in which people find themselves and the awkward, often unpredictable moments of transition between movement and stasis" (see Introduction). The COVID-19 pandemic lay bare the awkward position of migrants' bid to belong in the communities where they live while also wanting to be buried at home in Senegal. I now turn to the reasons why these migrants prefer to be buried in Senegal.

"Grave Preferences" and Infrastructures of Repatriation

Senegalese abroad put a lot of effort into solidarity networks that ensure their deceased compatriots are repatriated. Whether through secular associations' solidarity funds (*caisse de solidarité*) or religious initiatives called *hadiyatū rahma* among Murid organizations in North America, these efforts reflect migrants' strong desire to be buried in their homeland. These initiatives and the broader solidarity networks go back to the 1960s, especially among the growing Senegalese Sufi disciples living in Europe and North America (Babou 2002: 157). Beginning in the 1970s, for example, the Wolof *ʿAjamī* newspaper published by the *Mouvement Islamique des Mourides d'Europe* (The Islamic Movement of Murids of Europe), calls for contributions to various causes.⁶ The following excerpt is an announcement of the repatriation of a deceased Senegalese migrant, likely funded by the community (Image 1).

⁶ Wolof *ʿAjamī* refers to the writing of Wolof using the modified Arabic script. The Murids are the followers of the Muridiyya, a Sufi order founded in Senegal by Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba Mbàkke (1853–1927). He is commonly referred to as *Sëriñ Tuubaa* (Wolof: the master of Tuubaa). Tuubaa is the capital of the order and is located in central Senegal.



Image 1: Wolof ‘Ajamī Text: Announcement of the Repatriation of a Body to Senegal from France. Source: Fallou Ngom, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Mouhamadou L. Diallo, Gana Ndiaye, and other contributors. 2020. Ndigël: Murid Newspaper in Wolof ‘Ajamī 1.

<http://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/wolof/wolof-manuscripts/ndigel-1/>.

Roman Script Transcription

Waa mbootaayu Lislām bi nekk Ērop ñoo ngi am nàqar ak tiis di tàgge seen mbokkum taalube bu baax, ñu koy wax Masira Jóob. Faatu na ca Turwa ñu yóbbu ko Senegaal. Ñu ngi koy jaale ay bokkam yépp, góor ak jigéen.


English Translation

The Islamic Movement [of the Murids] in Europe are saddened by and inform you about the death of a good fellow disciple, Masira Jóob. He died in Troyes [France] and his body is repatriated to Senegal. We present our condolences to all his family members, male and female.

More recently, in a speech to the community in Rhode Island during the 2021 celebration of the Mànggal,⁷ one leader urged the audience to invest in the *hadyatou rahma*. Today in the United States and Canada, the Foundation Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (FONCAB) has a “community support system fund” called Hadyatou Rahma, requiring members over eighteen years of age to make a \$60

⁷ Bamba was exiled to Gabon for seven years (1895–1902) by the French colonizers. The Murids celebrate his departure through a holiday called Mànggal.

USD/CAD annual donation, plus a \$10 yearly membership fee (Image 2). In the case that a member or their relative dies in North America, the fund will be used to repatriate their body (Image 2). Arguing for the importance of the Hadyatou Rahma, the leader noted that “traditionally, it was easy to return home. We conceive migration as coming here, getting work, making money, and ultimately returning to Senegal. But we know that now life has become difficult. Return is almost impossible. So ultimately, death falls upon us (Wolof: *ndogalu Yàlla dina ñëw*), and in that case, we need to be taken care of.” He emphasized the importance of investment in repatriation for two reasons: first, because economic crises have made short-term migration less feasible and, second, because people are settling down at a higher rate than in previous waves of migration (Ndiaye 2020).



