



States and Diasporas Facing Death in Migration: A Comparative Analysis of the Cases of Senegal and Tunisia before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

*États et diasporas face à la mort en migration : une analyse comparée des cas
sénégalais et tunisien avant et pendant la pandémie de la COVID-19*

*Los Estados y las diásporas frente a la muerte en la migración: un análisis
comparativo de los casos senegales y tunecino antes y durante la pandemia de
COVID-19*

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States and Diasporas Facing Death in Migration: A Comparative Analysis of the Cases of Senegal and Tunisia before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Los Estados y las diásporas frente a la muerte en la migración: un análisis comparativo de los casos senegaleses y tunecino antes y durante la pandemia de COVID-19

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“Repatriation of bodies. A real headache for emigrants. The Tunisian state offers it free of charge to its citizens. The Senegalese state can do it too.” (*Collectif pour le rapatriement gratuit de dépouilles des émigrés sénégalais* [Collective for the free repatriation of the remains of Senegalese emigrants], Facebook, 2015).

- 1 As suggested by this collective of Senegalese emigrants in a Facebook post, the issue of body repatriation is a “real headache for emigrants”, requiring the intervention of the public authorities in the country of origin. This article focuses on the positions of states of origin and mobilisation of their nationals living abroad for a “right” to repatriation of remains. By linking the literature on “death and migration” with the corpus of research on diasporas and transnationalism, it analyses the relationship between emigrants and the authorities of their country of origin through the prism of death. It

highlights the importance of norms, values and emotions in the relationship between diaspora and states of origin.

- 2 The existing academic literature has long identified the fear of the “bad death” (Thomas, 1975) as a major concern of societies and its intensification in the context of migration. In response to this fear, the repatriation of bodies has become a key transnational practice, involving a network of very diverse actors (religious, families, associations, states and the private sector). For nearly three decades, sociologists and anthropologists of migration have been studying this issue. Their questions found an echo on both sides of the Atlantic (France, Spain, Canada, United States) in the 2000s and 2010s (e.g. Chaïb, 1992; Petit, 2002; Aggoun, 2006; Lestage 2012a; Fall and Ndongo Dimé, 2011; Solé Arraràs, 2015), illustrating the ritual, religious, identity and economic dimensions that characterise body repatriation.
- 3 Death in migration is also an eminently political phenomenon (Félix, 2011; Balkan, 2016) as it raises questions about the responsibility of states in relation to the demands of the deceased, their families and migrant organisations. Regarding the responsibility of migrants’ states of residence, the issue of Muslim cemeteries has attracted the attention of various researchers (Ahaddour and Broeckaert, 2017; Cuzol, 2018). Chaïb (2000) argues that citizenship involves the construction of a symbolic territory in which the cemetery is the “irrefutable proof” of the civic and spiritual integration of immigrants. In this sense, the study of public policies in relation to the death of immigrants illustrates practices of inclusion and exclusion of migrants in Europe (Aggoun, 2006).
- 4 In relation to the role of the authorities in countries of origin, the literature on diaspora policies (i.e. the policies of states towards their nationals abroad) has provided ample illustration of the emergence of diasporas as a specific category that requires government intervention, including in the area of social protection (Agunias and Newland, 2012; Collyer, 2013; Ragazzi, 2014; Delano, 2018; Gamlen, 2019; Lafleur and Vintila, 2020; Dufoix, 2008). This literature has identified a range of factors justifying the adoption of such policies and programmes: economic (e.g. capturing remittances and the return of highly skilled workers), political (e.g. adjusting to neoliberal forms of governance; see Ragazzi, 2014), and electoral (e.g. capturing diaspora votes; see Lafleur, 2013).
- 5 In this article, we introduce the concept of moral economy (Thompson, 1971; Fassin, 2005; Lacroix, 2019), in order to demonstrate that more attention needs to be paid to the norms, values and emotions that guide the action of diasporas in their relations with societies of origin. To do so, we choose as our subject of study the public practices and policies of countries of origin as well as the mobilisation of their nationals living abroad in support of the “right” to repatriation of remains. This subject offers a valuable perspective on the relations between emigrants and their representative organisations on the one hand, and the public authorities in their country of origin on the other.
- 6 In the first part of this article, we present a typology of state policies regarding their nationals abroad in relation to the repatriation of the dead and the living. We compare the cases of twelve non- European Union countries with large emigrant populations present on the territory of the European Union (EU). This allows us to clearly identify the limits of states’ efforts in this area.

- 7 Drawing on the work of Sayad (1999), in the second part of the article we suggest that the position of states of residence and origin in relation to the handling of the bodies of members of the diaspora during the COVID-19 pandemic is part of a logic of double rejection. We illustrate this concept by analysing the mobilisation of associative networks of Tunisian and Senegalese emigrants around the issue of repatriation during the pandemic. Through these two cases, we argue that this exceptional period was characterised by a double rejection of migrants who died as a result of COVID-19, by states of origin and of residence, and constitutes a key moment to observe the moral economy governing relations between states of origin and diasporas. The redefinition of time, space and relationships caused by the pandemic, as well as its social, economic and political impacts, put pressure on states and drove diasporas towards new forms of mobilisation.

Mixed Online and Offline Methods

- 8 This research was funded by a Starting Grant awarded to Jean-Michel Lafleur by the European Research Council: “Migration and Transnational Social Protection in (Post) crisis Europe” (“MiTSoPro”).¹ The article also draws on a survey carried out by national experts on diaspora policies and on ethnographic fieldwork with Senegalese and Tunisian diasporas, conducted in the framework of the “MiTSoPro” project. The objective of the project is to examine strategies deployed by migrants and their families to access social protection across borders. The first phase of the survey was conducted on the basis of documentation by a network of academic experts in the field of diaspora and consular policies. This network was set up in the twenty-seven EU Member States, as well as in twelve non-EU states with a significant diaspora presence in the EU. Through a standardised questionnaire filled in by each expert, the first phase of the survey enabled us to map out the repatriation policies in force in 2019 in each of these states in relation to living and dead nationals. From our sample of thirty-nine states, we selected two that have historically had opposite responses to the demands of their diaspora: Tunisia, whose consular services have traditionally handled the repatriation of bodies, and Senegal, which only provides repatriation on a discretionary basis. These two cases allow a qualitative analysis of diaspora mobilisations around this issue during the exceptional period of the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by the generalised suspension of body repatriation throughout the world.
- 9 As for many researchers who had to rethink their strategy for the collection of empirical material during the pandemic, virtual ethnography was a real methodological challenge. Indeed, our research methodology – which was originally based on participant observation in situ and face-to-face semi-directed interviews – had to be redesigned in order to adapt to this new reality. Similarly, both the participants in our research and the associations we observed had to develop alternative online modes of interaction and mobilisation to address their demands to states of origin. As a result, our ethnographic fieldwork is partly a “netnography” (Kozinets, 2019), i.e. a virtual or digital ethnography, through which we used online sources, in particular mainly on social networks (Facebook), to follow the progress of associative campaigns around the “right to repatriation of remains” and responses provided by the states of Senegal and Tunisia. Over the course of weeks, through regular conversations with participants in our respective research on forms of

