

https://dspace.org/

(Un)Rest in peace : the agents of human remains repatriation and the lives of living migrants : a study of agency, process and effect in repatriating bodies from South Africa and the U.S.A.

Wheeler, Brittany Lauren

2011-11-10
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10748

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

ABSTRACT

Migration, as a field of study and a phenomenon greatly impacting society, primarily concerns itself with the living. When migrants die outside their native territory or nation, the economic, social, physical and spiritual concerns that normally influence the management of death may be expanded to add an imperative that precedes even burial or other funeral arrangements: the decision of whether to return a body to its place of origin. This process can be simple and straightforward, but it can also be culturally complicated and illuminate issues and realities far beyond the breadth of the repatriation process alone. This study enters the discussion at the juncture of death and decision-making about repatriation, and does so by assessing two distinct systems of human remains repatriation and their involved agents, applying their lessons to a wider discussion of agency, repatriation and the situation of living migrants. The first system follows the repatriation of Native American bodies from museums in the United States, and the second follows the repatriation of African foreign nationals repatriating bodies from Johannesburg, South Africa. These disparate cases introduce differing concepts of who a migrant is and what migration involves, but they also provide a lens through which to consider whether more universal themes in agency, process and migrant experience can be found, linking the dead to the living through the process of repatriation.