21500 Schoolcraft Road Detroit MI 48223 USA Tel: 8104796189
 Website: www.foncab.org email: info@foncab.org

Membership Application HADIYATOU RAHMA		
FOUNDATION CHEIKH AHMADOU BAMBA OF NORTH AMERICA		
<input type="checkbox"/> New Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Renewal		
Name:		
Cell Phone	Home Phone:	
Current address (US or CANADA):		
City/Ville:	State /Province:	ZIP Code/ Code Postal:
Contact Person in the US or CANADA	Contact Person in Senegal	Email Address

FONCAB HADIYATOU RAHMA
 Memorandum of Understanding

This is not an insurance policy¹ ,but a community support system fund

- A\$ 70 contribution for a \$60 annual donation and a \$10 membership fee (for a total of US \$70 or CAN \$70) are received from all members.
- The \$70 annual donation amount is required from each individual older than 17 years of age in the household.
- The support donation collection campaign starts on May 1st 2021 and ends on July 31st 2021.
- The support coverage will be from August 15th 2021 to August 14th 2022
- Each Dahira of the Foundation is encouraged to designate two or more of its members to locally administer the operations. He/She/they will ensure every member who donates is registered and receives a membership card. He/they will be the contact person of FONCAB Social Committee for the local Dahira.
- The proposed support: will consist of the Foundation assuming the responsibility of the shipment's cost of members remains to Senegal or funeral expenses (if burial is in the US or Canada).
- Member's family must give Hadyatou Rahma full responsibility to manage the procedure and finalize the transport of the member's remains. Otherwise the disbursement will not exceed \$6,000, if a family does not give FONCAB full

Image 2: Screenshot of a registration form for the FONCAB Hadyatou Rahma initiative.

Such collective efforts stem from a shared expectation that one needs to be buried at “home,” “near one’s kin,” although what constitutes home remains highly fluid. “Mortuary politics,” as Brown (2008: 5) calls them, have historically raised social, cultural, political, and spiritual concerns in Africa and elsewhere (Jappie/ Araby 2021; Posel/ Gupta 2009; Balkan 2021). More specifically, where one is to be buried—either where one was born, that is, “where one’s placenta is buried” (Mebenga 1991 quoted in Geschiere 2014: 56), or where one’s ancestors are buried—has political significance. It can be a means to claim local political participation at the expense of “foreigners” (Geschiere 2005: 47). This turns the funeral “at home” into “an ultimate test for belonging” (Geschiere 2014: 54). As physical markers of space, graves also help justify claims to land (Shipton 2009: 14) and national belonging (McIntosh 2015).

In addition to claims of autochthony and its political and economic outcomes, there are powerful emotions associated with places of burial. For many Africans, there is a social stigma related to being buried away from “home.” Not surprisingly, it is common for Senegalese to pray for someone, saying, *yàlna boo dee àll* (may you not die in the bush, i.e., abroad). The Wolof word *àll* (bush) can be used interchangeably with *bitim réew* (outside the country). This is why the Senegalese people in the diaspora are sometimes called *ñi nekk ci àll bi* (those who are in the bush). The same system also applies to the Séeréer language, in which “abroad” (*Gilaa saax*) is a synonym of “bush” (*a kob*). Similarly in West Africa, the Mossi people of Burkina Faso frame subjecthood around migratory experience. In Moré, the language of the Mossi, the *mouaga* is “the individual,” seen as being rooted in their birthplace. The *cosweogo*, etymologically, is “the one who has spent too much time in the bush,” while the *parweogo* is “the one who has remained in the bush.” The bush here is understood as a foreign land, abroad, and is associated with the loss of social values and forgetting one’s roots, which one is reminded about if one is among one’s peers.⁸ Such distinctions illustrate how questions of migration and autochthony are central to defining African subjectivities and influence the “grave preferences” (Onona 2018) of African migrants.