engagement around the death of Senegalese migrants (Félicien de Heusch), and on transnational health practices of Tunisian migrants in Europe (Carole Wenger), we identified the networks involved in these campaigns. We collected documentary material including press releases, resolutions, photographs, videos, publications and Facebook comments, while in some cases conducting participant observation of these campaigns.² Miller (2011 and 2016) takes a dual approach by contextualising her “online” fieldwork in the “offline” world and analysing the extent to which her stakeholders use Facebook in their daily lives. Bluteau (2019) considers that the importance of these “digital landscapes” in people’s daily lives is such it can be questioned whether it is even possible to conduct ethnographic fieldwork without taking into account these digital spaces. He suggests thinking in terms of “[...] the post-digital era, in the sense that it is no longer appropriate to consider digital technologies as separate entities,” but as “embedded in everyday practices” and as part of a single field thus requiring the researcher’s co-presence (Bluteau, 2019: 2).

- 10 After the exceptional period at the start of the pandemic had passed, we conducted a complementary phase of face-to-face interviews with some of the actors mentioned. We carried out approximately twenty semi-structured interviews, partly online, partly face-to-face in Belgium with representatives of associations, families of COVID-19 victims, but also with consular authorities and officials in charge of implementing diaspora policies. These participants were selected on the basis of their involvement in the transnational management of the repatriation of remains during the observation period. This second phase of data collection (particularly with victims’ families and some policy makers) enabled us to explore certain issues with the participants, such as the place of emotions and symbols. Such issues could not have been addressed during the first interviews conducted remotely during the period of the most severe health restrictions (from March to May 2020).

Negotiating Presence and Absence through Death

- 11 In his seminal work, Sayad (1999) invites us to consider the immigrant as being “doubly absent, in the place of origin and the place of arrival.” The absence of the immigrant, he would later argue, is “in fact a dual absence, for while immigration is clearly a matter of presence and a somewhat intrusive presence, it is also, in its own way, a moral absence, one might say, a form of absence within presence, an absence in spite of presence [...]” (Sayad, 2000: 10). This “tragic” framework (Timera, 2014) can nevertheless be reconsidered through the notions of migrants’ “dual space” (Quiminal, 1991; Basch *et al.*, 1993), “dual presence” (Dufoix, 2010) and through the perspective of transnationalism. The transnational approach highlights the simultaneous presence of the migrant in the country of emigration and in the country of immigration and the creation of a transnational social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004) through cultural, social, family, economic and political practices (Basch *et al.*, 1993). Sayad also suggests that immigration and emigration should be conceived as “two inseparable sides of the same reality; they cannot be explained without each other” (Sayad, 1999: 15). “Dual presence” and “dual absence” are thus part of a whole, that is in tension and continuously renegotiated. According to Sayad, death in migration cannot possibly be considered an “ordinary death”, it is a “displaced” death, a death that “disturbs” (Sayad, 2000: 9), because it signals a “bad death”, the failure to accomplish the project

of migratory return during the migrant's lifetime. This "bad death", absent for some, present for others, is "doubly experienced by the two communities to which the deceased belong" (Kinzi, 2018: 105). Whether the bodies are repatriated or buried in situ, as noted by Cuzol (2018: 126): "[...] whatever the choice made, it is never entirely satisfactory. The deceased is present to some and absent to others." The definition of the status of presence and/or absence of the dead person thus seems situational, relational and subject to negotiation, even conflict, to ensure the "good death" of the deceased.

- 12 Studies on death in migration show that, when the choice of burial is made in the country of immigration, immigrants are generally confronted with public authorities that vary in their willingness to create Muslim sections in cemeteries. These positions reflect different interpretations of the role of worship and the state, not only between European countries, but also between regions and municipalities (Ahaddour and Broeckaert, 2017). This results in a chronic lack of Muslim sections in cemeteries, the difficulty of following religious prescriptions to the letter and of paying the price of the plots, the impossibility of receiving family visits from the country of origin, and the fear of cremation or burial in a mass grave. All these elements are characteristics of the "bad death" and express the rejection of the deceased immigrant by the country of residence. Thus, in accordance with the idea of "integration through death" (Aggoun, 2006), the demand for public policies that respect the immigrants' religious and cultural prescriptions has become central, as their integration raises significant socio-political and identity-related issues (Cuzol, 2018: 117).
- 13 The repatriation of remains to the country of origin, on the other hand, is generally seen as the only way to ensure the biographical continuity of the migration project through burial in the native land. However, Kinzi (2018: 112) observes that this post-mortem return is often seen as a sign of emigrants' dual failure: "On the one hand, they are those who have 'failed' in their social life by leading it far from their native group; on the other hand, they are also those who have 'failed' in their death by dying far from their land and village of origin." "Failing" or "succeeding" in life and death in migration is thus a matter of constant negotiation for reparation of the "debt" of the absentees and their "rebirth" among those present. Indeed, according to Timera (2014: 35), "the place of the 'absentee', even if temporary, is ambiguous. Often reduced to a state of nothingness, it is their periodic, permanent, happy or tragic return that establishes their rebirth among 'their kin' and reaffirms their belonging to the group". As the repatriation of bodies is the expression of the migrant's "ultimate return" (Petit, 2002), it is through this practice that the fine balance between "dual presence" and "dual absence" is contested to ensure the continuity of the group: not only the transnational family and diasporic networks, but also the nation-state. For this reason, intervention in the repatriation of bodies by public authorities in the country of origin and diasporas, or the lack of such intervention, may influence the interpretation of death in migration as a "failure" or "success". It is therefore necessary to examine the practices of states of origin and their diasporas in this area.
- 14 As mentioned earlier, the subject of repatriation of the dead has received significant attention from sociologists and anthropologists of migration. Their research reveals a number of significant cases in which the state undertakes to repatriate its nationals who die abroad (Félix, 2011; Lestage, 2012b on Mexico; Kinzi, 2018 and Cuzol, 2018 on

Algeria). A notable counterexample in this area is that of Sudan, which refuses to repatriate its refugees who die in Israel (Anteby-Yemini, 2018).

