



### A92 Forensic Anthropology Research Centre (FARC): An Emerging Community of Practice in South Africa

*Ericka N. L'Abbe, PhD\**, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0001, SOUTH AFRICA; *Leandi Liebenberg, MS*, Pretoria 0186, SOUTH AFRICA; *Gabriele C. Kruger, MSc*, Pretoria, Gauteng 0084, SOUTH AFRICA; *Anna C. Oettle, MBChB, PhD*, Sefako Magatho University, Ga-Rankuwa 0204, SOUTH AFRICA; *Steven A. Symes, PhD, MS Medical Examiner's Office, MCL, Pearl, MS 39208*; *Shari A. Eppel, BA, Erie, PA 16504*; *Kyra E. Stull, PhD, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, NV 89557*; *Marie Christine Dussault, PhD, Brampton, ON L6Z 4B6, CANADA*; *Michael W. Kenyhercz, PhD, Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, HI 96816*; *Yvette Scholtz, MSc, University of Pretoria, Arcadia 0084, SOUTH AFRICA*; *Clarisa Sutherland, BSc, Pretoria, Gauteng 0083, SOUTH AFRICA*; *Alieske C. Hagg, MSc, Pretoria, Gauteng 0028, SOUTH AFRICA*

**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the emerging practice in South Africa (SA) of the analysis of unidentified skeletal remains, establishment of skeletal collections, education, research, and community service.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by contributing to the knowledge of education and training in forensic anthropology in Africa, particularly in South Africa.

The FARC was established in 2008 with the goal of producing research and education on par with international standards on all aspects concerning the identification of human skeletal remains. Each year in Gauteng, approximately 1,200 bodies are incinerated without a known identity, many of whom may be illegal immigrants and/or migrant laborers from other provinces in the country or the African continent.<sup>1</sup> Gauteng is one of nine provinces in SA, and the total number of missing and unidentified persons within the entire country is unknown. The forensic anthropology laboratory of FARC receives anywhere from 80 to 100 unknown persons from the Forensic Pathology Services (FPS) and the South African Police Services (SAPS) each year. If a person is not identified after analyses and with further investigations from the SAPS and the Victim's Identification Centre (VIC), the skeletal remains are accessioned into archival storage until they are identified. Historical and geographical circumstances (migrant labor) and illegal entry into the country confounds identification in the country. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the contribution of FARC and its collaborators in developing and improving education, research, and community engagement in forensic anthropology in SA within the past ten years.

FARC has contributed to improving proficiency and expertise among practicing SA forensic anthropologists with the development of freely available, population-specific databases; the introduction of standard operating procedures in forensic anthropology laboratories at the various universities; and the recent provision of annual proficiency testing for practitioners. Expertise development starts as early as the undergraduate years and continues into the practitioner's workplace. For this reason, undergraduate and postgraduate physical/forensic anthropology curricula have been modified with the goal of encouraging critical and relativistic thinking among students and of providing hands-on experience with cold cases and course facilitation. Structured, mentored experiences are designed at all levels of education to prepare students for the real world of work, which is not limited to academia.

FARC-affiliated researchers from South Africa, Europe, and the United States publish between 10 and 20 manuscripts and book chapters a year on a range of physical anthropology topics, including human and hominin variation, cranial-facial comparisons, periodontics, and bone trauma. National and international researchers obtain data from the Pretoria Bone Collection, a modern 20<sup>th</sup>-century South African skeletal collection that houses approximately 1,700 remains. In collaboration with various South African and European partners, current research plans are underway to establish a diverse, large, and digitally available imaging repository of various skeletal collections and anatomical specimens. The goal is for this to place South African forensic anthropology at the cutting edge of collaborative scientific research; improved internationalization of SA with an increase in postgraduate students, as well as competitive undergraduate learning facilitation; and to improve qualifications of academic staff in the country.

Community engagement has grown in the past ten years, adding value and applicability to the consultation services with the SAPS, forensic pathologists, and other humanitarian forensic-based training/research projects in Africa. For the past two years, FARC members have participated in training six Zimbabwean anthropologists from the Ukuthula Trust, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) founded in Zimbabwe in response to the Gukurahundi massacres in Zimbabwe and are also forming research and training collaborations with East African colleagues (Tanzania).

The contributions from forensic anthropologists in research, education, and community engagement are both sustainable and relevant within the South African community. FARC is committed to promoting excellence in research, teaching, and training both at UP and other tertiary institutions; this particularly includes improving proficiency of forensic anthropologists in the country, as currently no guidelines exist in defining this professional discipline, and to assist in training the next generation of forensic anthropologists to work on the African continent within a strong community of practice.

#### Reference(s):

<sup>1</sup>. Wild S. 2016. <http://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-12-00-long-quest-to-understand-these-bodies-without-identities>.

#### Proficiency, Student Training, Research