Despite the diversity of the Muslim world and varying degrees of interpretation of Islamic laws, there are standard funerary practices. Some of these practices are even understood as a religious obligation that falls upon the entire Muslim community where the deceased lived. Generally, the body of a deceased Muslim is to receive a ritual cleaning and shrouding and, after a funeral prayer, is to be

⁸ I thank Idrissa Démé from the State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for this insight on the Mossi. For the burgeoning “bush” literature of West Africa and northern Uganda more broadly, see Lagace 2023.

buried coffinless, facing the Qibla in Mecca (Balkan 2015: 125). Where Muslims are minorities, as in Canada (Fall/ Dime 2011), meeting those requirements can be problematic. Balkan notes in the case of Germany that “laws that mandate the use of a coffin, obligatory waiting periods of forty-eight hours between death and burial, time limits on grave plots, and mandatory autopsies when the cause of death cannot be determined” (2015: 125–126) conflict with Islamic funerary practices that forbid cremation, embalming, and autopsy, and require that the deceased be buried as soon as possible. Consequently, repatriation becomes the most viable option.

These challenges are not the only motivations for the repatriation of bodies in some Muslim migrant communities. Preoccupation with such repatriations becomes increasingly tied to social concerns surrounding “death abroad” and religious ideas around proper burial and the afterlife. For some Sufi communities, grave preferences are intrinsically linked to belief in salvation and intercession. As Stauth and Schielke show for some Muslims in Asia, a saint’s grave or “saintly place” is considered a link between the “human and the transcendent” (2015: 15–16). The city of Tuubaa in central Senegal is one such place for the followers of the Muridiyya Sufi order. For the Murids, special geographic features as well as the politically mandated history of exile of their leader all signal Tuubaa as a “sacred locality” (ibid). In addition to housing the tomb of the order’s founder, Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba (1853–1927), the city is named after the tree of paradise mentioned in the Qur’ān (Ross 1995: 228). Unsurprisingly, many Murids believe that burial in the city’s cemetery ensures salvation (ibid). Indicative of this belief is the great tree in the middle of the graveyard of Tuubaa, which is called *Guy Texe*, the “Baobab of Salvation.” Most importantly, Murids believe that the prayers Bamba formulated during the foundation of the holy city and contained in his poem *Maṭlabu al-Fawzayni* (In Quest for Success in this World and the Hereafter) have been answered. In it, he asked: “[Oh Allah], make this city [i.e., Tuubaa] be a place of pilgrimage for the needy in this world. Make it a source of intercession for the offender in the Hereafter” (Mbàkke, n. d.). For all these reasons, many Murids prefer to be buried in Tuubaa (Onoma 2018).

Our Corpses, Our Homeland

Unattended deaths, unmarked mass graves, and “Zoom funerals” are some of the transformations the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to how we mourn (Balkan 2021). For Muslim migrant communities in the West, the pandemic exacerbated the shortage of Islamic burial grounds. For instance, Muslim

communities in France and Italy faced many challenges in offering proper burials to their loved ones, forcing them to either repatriate their remains or even bury them in non-Muslim cemeteries (Balkan 2021).

In such a complex context, Senegalese migrants in Brazil received the ban on the repatriation of bodies with horror. For them it meant the possibility of death in conditions falling outside of what they consider *mujj gu rafet* (Wolof: a beautiful end of one's life). The general social expectation in Senegal, with a population over 95 percent Muslim, is that migrants should return home, whether to retire or be buried, as the song by Youssou Ndour cited in the epigraph illustrates. For these reasons, Senegalese in the diaspora viewed their government's decision to ban the repatriation of corpses as a betrayal.

What shocked the *móodu-móodu* was that Senegal unilaterally decided to ban repatriation, regardless of the cause of death, for fear of spreading the virus to the Senegalese population. Èmigré activists maintained that the decision had “no sanitary or scientific” underpinnings because it went beyond the World Health Organization's March 24, 2020, recommendations concerning the handling of remains. In short, it was an “irrational decision,” according to Seydina Oumar Ba, a France-based Senegalese intellectual, in an interview on RT France on May 19, 2020 (CRC-Senegal 2020). According to Ba, there were eighty Senegalese victims of COVID-19 abroad, twenty of whom had already been buried abroad. Ba was not alone. On April 13, 2020, Senegalese citizens in thirty countries, including Brazil, created an organization to fight against the repatriation ban: CRC-Senegal *Collectif pour le rapatriement des corps des sénégalais* (Image 3).