- 15 Despite the existence of these specific case-studies, there is currently no systematic review of state practice in this area. This exercise is further complicated by the fact that under international law there is no uniform and irrevocable right to repatriation for citizens abroad, whether dead or alive. Article 5 of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations provides a vague definition of consular functions of each signatory state and only specifies that states have an obligation to “help and assist nationals, both individuals and bodies corporate, of the sending State.” This provision clearly leaves a great deal of room for interpretation by states of origin.
- 16 In the framework of the “MiTSoPro” project, repatriation is defined as an intervention of the public authority allowing a national residing temporarily or permanently abroad to return to the national territory. The table below describes the public policies of twelve non-EU states, selected from among those with a significant share of their diaspora (minimum 40%) settled in the EU.

Table 1: Repatriation Policies for the Living and the Dead Implemented in twelve Non-EU Countries with a Significant Emigrant Population Settled in the EU

	Financial support for the repatriation of the living	Financial support for the repatriation of the dead
Argentina	No public policy	Only on discretionary basis
China	Only on discretionary basis with obligation to reimburse	No public policy
Ecuador	Only on discretionary basis without obligation to reimburse	Entitlement to financial assistance, to be reimbursed, for the repatriation of the remains of vulnerable citizens (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility)
India	Entitlement to financial assistance without obligation to reimburse for citizens without means and in distress (via an insurance scheme known as the Indian Community Welfare Fund, ICWF)	Entitlement to financial assistance without obligation to reimburse for the repatriation of the remains of vulnerable citizens (via an insurance scheme known as the Indian Community Welfare Fund, ICWF)
Lebanon	No public policy	No public policy
Morocco	Entitlement to financial assistance, with obligation to reimburse, for citizens in distress (consular code)	Only on discretionary basis (Hassan II Foundation and Foreign Affairs Ministry)
Russia	No financial assistance, but funding of return travel for those in distress abroad (government standard)	No public policy
Senegal	Only on discretionary basis, on health grounds	No public policy
Serbia	No public policy	No public policy
Switzerland	Entitlement to financial assistance, with obligation to reimburse (for those covered by the Social Security system applicable to Swiss nationals abroad)	No public policy
Tunisia	No public policy	Right to repatriation of remains, free of charge
Turkey	No public policy	Right to repatriation of remains for those who have taken out an insurance policy, as set up by state-funded religious associations (Presidency of Religious Affairs, DTIB)

Source: “MiTSoPro” project (2019).

- 17 An analysis of the table confirms that there is no unconditional right to repatriation, for either the living or the dead. However, three comments should be made on the table. First, repatriation is a public intervention in relation to which the discretionary power of consulates and/or Foreign Affairs often plays a dominant role. This is true for states that do not have a public policy on repatriation, but which in exceptional circumstances may nevertheless intervene (e.g. an aviation disaster or natural disaster, a crisis or a death receiving significant media attention, etc.). As discussed below, the

Senegalese authorities, for example, regularly intervene in the repatriation of the remains of murder and accident victims, even though there is no formal public policy on body repatriation.

- 18 Secondly, assistance for the repatriation of the living or remains is rarely unconditional. In the vast majority of cases, it is necessary to prove a state of physical and financial distress. In the case of repatriation of the living, this financial assistance is more often than not combined with the obligation to reimburse the aid received on return.
- 19 Thirdly, while the majority of response mechanisms presented in the table are funded directly from the state budget, the examples of India, Turkey and Switzerland indicate that some states prefer insurance mechanisms to meet the repatriation needs of their nationals. The nuance is important in that repatriation is then only provided to citizens who have taken out such an insurance policy (in contrast to the examples of Ecuador and Tunisia).
- 20 Our analysis of the practices of states of origin and residence in relation to the handling of migrant remains suggests that our thesis on dual presence/absence is supported by both the existing literature and our survey data on public policies in countries of origin. In the following section, we examine the extent to which the pandemic marked a time of double rejection, challenging the moral economy that underpins the relationship between diasporas and their countries of origin. To this end, we analyse two cases of diaspora mobilisation in response to the suspension of body repatriation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Double Rejection of Bodies in the Pandemic Context: A Calling into Question of the Moral Economy in the Relationship between Diaspora and Country of Origin

- 21 The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a defining moment for many diasporas in terms of their relationship with their countries of origin. Indeed, some countries of origin adopted strict health measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In order to contain the pandemic, states distinguished between movements considered “risky” and “unnecessary” and those considered “necessary” and “legitimate” (Scheel, 2020). Many states decided to restrict access to their territory for their citizens living abroad, but also to partly or fully suspend body repatriations.
- 22 The ban on returning to the country of origin – alive or dead – marked this double rejection of bodies as potential carriers of disease, reviving the historical association between migration and the circulation of disease (Prothero, 1977; Markel, 1997). The “foreign body” was perceived as endangering the health of the nation (Higham, 1988; Markel and Stern, 2002), driving states to adopt policies to control the spread of viruses and to exclude these migrant bodies. These control policies excluding migrant bodies, seen as biologically threatening (Ormond, 2021: 1), fuelled negative representations of migration, from historical quarantine practices (Gensini *et al.*, 2004) to contemporary measures of border control and medical screening of immigrants (Gushulak and MacPherson, 2011; Klinkenberg *et al.*, 2009; Arshad *et al.*, 2010). In relation to the

repatriation of bodies, Chaïb (2000: 48) observes that international funerary legislation³ was developed around the fear of contamination and smuggling linked to transportation of corpses.