Image 3: Source: Picture of the Collective for the Repatriation of the Senegalese Bodies, @CRC-Senegal. <https://www.facebook.com/crcsenegal/photos/118695699815456>

The CRC rallying call was a demand for “dignified burials” following the “same safety measures taken when transporting a corpse from the Fann hospital in Dakar to the popular Yoff cemetery in Senegal” (Diop 2020). The motto of the organization, “*Sunu néew, Sunu réew*” (Wolof: Our corpse, Our homeland), conveys this appeal for “equal treatment” (Image 3). After two unfruitful letters to the Senegalese Minister of Foreign Affairs, the CRC wrote to President Macky Sall. When the pleas for help in April 2020 proved unheard, the CRC decided to take matters to the Senegalese Supreme Court on May 5, 2020. The judges decided to uphold the repatriation ban, which undermined their own credibility in the eyes of many Senegalese citizens. However, the government later reversed course. On May 11, 2020, President Sall tweeted that his government was going to lift the ban “given the huge mobilization of the Senegalese living abroad” (Sall 2020).

COVID-19 and the Loss of Prestige of the *Móodu-móodu*

For a long time, international migration has been synonymous with upward social mobility in Senegal (Hannaford 2017: 26). The economic impact of the émigrés is such that some Senegalese believe the country “will be on its knees” without remittances (Riccio 2005: 106). That may indeed be the case. In 2019, remittances totaled over \$2.5 billion and constituted more than 10 percent of Senegal’s gross domestic product (World Bank 2021b). The figure is more than the \$1.5 billion that the country received in foreign aid (World Bank 2021a). In recognition of the contribution of the émigrés to the country’s economic growth through family remittances, funding of community projects, and entrepreneurial investments upon temporary or permanent return, Senegal has long devised preferential diaspora policies (Sinatti 2019: 601). These range from “special treatment” in accessing ordinary bureaucratic services to overseas voting rights and facilitation of remittances and investment. For example, as of March 2019, my experience is that it takes less time (about four hours) to get a Senegalese passport issued at the consulate in New York than in Dakar, where it can take between two days and a week.

However, growing xenophobia in many host countries made life difficult for *móodu-móodus*, and media attention to the so-called migration crisis in recent years contributed to demystifying “life abroad.” In addition, social media made images of the precarious living conditions of some Senegalese abroad easily accessible. Once held in high esteem, the *móodu-móodus* find themselves constantly questioned regarding the origin of wealth behind their relatively lavish lifestyles once they return home. The rural origin of many of them is also brought into the mix as they get portrayed as wealthy hicks by their urban counterparts who remain in the homeland. Finally, when the COVID-19 crisis began, there was suspicion that the émigrés might be bringing the deadly virus to Senegal.

It was not solely a legal battle against the government that the *móodu-móodu* had to fight. They also needed to confront online criticism from their compatriots in the homeland. Thus, Senegalese abroad tried to convince their fellow citizens at home that “the *móodu-móodu* deserves a decent burial too,” as one Senegalese in São Paulo put it in a Facebook Live discussion hosted by Touba-Brasil TV.

As Senegalese anthropologist Ibrahima Thiaw has noted, Africans have resorted to traditional African values to devise solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic. Senegalese in particular have tapped into what he calls a *teraanga* aesthetic, understood as “hospitality, sociability,” which ultimately functions as a “catharsis for *vivre ensemble* or living together by creating a space where solidarity and

mutual aid exchanges ... are deployed” (2020: 477–478). However, at the beginning of the pandemic, this was not the overall experience of Senegalese living abroad who returned home. On the contrary, the pandemic helped expose the shifting status of the Senegalese in the diaspora, who were equated with foreigners. Dakar-based newspaper *L'Évidence* headlined “La France coronise le Sénégal?” (France is coronizing Senegal) after the first case of COVID-19 in the country was found in a French citizen who had traveled to Senegal.⁹