- 23 As we will see below, emigrants who returned to their country of origin during the COVID-19 “crisis” were portrayed as responsible for the deterioration of the health situation in the country. The counting of these “imported cases” stigmatised returning emigrants as representing a threat to their country and as a vector for the spread of COVID-19. Onoma (2021) shows the way in which emigrants returning to Senegal during the pandemic were designated by the Senegalese population as “scapegoats” and responsible for the transmission of the virus, revealing a more deeply rooted concern about the disruptive effect that the return of emigrants may have on those who remained in the country of origin. By defending their “right to return”, they became “bad citizens” and some states adopted measures making a stay in the country of origin difficult or impossible. The closure of borders, the interruption of flights, and the fear of contamination by so-called “COVID bodies” (i.e. bodies of people who died as a result of COVID-19) jeopardised the repatriation of remains, thus depriving emigrants of their “right” to return post mortem and reinforcing their absence from their country of origin.
- 24 The COVID-19 pandemic thus marked a period of breakdown of the “emotional community”⁴ between diasporas and their countries of origin, triggering a renegotiation of the position of emigrants; those “from outside” (Timera, 2014) were “absent” and kept away from the state of origin. As Timera argues, absence “structures the relationship in a lasting way” (2014: 41), between countries of origin and emigrants, forcing the latter to reaffirm their belonging to the “emotional community” by defending the legitimacy of their presence, especially in times of crisis. From a conceptual point of view, this period of exception and activation of the registers of pain and emotion (Stierl, 2016) by the diaspora thus invites us to consider the use of the concept of moral economy in the field of study of diaspora policies. Initiated by Thompson (1971) and developed by Scott (1976), the moral economy approach suggests that economic activities should no longer be studied solely from a material point of view, but that the social norms and obligations accompanying the economic functions performed by a community should also be taken into account. As evidenced by its application to a broad range of social and geographical contexts, the concept of moral economy has enjoyed significant success in the field of socio-anthropology. Its development enabled the consideration of the role of values (e.g. justice) in the practices of resistance by marginalised populations. According to Thompson and Scott, “the moral economy implies a relational conception of legitimacy, therefore one can think about contestation and paternalism together, as one can with patronage and rumor, deference to authority, and the obligation that leaders have to act as ‘good authorities’” (Siméant-Germanos, 2010: 145). It “refers to the concept of exchange based on norms of reciprocity” (Siméant-Germanos, 2010: 144), balancing relations between authority and population. However, Siméant-Germanos (2020: 208) observes a slackening and straining in use of the notion of moral economy. She thus suggests that it should be used with caution, stressing the value of the notion to “reflect on the vertical link between the elite and subjects, the transformations and crises in this link” (Siméant-Germanos, 2010: 157).

- 25 Fassin (2009: 1257) defines moral economy as “the production, distribution, circulation and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, norms and obligations in social space.” The sociology of emotions (Kemper, 1978; Hochschild, 1979; Goodwin *et al.*, 2001; Traïni, 2009) takes into account emotions “to consider their role in the processes of mobilisation, activist socialisation, maintenance of loyalty, but also disengagement” (Sommier, 2020: 222). In the field of migration studies, Fassin (2005) also suggests that the moral approach allows an analysis of the norms and values by which migration is considered and regulated. More recently, Lacroix (2019), drawing on Carling (2008), suggests that the transnational spaces in which migrants move are perceived by migration actors in terms of centrality (country of origin) and periphery (country of residence) and that, as a result, “these representations associated with the migration space feed a moral economy between migrants and those who have stayed” (Lacroix, 2019: 3).
- 26 The pandemic period represented a moment of questioning of the consensus between states and diasporas, of breakdown in the “symbolic exchange system” (Triaud and Villalón, 2009: 36) that guarantees social order, and provides us with an opportunity to look at the values governing relations between the diaspora and their society of origin, in particular, with the public authorities. In other words, beyond purely utilitarian approaches to diaspora policies, the moral economy approach invites us to consider the role of norms, values, and emotions in defining the relationship between governments in the country of origin and their diasporas. In the two case studies below, we therefore attempt to demonstrate the extent to which the mobilisation of emigrants for the repatriation of bodies during the pandemic marked a high point in terms of the visibility of the issue. Indeed, this moment not only highlighted the values that guide populations in the management of death in migration, but also, and above all, the representations and expectations of these populations in relation to the role expected of the authorities in the country of origin. However, in expressing these representations, values, expectations and emotions, emigrants are, as we shall see, reminded of their ambiguous position in the country of origin: courted for their remittances, their skills or their electoral support, they also have to fight representations of the emigrant body as sick and guilty of its own absence.

“The State Must Shoulder its Responsibility”: Mobilisation of the Tunisian Diaspora for the Respect of the “Right” to Repatriation

- 27 Existing literature on Tunisian emigration shows that although Tunisia, at the time of its independence, was initially opposed to labour emigration, in the mid-1960s it developed controlled labour emigration, notably through the signing of bilateral emigration agreements,⁵ in order to reduce pressure on the Tunisian labour market and encourage remittances (Jaulin, 2014). From the 1960s onwards, one of the main objectives of the Tunisian emigration policy was to encourage the transfer of remittances from its workers who had gone to Europe (Mabrouk, 2010).
- 28 These emigrants, who since the end of the 1980s have been known as *Tunisiens Résidents à l'Étranger* (Tunisians Resident Abroad-TRE), also include a number of opponents to the regime of the first Tunisian President Bourguiba (1957-1987), notably many students who campaigned against the single-party system from a distance (Dhifallah, 2004). It is within this framework that a series of practices aimed at “bringing Tunisians closer” to

the consulates developed (Geisser, 2012). According to Kenza, a consular official in Brussels, the state of Tunisia, in an effort to encourage emigration and remittances, and in order to ensure the loyalty of TREs to the regime, adopted a range of social policies responding to the “*dual need*” to “*monitor*” TREs and to encourage them to “*send back foreign currency*.”⁶ According to the participants in our survey, it was in this context that a decree⁷ adopted in the early 1970s gave the consular authorities the task of repatriating the remains of Tunisian nationals, regardless of their place of birth.

- 29 Initiated under a paternalistic regime concerned with the monitoring of its emigrants, the repatriation of bodies by the state is therefore a major element in the representation of the migratory experience by TREs. As described by our research participants, it was Bourguiba who “*authoritatively took the decision that every Tunisian national must be repatriated*”,⁸ thus acting as a transnational moral authority (Lacroix, 2019) in relation to where citizens should be buried. This practice is therefore a “*non-negotiable*” “*benefit*”,⁹ as it has been around “*forever*”.¹⁰ It was maintained under the regime of President Ben Ali (1987-2011) who, in an attempt to strengthen the allegiance of TREs, introduced a series of populist social welfare provisions (Harrigan and El-Saïd, 2014). As Abed points out, many of these initiatives resulted in social benefits that still exist today and “*one cannot [...] deny the social policies adopted by [successive Tunisian governments] [...] even though their purpose may be questionable*.”¹¹
- 30 In the imagination of many TREs, body repatriation to the country of origin is therefore a way of responding to religious prescriptions, but also an essential value of the moral economy governing the relationship with the authorities of the state of origin. The state ensures repatriation in exchange for the maintenance of loyalty and remittances from TREs to their country of origin.
- 31 While it seemed unthinkable to many of the participants in our research to question this fundamental benefit, its implementation represents a significant cost to the state. Indeed, budgetary factors, as well as the diversification of TREs’ places of residence, have led to a series of adjustments to the policy over the years. Although it is no longer perceived as an unconditional right, its calling into question in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic nonetheless marked a moment of tension and emotional crisis between the Tunisian authorities and the diaspora. These tensions are symptomatic of the evolution of relations between the Tunisian authorities and the diaspora over time, particularly since the 2011 revolution.
- 32 On 18 March 2020, Tunisia closed its borders to non-residents and interrupted air and sea connections, preventing the return of both the living and the dead. In Tunisia, as in Senegal, the burial of residents who had died as a result of COVID-19 in local cemeteries provoked strong reactions from inhabitants in certain localities (Delpuech, 2020; Lachheb, 2020). The fear of circulation of the virus caused by “*COVID bodies*” from abroad was part of the same logic, or, as one participant summarised it, “*people were afraid of being attacked by these bodies*”.¹² During the health crisis, a new representation of emigration emerged, as an external peril threatening the capacity of a state with limited resources to cope with the pandemic.
- 33 In response to these representations, collectives and associations denounced “*the hateful allegations made against TREs returning to Tunisia, accused of importing and disseminating the virus in their country*.”¹³ A debate also started on Facebook groups of Tunisians abroad, in which certain TREs called for responsibility and a sense of sacrifice to protect the country: “*Close the borders immediately. Ready to die abroad; the*

important thing is that our citizens do not die in Tunisia.”¹⁴ This idea of duty towards the country of origin was also found among TRE associations mobilised to collect funds and medical equipment to help hospitals in Tunisia and “to fulfil their duty of solidarity with their country.”¹⁵

- 34 With the interruption of air connections, families unable to repatriate their dead to Tunisia were forced to resign themselves to burying them in Europe at their own expense, since the Tunisian state only provides support for transport and not for burial of the remains. But some families “*don’t have a budget for death*”¹⁶ and incurred costs they could not afford alone. On social networks, images from Italy showing the bodies of Tunisians who had died in hospitals awaiting burial, aroused the emotion of TREs: comments under these images include “What is the Tunisian consulate doing?”,¹⁷ “Associations must lodge a complaint against the consulate”.¹⁸ Association leaders also strongly denounced the fact that the majority of Italian cemeteries had no Muslim sections.
- 35 In France, Karim explained that “*first there was a rumour*.”¹⁹ In hospitals, places in the morgues were limited and bodies could not be kept for long while waiting for a solution for their repatriation. “Rumours” circulated that if the bodies were not taken care of, they would be cremated, betraying the fear of a “bad death” that characterises the double rejection of the “foreign body”, “rejected” both here and there:

“Either you go and take your body with an undertaker, or the body will be burnt! [...] When we heard this, we confronted the consulate and the Tunisian state so that it would assume its responsibility and bury its patriots. As a precaution, we launched a fund to collect the bodies. In forty-five minutes, we collected 16,000 euros. People were touched [...]. Because we’re not used to this. If the Tunisian state didn’t take care of it, we would have insurance [...] The state takes care of everything, but it’s paid for with the citizen’s money, the state doesn’t have any money, it’s our money [...] so that’s why we said that the state of Tunisia must assume its responsibility.” (Online interview with Karim, on 07/03/2021)

- 36 According to many TREs, since the Tunisian authorities were unable to respect the terms of the decree during the “crisis”, they were, in a sense, indebted to the families of the deceased. In Belgium too, the TREs were concerned and called on the Tunisian authorities:

“Should they bury them temporarily here in the country where the death occurred, leaving them in the morgues pending better days, or should the state of Tunisia find an exceptional way to repatriate the remains? [...] Who could take care of them and cover the costs? [...] Action should be taken to provide a rapid response to the families so that they are not left to fend for themselves in unbearable distress.” (Press release of the Comité de Vigilance pour la Démocratie en Tunisie [Vigilance Committee for Democracy in Tunisia-CVDT], on 22/03/2020)

- 37 This information was also relayed in Tunisia and was the subject of press articles and radio broadcasts. Very rapidly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed consulates to pay the burial costs of those forced to be buried in Europe: “*It took forty-eight hours, it was fast, because it was going to explode, or else it was going to make a lot of noise, it was going to do damage.*”²⁰ In a press release dated 28 March 2020, the Tunisian consulate in Paris refuted “erroneous information on the fate of the remains of Tunisian nationals residing in France who died as a result of Coronavirus” and announced that burial costs would be covered in Muslim burial sections. In relation to deaths not resulting from COVID-19, associations, in collaboration with the consulates, found an alternative and, until the resumption of air connections, repatriated the bodies by cargo plane. Finally, it was not until November 2020, when the concerns of TREs in relation to the “crisis”

seemed to have shifted to other issues, that arrangements were made to repatriate “COVID bodies” to Tunisia.

- 38 As the case of Tunisia illustrates, the COVID-19 pandemic was another moment of tension in relationships between TREs and authorities in their country of origin. It provoked renewed dissonance among TREs and in particular among civil society actors. Two observations can be made. On the one hand, the “crisis” experienced by Tunisia reminded its diaspora of the requirement of solidarity and loyalty to the country of origin, which have been founding elements of the relationship between these two actors since the 1970s. On the other hand, by not providing a solution for the repatriation of the diaspora’s “COVID bodies”, and then by offering to cover the costs of burial in Europe, the state called into question its part of the tacit contract under which it demands solidarity and loyalty from TREs. By reacting rapidly to mobilisations by associations, the Tunisian authorities admittedly tried to restore their legitimacy, but, as the involvement of associations in the search for alternative solutions for the repatriation of bodies shows, the position of the state in the relationship between the diaspora and the society of origin was further weakened. Summarising the change in values underlying the relationship between the state of Tunisia and the diaspora, Kenza explains that the perception of governance has changed completely:

“I vote, I pay taxes and I have demands. I have the right to know where my money is being spent. Today, we are close to mistrust. With COVID, we are in a state of mistrust.” (Interview conducted in Brussels with Kenza, consular official, on 31/03/2021)

- 39 This weakening of the position of the state of Tunisia in relation to its diaspora is indicative of the breakdown that took place at the time of the revolution, transforming their power relationship and calling into question the requirement of loyalty towards the Tunisian authorities.