While the initial coverage in Senegalese and European media focused on the growing xenophobia in most countries and on some Africans claiming COVID-19 to be a “white people’s disease” (Le Figaro 2020), the Senegalese in the diaspora were victims of the same stigmatization. When the infamous *cas zero* (French: Patient zero) was announced, Senegalese in the diaspora received a great deal of pressure not to return home. Those living in Europe usually drive to Senegal, crossing from Morocco and traveling through Mauritania. Because the border with Mauritania is porous, some Senegalese who had already left Europe before Senegal closed its borders were able to get home. In a WhatsApp group for Senegalese both at home and in the diaspora, a participant sent a widely shared message. In his voice message, he addressed someone named Móodu Jaañ in these terms:

I hope you guys who are abroad (Wolof, literally: ‘in the bush’: *ñi nékk ci àll bi*) are not finding a way to return home. If I were running the country, any *móodu-móodu* who sets foot here would never do it again. I would turn him into a disabled person. I swear by Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba, or I would castrate you! I am telling you, and I am not hiding what I have to say. You better kick me out of the [WhatsApp] group. Any *móodu-móodu* who comes home knowing well that there is a disease over there should be castrated. May God forgive me, but we know that most of those trying to come here are sneaking in just because of women!

Similar sentiments were largely shared on social media. Comedians were quick to use TikTok and other platforms to caricature or defend the *móodu-móodu* arriving in Senegal and everyone fleeing from or calling the police on them.¹⁰ For

⁹ As a subheadline, *L'Évidence* wrote: “traite négrière, colonisation économique, colonisation épidémiologique...?” [Slave trade, economic exploitation, epidemiologic colonization...?] The subheadline implied that the pandemic might be another burden imposed on Senegal by France, following the slave trade, colonization, and neo-colonization. This sentiment was further strengthened by French doctors affirming on national television that vaccines should be tested on Africans because they lack resources. See Thiaw (2020: 476).

¹⁰ A sample clip can be found here: <https://youtu.be/GOZJsanll-o>, [Last accessed: 1 May 2022].

example, comedian and radio host Marieme Faye addressed the frustration of the *móodu-móodu* in one of her skits on Vibe Radio, a Dakar-based station. Faye is famous for her critique of the Senegalese society, especially those who take advantage of their relatives who live abroad. In one skit, she uses the “*Móodu-móodu en a marre*” (French: The migrant is fed up) as a punchline while listing the grievances of the *Móodu-móodu*. Faye describes the predicament of the Senegalese abroad as being trapped in countries where cremation is culturally acceptable because one is “a *persona non grata* in one’s own country” (Faye 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the clip became popular among the *móodu-móodu*, who shared and discussed it in WhatsApp groups during the first months of the pandemic. On social media, *móodu-móodu* asked what happened to *teraanga*, hospitality, a value said to be crucial to social relations in Senegal (Riley 2019). “Are we no longer part of the nation?” asked Mo, a Senegalese rapper based in São Paulo, in an Instagram live conversation. He then went on to point out the economic contributions of the diaspora. In the same conversation, Mo noted the Wolof question *kañ ngay ñibbi?* (When are you going home?), which the Senegalese living abroad get asked when they visit their homeland. He highlighted that the question is asked in Senegal to returnees, as if “home” is the country of migration and the one who has chosen to migrate is no longer entirely at home in Senegal. For this reason, he advised his followers to “live a good life” where they are instead of sending all their earnings to Senegal. In reaction, one of his followers added: “And get ready to be buried here!”

At a time when ethnic and religious identities make integration difficult for many migrant communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has created conditions for change in attitudes toward the attachment to the homeland and host country. The pandemic has led many migrants to consider new forms of sociality. Key questions to be answered included: where to live, where to put down roots, where to invest capital and emotion, and where to die? Return migration is considered the endpoint of spatial mobility by many Senegalese migrants. Ideally, one would return home to retire and live in one’s community of origin. Should death prevent such a project from coming to fruition, migrants still expect to return home through the infrastructure of repatriation in which they invested. Although the ban on repatriations to Senegal was lifted, there are indicators of a rupture in the long-standing tradition of posthumous “returns” that started in the early 1970s. The idea of being buried abroad, which was once almost unthinkable, became discussed as a regular possibility among the Senegalese in Brazil and beyond. In contrast, some are exploring more reliable infrastructures of repatriation, such as life insurance policies affordable for the

majority of the *móodu-móodu*. Further investigations will help determine the broader impact of COVID-19 on the burial practices of Senegalese abroad.