“The State Will Give in”: Mobilisation of the Senegalese Diaspora for the Lifting of the Temporary Ban on Body Repatriation

- 40 Although policies to assist emigrants were in place as early as the 1980s, it was not until 1993 and the creation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad that these policies were effectively institutionalised (Smith, 2020). Unlike Tunisia, the state of Senegal does not have a formal policy on the repatriation of remains. It is therefore traditionally family and community solidarity and obligations that enable emigrants to meet the considerable costs involved in the repatriation of bodies, the logistics of which are taken care of by private companies based in the country of residence (Chaïb, 2000). However, there are discretionary practices to support the repatriation of the bodies of *Sénégalais de l’Extérieur* (Senegalese nationals abroad-SE), resulting from an interpretation of the duty of states to assist their citizens in distress abroad.
- 41 According to Ousmane, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the legitimacy of state support for the repatriation of remains is “*self-evident*”²¹ and therefore common sense. Although SEs are politically represented (through the right to vote from a distance and the creation of a consultative council of emigrants) and the diaspora is symbolically considered “the fifteenth region” of the country, according to Moussa, this region “*does not have a cemetery*”.²²

- 42 As in the case of Tunisia, the origins of such support are difficult to pinpoint, but according to officials, it is associated with the Wade presidency (2000-2012). Through the ministry's "relief and assistance fund", which aims to support the many requests of SEs in "precarious" and "indigent" situations, the Senegalese authorities also deal with requests from families to support the repatriation of bodies: "*To repatriate or not to repatriate, that's the question. Why, who, and how?*" asked one of the officials interviewed for our research.²³ Although the processing of requests for support relating to the repatriation of remains is at the discretion of the authorities, an internal procedure is conducted, according to Cheick, "*on the basis of objective criteria*"²⁴ such as the economic situation of the deceased and their family, and above all the "*rather emotional*" or even "*sensitive*" nature of the death. Indeed, a "*typology of deaths*"²⁵ guides the processing of applications: deaths following a murder, an accident, or those of students. Cheikh explains that "*these are quite painful situations for the state, and we really do make a gesture to support the families*".²⁶ This "gesture" can also be made independently of the ministerial involvement, by the president himself during his trips abroad, or by the first lady, through her foundation.
- 43 In response to the question "to repatriate or not to repatriate", Ousmane notes that criteria for selection of requests for support for body repatriation run the risk of provoking rejection of the authorities, who prefer to conserve their political interests:
- "We'd be there, checking, quibbling over small criteria, at a time when the family of the deceased is suffering, can't even mourn. And what does that lead to? [...]. Someone will make a speech or post a text on social networks against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or against a particular minister, imagine the effect [...] We are managed by politicians, they tend not to publicise the matter too much."* (Interview conducted in Dakar with Ousmane, MFA official, on 19/02/2021)
- 44 In order to avoid its legitimacy being called into question in relation to the SEs, the state provides "*its children*" with material and symbolic support, in a "*sensitive*" and "*emotional*" time of mourning, wishing to show them that it "*is not abandoning*"²⁷ them in the face of the risk of a "bad death" in Europe.
- 45 However, due to budgetary constraints and the growing determination of Senegalese authorities to direct its diaspora policies to the service of the national economy, the participants in our research evoked a desire on the part of the state to withdraw in the area of repatriation:
- "We cannot repatriate all the bodies and we prefer to repatriate brains than bodies"* (Interview in Dakar with Cheick, MFA official, on 17/03/2020).
- 46 Given the authorities' desire to approach the diaspora through a discourse on the circulation of skills, the practice of supporting body repatriation appears to them to be economically unsustainable. According to Samba,²⁸ the alternative envisaged is therefore to encourage SEs to take out private insurance while ensuring that they maintain a link with the consulate by inviting them to register on consular lists and to vote, since votes of the diaspora are courted by Senegalese political parties (Smith, 2015). In other words, even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Senegalese state's commitment to body repatriation could be seen as discretionary, unsustainable, but also guided by political and electoral motives.
- 47 As in the case of Tunisia discussed above, the Senegalese authorities responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020 by closing airspace and prohibiting the repatriation of "COVID bodies" on health grounds. This double rejection of "COVID bodies" by the

countries of residence and origin provoked a reaction among the Senegalese diaspora comparable to that observed in the case of Tunisia:

“[The families] saw their loved ones rejected in their own country [...] why reject a body? It’s a cowardly thing to do.” (Online interview with Assane, community activist, on 21/07/2020).

48 Nevertheless, the Senegalese authorities rapidly tried to take measures aimed at the diaspora. Indeed, the pandemic affected representations of the diaspora since it was perceived both as an agent of contamination — alive or dead — arousing fear in public opinion, but also as a population in distress requiring the support of the state. This latter representation marked an evolution from the traditional view that only individuals who were victims of particularly distressing circumstances (accident, crime) could expect discretionary intervention by the state. The Senegalese authorities thus created the “Force COVID diaspora” fund with 12,500,000,000 CFA francs²⁹ to facilitate the repatriation of living SEs and offered to support the families of COVID-19 victims with 2,000 euros to organise a funeral in the deceased’s country of residence.

49 This paradigm shift from discretionary support for SEs to temporary recognition of the risk of precariousness faced by all SEs in times of pandemic was received with caution among the diaspora. Indeed, since it was used to financing the repatriation of bodies to the country of origin, the diaspora was not expecting financial support, but rather the lifting of the ban on the repatriation of “COVID bodies”. A transnational collective — the *Collectif pour le Rapatriement des Corps* (Collective for the Repatriation of Corpses-CRC) — was created on 9 April 2020 via social networks based on the following observation:

“If it is possible to regulate the repatriation of living people, who may carry the virus and are more likely to spread it, then the same can be done for dead people in sealed coffins that pose no risk of contagion. May reason finally prevail over emotion and unnecessary hysteria.” (CRC, Facebook post, on 11/05/2020)

50 Under the slogan “our body in our country” and in order to fight against the “unnecessary hysteria” and the “second mourning” that burial in Europe implies for SEs, perceived as a “bad death”, the CRC led an online mobilisation campaign uniting SEs from more than thirty countries, coordinated from France. The collective, composed of families of COVID-19 victims, representatives of associations, doctors, and several religious representatives, published its positions daily on Facebook, gave interviews to the press, and went so far as to file a petition against the state of Senegal with the Senegalese Supreme Court. With a sense of having been “betrayed” by the state, the collective was determined to do anything to ensure that state “gave in”. From his position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ousmane testified to the emotion aroused by this debate, but also to the discrepancy between the representations of the Senegalese authorities and the needs expressed by the collective defending the interests of SEs:

“There was a general outcry [...] They preferred not to eat, not to drink, there were people crying, it was their number one concern [...]. This was all people were talking about, we were even telling them, there is aid, we don’t need it, we want to repatriate.” (Interview conducted in Dakar with Ousmane, MFA official, on 19/01/2021)

51 In its mobilisation for the lifting of the ban on repatriation, the collective explicitly mentioned the duty of sacrifice demanded of the diaspora in its relationship with the country of origin:

“How is it that immigrants who send home tens of billions of dollars a year can lose the most basic right to rest in peace among their family? [...] All they are asking is for their right to be respected.” (CRC, Facebook post, on 05/05/2020)

- 52 In this effort to resist what is perceived as an unjust state decision, the use of the figure of the *Jambaar* (the brave, the valiant in Wolof), the warrior and the martyr to describe SEs who were victims of COVID-19 proved particularly useful:

“To the union of the diaspora for the right of the dead. To the memory of our *Jambaar* who died on the battlefield.” (CRC, Facebook post, on 25/04/2020)

- 53 In response to the mobilisation of the diaspora, and although the courts confirmed the authorities’ decision, the President finally lifted the ban on body repatriation on 11 May 2020. Instead, he imposed management of the arrival of “COVID bodies” by the fire brigade and the health services and limited the presence of families at burials. Under the “pressure” exerted by their diaspora, the Senegalese authorities gave in. To legitimise this change of position, “humanitarian” reasons were invoked. These were reminiscent of the discretionary and exceptional logic that prevailed in the processing of requests for repatriation of bodies before the pandemic. Looking back at this episode, Assane stresses the importance for emigrant associations that the state does not encroach on their prerogatives:

“I would prefer things to be left as they are and for the families to organise themselves and for the associations to do what they usually do [...] COVID has made things worse and created a number of problems. I’m especially afraid that the state will make things more complex [...] It shouldn’t replace associations and families.” (Online interview with Assane, community activist, on 21/07/2020)

- 54 In attempting to respond to the pandemic by suspending the repatriation of bodies and partially financing burials in countries of residence, the Senegalese authorities came up against not only the families’ desire to avoid a “bad death”, but above all the desire for autonomy of part of the diaspora and its representative organisations in the transnational management of deaths. Although, as mentioned in the introduction, before the pandemic a collective of Senegalese emigrants had invited the authorities to follow the example of the Tunisian state policy on the repatriation of bodies, it was ultimately the desire for autonomy that was reinforced among the diaspora in response to the ban on the repatriation of “COVID bodies”.
- 55 By attempting to intervene on health grounds in a domain which is an important focus of emigrant associations, the authorities aroused fears among the diaspora of paternalistic tutelage. In order to make the state yield, the diaspora mobilised to remind the authorities of the sacrifices associated with emigration and the indispensable economic contribution it makes to the country of origin. Confronted with its own shortcomings, the authorities finally “gave in” at the risk of losing their legitimacy with a diaspora that is courted because of its economic weight.

Conclusion: Role and Use of Emotions in State-Diaspora Relations

- 56 In this article, we have argued that the relationship between the diaspora and the authorities in the country of origin is based on two types of representations that are permanently anchored in the diaspora and that govern the relationship between these two actors. On the one hand, there are representations of the role that the state should

play in relation to the diaspora, which have their origins in the conditions in which migration flows have historically developed. Our two case studies diverge with regard to this type of representation, since the Tunisian authorities have for several decades maintained the idea of an interventionist and protective (or even paternalistic) state in relation to its diaspora as a whole, whereas the Senegalese authorities have traditionally opted for a “*laissez-faire*” approach, limiting its interventions to exceptional circumstances affecting the most precarious among the diaspora. On the other hand, relations between the diaspora and the authorities of the country of origin are also based on representations assimilated by the diaspora itself as to the expectations of the authorities of the country of origin towards it. Here again, our two cases diverge since the Tunisian diaspora perceives – without necessarily accepting it – that it is historically expected to be loyal to the government in power in its country of origin, while the Senegalese diaspora perceives this expectation primarily in terms of economic support.

- 57 Although research on transnational political participation of diasporas frequently assumes that a rejection by the country of residence or origin can act as a trigger for transnational political engagement, our case studies illustrate the concomitant rejection of the diaspora by both the society of origin and residence. As we have shown, this ambivalent position, between “dual presence” and “dual absence”, provokes among the diaspora a need to reaffirm its presence. The pandemic thus highlighted the double rejection of the body of migrants who died as a result of COVID-19 and provoked new forms of transnational political mobilisation. The “crisis” thus crystallised the disengagement of the states of origin, while at the same time raising questions about the responsibility of states of immigration in relation to the death of migrants.
- 58 In our two case studies, the COVID-19 “crisis” was a moment of questioning these traditional representations of the state’s role towards its diaspora. By suspending body repatriation and in contradiction with the expectations of its diaspora, Tunisia failed to fulfil the commitment it made by decree. Similarly, Senegal obstructed the efforts of families and associations seeking to repatriate bodies, in contradiction with its traditional “*laissez-faire*” approach. By acting in a manner contrary to the traditional role as perceived by the diaspora, the state’s expectations towards its diaspora became illegitimate in the eyes of the latter and gave rise to a sense of injustice justifying its mobilisation.
- 59 As part of this mobilisation aimed at obtaining a change in policy from the authorities in the country of origin during the pandemic, the use of emotions and reference to the values guiding the diaspora in contrast to a state seen as failing by the diaspora was a crucial element of the latter’s mobilisation strategies. The observation of interactions between the diaspora and the authorities, the interventions of the diaspora in the press and their communication provided ample illustration of this point. For the Tunisian diaspora, it meant calling for the respect of the “law”, while the Senegalese diaspora explicitly referred to respect of the autonomy traditionally recognised by the state in relation to emigrant associative actors. In both cases, these principles of respect of the law and autonomy were presented as cardinal values of state-diaspora relations.
- 60 When the state transgresses – even temporarily – these values arising from the moral economy which guides its relations with the diaspora, the relationship between these two actors is immediately put under tension. As we have shown, the diaspora’s perception that these values are being unilaterally called into question by the state

drives diaspora actors to deploy the register of values and emotions. By threatening to no longer behave in accordance with the country of origin's expectations, the diaspora hopes to remind the state of its obligations by raising fears of a loss of legitimacy. Faced with diaspora resistance, authorities in the country of origin have two options. First, they can try to adjust the representations of their role towards the diaspora in order to align them with the public policies they wish to implement. However, the historical anchoring of these representations and the strong symbolic dimension of public policies towards diasporas make this type of manoeuvre difficult to accept by the latter. Second, as the states of Senegal and Tunisia did in the two examples analysed above, authorities can modify their policies to align them with traditional representations of the role of the state as perceived by its diaspora.