Conclusion

Senegalese abroad have historically invested in solidarity mechanisms that ensure the repatriation of deceased compatriots. Because of the power and prestigious status attached to the position of immigrant (Hannaford 2017: 26) and the stigma attached to being buried in a “foreign land,” repatriation of remains is the favored outcome. Attention to migrants’ mortuary politics (Brown 2008: 5) is a window into understanding the meaning of burials and migrants’ attempts to form nonlinear transnational ties in life and the afterlife (Félix 2018: 140).

If, as Minkin argues, “death defines the living” (2021: n.p.), knowing if one will be offered “a decent burial” by those who might remain can have an enormous impact on social relations. It is unclear what new paradigms will emerge from the “social dramas” (Turner 2018: 33) created by COVID-19 between Senegalese at home and those abroad. However, the pandemic has forced many Senegalese abroad to reimagine the ties they wish to have with their host countries and homeland now and after death.

Bibliography

- Babou, Cheikh Anta (2002): Brotherhood Solidarity, Education and Migration: The Role of the Dahiras among the Murid Muslim Community of New York. In: African Affairs 101/403, 151–70.
- Balkan, Osman (2015): Burial and Belonging. In: Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism 15/1, 120–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12119>.
- Balkan, Osman (2021): Death Interrupted: Mourning across Borders in the Wake of Covid-19. SSRN The Immanent Frame (blog). September 16, 2021. <https://tif.ssrn.org/2021/09/02/death-interrupted-mourning-across-borders-in-the-wake-of-covid-19/>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Brasil (2021): Refúgio em Números. <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/seus-direitos/refugio/refugio-em-numeros-e-publicacoes/pagina>
- Brown, Vincent (2008): The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- CONARE, Comitê Nacional Para os Refugiados (2016): Sistema de Refúgio Brasileiro: Desafios e Perspectivas. Brasília: Ministerio da Justicia.

- CRC-Senegal (2020): Collectif Pour Le Rapatriement des Corps Des Sénégalais Décédés | Facebook. Facebook. @CRCSenegal. 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/crcsenegal/>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Dakaractu (2020): Amadou Ba : « Le Sénégal va acheter des tombes dans les cimetières à l'étranger pour y inhumer nos compatriotes décédés du Covid-19 dans un pays touché... »." DAKARACTU.COM, April 9, 2020. https://www.dakaractu.com/Amadou-Ba-Le-Senegal-va-acheter-des-tombes-dans-les-cimetieres-a-l-etranger-pour-y-inhumer-nos-compatriotes-decedes-du_a186694.html. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Diop, Amar Mbaye (2020): Message de Mr Bocar, Membre CRC-Senegal. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MI99QxpH8yY>. Last accessed May 1st, 2022.
- Fall, Khadiyatoulah/ Dime, Mamadou (2011): *La Mort Musulmane En Contexte d'immigration et d'Islam Minoritaire. Enjeux Religieux, Culturels, Identitaires et Espaces de Négociations*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Faye, Marième (2020): Modou Modou VS Coronavirus. MDR Avec Marième Faye. Dakar: Vibe Radio. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojr-tO_tvGE. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Félix, Adrián (2018): *Specters of Belonging: The Political Life Cycle of Mexican Migrants*. Studies in Subaltern Latina/o Politics. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Geschiere, Peter (2005): *Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon*. In: *African Studies Review* 48/2, 45–64.
- Geschiere, Peter (2014): *The Funeral in the Village: Urbanites' Shifting Imaginations of Belonging, Mobility, and Community*. In: Diouf, Mamadou/ Fredericks, Rosalind (eds.): *The Arts of Citizenship in African Cities: Infrastructures and Spaces of Belonging*. Africa Connects. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 49–66.
- Hannaford, Dinah (2017): *Marriage without Borders: Transnational Spouses in Neoliberal Senegal*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jappie, Sarah/ Araby, Mona (2021): *Ecologies of the Dead and Living: Mourning out of Place*. SSRC The Immanent Frame. <http://tif.ssrc.org/2021/08/26/ecologies-of-the-dead-and-living-mourning-out-of-place/>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Kane, Ousmane Oumar (2011): *The Homeland Is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lagace, Martha (2023): *Keyword: The Bush*. Forthcoming in *African Studies Review*.
- LeFigaro (2020): *Coronavirus: Quand l'Afrique dénonce la «maladie des blancs»*. In: *LeFigaro*, March 28, 2020, sec. Actualité. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/coronavirus-quand-l-afrique-denonce-la-maladie-des-blancs-20200328>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.

- Mbàkke, Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba (n.d): *Maṭlabu Al-Fawzayni* (In Quest for Success in This World and the Hereafter). <http://daaraykhassida.com/dkhassida%20pdf/fawzayni.pdf>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- McIntosh, Janet (2015): *Autochthony and 'Family': The Politics of Kinship in White Kenyan Bids to Belong*. In: *Anthropological Quarterly* 88/2, 251–80.
- Minkin, Shane (2021): *Imperial Death and Belonging in Alexandria, Egypt*. SSRC The Immanent Frame. September 30, 2021. <https://tif.ssrc.org/2021/09/30/imperial-death-and-belonging-in-alexandria-egypt/>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Ndiaye, Gana (2020): *Mobility and Cultural Citizenship: The Making of a Senegalese Diaspora in Multiethnic Brazil*. In: Meerzon, Yana/ Dean, David/ McNeil, Daniel (eds.): *Migration and Stereotypes in Performance and Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 157–77.
- Onoma, Ato Kwamena (2018): *The Grave Preferences of Mourides in Senegal: Migration, Belonging, and Rootedness*. In: *Africa Spectrum* 53/3, 65–88.
- Posel, Deborah/ Gupta, Pamila (2009): *The Life of the Corpse*. In: *African Studies* 68/3, 299–309.
- Riccio, Bruno (2005): *Talkin' about Migration - Some Ethnographic Notes on the Ambivalent Representation of Migrants in Contemporary Senegal*. In: *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für Kritische Afrikastudien* 8, 99–118.
- Riley, Emily Jenan (2019): *The Politics of Terànga: Gender, Hospitality, and Power in Senegal*. In: *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 42/1, 110–24.
- Ross, Eric (1995): *Touba: A Spiritual Metropolis in the Modern World*. In: *Canadian Journal of African Studies /Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 29/2, 222–259.
- Sall, Macky (2020): *Ainsi, tenant compte de la forte demande de rapatriements de corps de nos compatriotes décédés du COVID19 à l'étranger...* Tweet. @Macky_Sall. May 11, 2020. https://twitter.com/Macky_Sall/status/1259939760405127168. Last accessed May 1, 2022.
- Shipton, Parker MacDonald (2009): *Mortgaging the Ancestors: Ideologies of Attachment in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sinatti, Giulia (2019): *Return Migration, Entrepreneurship and Development: Contrasting the Economic Growth Perspective of Senegal's Diaspora Policy through a Migrant-Centred Approach*. In: *African Studies* 78/4, 609–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2018.1555310>.
- Stauth, Georg/ Schielke, Samuli (2015): *Dimensions of Locality: Muslim Saints, Their Place and Space* (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam No. 8). Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Thiaw, Ibrahima (2020): *Archaeology of Two Pandemics and Teranga Aesthetic*. In: *African Archaeological Review* 37/3, 475–479.

Turner, Victor (2018): *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

World Bank (2021a): Net Official Development Assistance and Official Aid Received (Current US\$) - Senegal. 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.O-DA.ALLD.CD?locations=SN>. Last accessed May 1, 2022.

World Bank (2021b): Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP) - Senegal. 2021. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=SN&most_recent_year_desc=true. Last accessed May 1, 2022.