61 In conclusion, the analysis in this article of the mobilisations of associative networks of Senegalese and Tunisian emigrants around the ban on the repatriation of corpses shows the relevance of a moral economy approach to diaspora-state of origin relations. In doing so, the article illustrates the need to go beyond purely utilitarian frameworks of analysis of diaspora-state of origin relations that primarily identify the economic or political influence of the diaspora as an explanatory factor of state behaviour. On the contrary, based on this research, we call for increased attention in the study of state-diaspora relations to the role of "crises" and emotions, norms and values as explanatory variables in the evolution of these relations. In the face of death, and especially when it brings with it emotions in the context of a "crisis", the whole fragile balance of the "emotional community" is called into question. Departing from the values that underpin the moral economy governing diaspora-state relations means jeopardising the consensus between states of origin and diaspora.

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NOTES

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2. In the case of Tunisia, associative networks composed of several associations from different European countries (mostly in France) were set up at the beginning of the COVID-19 "crisis" to coordinate their actions as well as their demands addressed to the Tunisian authorities. Virtual coordination meetings were organised twice a week, providing a forum for listening and the possibility of contact with a wider network of associations.
3. The Berlin Agreement (10 February 1937), the Declaration of the 17th Conference of the Pan American Health Organisation (7 October 1966), and the Council of Europe Strasbourg Agreement on the Transfer of Corpses (26 October 1973) are the main legal texts governing the repatriation of corpses (Chaïb, 2000: 49).
4. The notion of "emotional community" was initially used by Weber (1976) to refer to the affective and emotional bond between the leader and his followers or disciples as the founder of charismatic power (Kalberg, 2012: 489). In turn, Schnapper (1994) deployed the concept as a tool

for building the “community of citizens”. Moreover, the use of the notion was also popularised in other fields such as medieval history (Rosenwein, 2001), emphasising the transformative capacity of emotion. Finally, Boquet (2013: 6) indicates that while the “emotional community” is primarily defined as a set of goals and values shared by its members, it also constitutes “[...] an environment adapted to accommodate performative approaches to emotion, in their intrinsic capacity to transform situations.”

5. In 1965 with France, in 1969 with Belgium.
 6. Interview conducted in Brussels with Kenza, consular official, on 31/03/2021.
 7. Furthermore, Chaïb (2000: 74) cites the law of 28 December 1978, which created a response fund for the protection of people and property abroad, aimed in particular at repatriating the bodies of the deceased and their property. The institutionalisation of the state of Tunisia’s response in this area highlights the desire to include the repatriation of bodies as part of the construction of a transnational social protection policy for emigrants.
 8. Online interview with Adnen, member of Tunisian civil society in France, on 11/11/2020.
 9. Online interview with Taoufik, former official of the *Office Tunisien à l’Étranger* (Office of Tunisians Abroad), on 24/10/2020.
 10. Online interview with Karim, member of Tunisian civil society in France, on 07/03/2021.
 11. Online interview with Abed, member of Tunisian civil society in France, on 19/10/2020.
 12. Online interview with Karim, on 07/03/2021.
 13. Press release of the *Collectif ATE COVID 19* (Association of Tunisians Abroad against COVID-19), on 22/02/2020.
 14. Comment by Jamil on the Facebook group of Tunisians in France, on 17/03/2020.
 15. Press release of the *Collectif ATE COVID 19*, on 22/02/2020.
 16. Online interview with Karim, on 07/03/2021.
 17. Comment by Amal on Facebook, on 22/03/2020.
 18. Comment by Nadia on Facebook, on 23/03/2020.
 19. Online interview with Karim, on 07/03/2021.
 20. Online interview with Karim, on 07/03/2021.
 21. Interview conducted in Dakar with Ousmane, MFA official, on 19/02/2021.
 22. Interview conducted in Dakar with Moussa, MFA official, on 06/12/2019.
 23. Interview conducted in Dakar with Ousmane, MFA official, on 19/02/2021.
 24. Interview conducted in Dakar with Cheick, MFA official, on 17/03/2020.
 25. Interview conducted in Dakar with Moussa, MFA official, on 06/12/2019.
 26. Interview conducted in Dakar with Cheick, MFA official, on 17/03/2020.
 27. Interview conducted in Brussels with Diarra, consular official, on 17/07/2020.
 28. Interview conducted in Dakar with Samba, MFA official, on 03/12/2021.
 29. Approximately 19 million euros.
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ABSTRACTS

What positions do states of origin and their diasporas take in relation to the “right” to body repatriation? By linking the literature on “death and migration” with the corpus of research on diasporas and transnationalism, this article analyses the relationship between emigrants and the authorities of their country of origin through the prism of death. It is based on a comparative

survey of policies on body repatriation in twelve states and on ethnographic fieldwork on the mobilisation of associative networks of Senegalese and Tunisian emigrants around the “right” to body repatriation before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. By proposing the notion of a double rejection of “COVID bodies” by the states of residence and origin during the pandemic, this article draws on the concept of moral economy in the analysis of diaspora policies.

Comment les États d’origine et leurs diasporas se positionnent-ils face au « droit » au rapatriement des corps ? En articulant la littérature sur « mort et migration » avec les corpus sur les diasporas et le transnationalisme, cet article analyse les rapports entre les émigrés et les autorités de leur pays d’origine par le prisme de la mort. Il repose sur une enquête comparative sur les politiques de rapatriement de dépouilles dans douze États et sur un travail ethnographique sur les mobilisations des réseaux associatifs des émigrés sénégalais et tunisiens autour de ce « droit » avant et pendant la pandémie de la COVID-19. En proposant la notion de double rejet des « corps COVID » par les États de résidence et d’origine durant la pandémie, cet article mobilise le concept d’économie morale dans l’analyse des politiques d’attention des États vis-à-vis de leurs ressortissants à l’étranger (*diaspora policies*).

¿Cómo los estados de origen y sus diásporas se posicionan frente al «derecho» a la repatriación de cuerpos? Articulando la literatura sobre «muerte y migración» con los corpus sobre diáspora y transnacionalismo, este artículo analiza a través del prisma de la muerte las relaciones entre emigrantes y autoridades del país de origen. Este trabajo se basa en una investigación comparativa sobre las políticas de repatriación de cuerpos en doce Estados y sobre un trabajo etnográfico sobre las movilizaciones de redes asociativas de emigrantes senegaleses y tunecinos alrededor de este «derecho» antes y durante la pandemia de la COVID-19. Proponiendo la noción de doble rechazo de los «cuerpos COVID» por los Estados de residencia y de origen durante la pandemia, este artículo moviliza el concepto de economía moral para el análisis de las políticas de atención de los Estados respecto a sus ciudadanos residentes en el extranjero (*diaspora policies*).

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