

## One body playing many parts—le Betjouana, el Negro, and il Bosquimano

**Neil Parsons**

University of Botswana, History

*Two French taxidermists stole the body later known as El Negro from a grave beyond the Cape Colony frontier in 1830-31. It was stuffed and displayed as 'Le Betjouana' (i.e. the Bechuana or Motswana) in France and as 'Il Betjouana' in Spain. From 1916 until 1998 it was the prime exhibit in a museum at Banyoles, north of Barcelona, where it became known as El Negro. Controversy over its display began in 1991, and was complicated by the assertion that a 'Betjouana' was a type of 'Bosquimano' (Bushman).*

On Monday February 7th, 2000, Miquel Molina, the local news editor of *La Vanguardia* newspaper in Barcelona, Spain, e-mailed the History Department at the University of Botswana, asking for our opinion on the impending 'devolution to Botswana of the body of an African warrior from the last century which was being exhibited until 1998 (it is kept in a store nowadays) in a Museum located in Banyoles (North of Spain).' Molina added:

Last week, the Banyoles City Council and the [Catalonia] Regional Government agreed to send the body back to Botswana, after a big debate about the exhibition of human bodies in museums.<sup>1</sup>

Our response to Molina acknowledged the need to re-inter a human body which had been stolen from its grave, and requested more information to locate exactly where and when the body was stolen. (At this point our understanding was that the body was of 'Bushman' or Khoe/San origin, and had been stolen from a grave in Botswana, somewhere in the Kalahari, in about 1888.) A flurry of e-mails between Spain and Botswana, and then with South Africa, followed. Our findings from *La Vanguardia* and *El Pais* newspapers in Spain, the McGregor Museum at Kimberley in South Africa, and the University of Botswana's Department of History, are summarized below. We were assisted by the Internet translation-engine <<http://babelfish.altavista.com>> which gave instant, if crude, translations between Spanish and English.

### Tracing the body back home

Our first surprise came on February 14th, when we learnt for the first time that the Verreaux brothers had stolen the body in about 1830, some 58 years earlier than we had previously been given to believe. Darder had purchased the body from the heirs of the Verreaux brothers in 1880, and had displayed the body in public at the 1888 Universal Exhibition in Barcelona.

We responded that by about 1830 one could guesstimate that 'scarcely twenty Europeans had set foot' inside the borders of modern Botswana, and a 'Bushman' body would much more likely have come from the lands between the southern (Sneeuwberg etc.) escarpment and the Orange river in South Africa. Exactly what evidence was there, we inquired, that the man was a 'Bushman', let alone from the Kalahari?<sup>15</sup>

By this time our contacts had spread to two journalists in Botswana, and to an academic in Texas, followed by more academics and museologists in South Africa. Molina began to feed in with details drawn about the Verreaux brothers and Francesc Darder from the articles about El Negro written by Jacinto Anton and published in *El Pais* in 1992. There were absolutely vital new details contained in Molina's e-mail to *Mmegi/The Reporter* on February 15th.

The first new detail about the ethnicity of El Negro (with a bombshell in its parentheses) was:

the catalogue of the first exhibition of the body (in Paris, 1831), defined “El Negro” as a member of the Betjouana (sic) nation. The same definition appeared [for] its exhibition in Barcelona in 1888. (Is it right that the bushmen are one of the Betjouana ethnic groups?)

The second new detail was an essential piece of geographical context:

According to the same source, the Verreaux brothers (two famous French taxidermists) stole the body somewhere where the Betjouanas lived (in the articles of that time, it is placed near the Orange and Vaal rivers, on the border of the Kalahari desert) the night after the burial. It was supposed to [have been] stuffed in the British Cape Colony, from where the two brothers sent the body to Paris.<sup>16</sup>

The problem now seemed basically solved for the academics, who contacted colleagues at the McGregor Memorial Museum in Kimberley, within whose remit the Orange-Vaal area fell. The location of the most likely group of ‘Bechuana’ and their descendants were soon identified. (However, despite a number of false starts over the next few months, no initiative was forthcoming from the South African side to claim the body of El Negro.)

The intervention at so late a date of newspapers in Barcelona and Gaborone, using their academic contacts, now threatened to muddy the clear waters of repatriation for the politicians and bureaucrats. The ministries of foreign affairs in Madrid and Gaborone sounded less than pleased. The Spanish secretary for foreign affairs, Julio Nunez, responded somewhat testily when confronted by *La Vanguardia*:

The government's hope is that the bushman's body may go to Botswana. If they don't want it back there—something which is difficult to [arrange]—we will look for another place where they have ethnic groups similar to the body which was exhibited in Banyoles. Besides I talked last week with the Botswanan secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ernest Mpofo, who said that his government will prepare for El Negro the ceremony that it deserves when there is an agreement with the Spanish government for its return. He seemed willing to accept the return on the body. More than this, he said it will be something symbolic for the whole [of] Africa.<sup>17</sup>

Ernest Mpofo in Gaborone reiterated in *Mmegi* on March 3rd that as far as the Botswana government is concerned, El Negro was, as mandated by a resolution of the Organisation of African Unity, ‘a bushman from Botswana’. There was also a warning, in March 2000, that the Spanish might repatriate El Negro as a museum object in a box, rather than as a human being in a coffin. With a Spanish general election coming up, the authorities of Banyoles and Girona put off their final decision on El Negro until after April 2000. Over the next five months there were other procedural delays on the Spanish side, but the National Museum in Madrid actually took possession of the body from the Darder Museum in Banyoles around August.

A last-ditch argument against repatriation by the Darder Museum was that since El Negro was really a ‘Bushman’ from the Kalahari, the Botswana government should be punished for the maltreatment of people in the Kalahari today by withholding the body from repatriation. When told of this, Ernest Mpofo despaired:

You don't know how many times I've been to Geneva to answer for the government. Even when I was [ambassador] in Brussels (Belgium) I used to do that.<sup>18</sup>

### **El Negro as Le Betjouana**

The body of El Negro was examined in 1993 by a CAT-scan by a group of Catalonian physicians and one anthropologist. The physicians found that the body consisted of

mummified flesh, with only the skull and leg and arm bones intact inside; the rest consisted of iron support rods and grass or hay stuffing. It was the body, they concluded, of a man aged about 27, who had possibly died of a pulmonary infection. The anthropologist among them, a lawyer by profession, pronounced on the body as being of 'Bushman' race.<sup>19</sup>

Further information has been compiled courtesy of Miquel Molina (*La Vanguardia*) and Jacinto Anton (*El Pais*) in Barcelona and David Morris of the McGregor Memorial Museum in Kimberley, supplemented by consultation at the South African Museum in Cape Town and by literary and Internet sources.

To unravel the identity of El Negro it is necessary first to identify the Verreaux brothers and their movements. Jules Verreaux (1807-1873) and Edouard Verreaux (1810-1868) were part of a close-knit set of French natural scientists. Jules first came to the Cape of Good Hope in 1818-1820 with Pierre Delalande, curator of botany at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, variously described as the Verreaux brothers' uncle and as the husband of their sister. Together they made three excursions in search of flora (uprooted) and fauna (shot), as far out of Cape Town as the Keiskamma river on the eastern frontier. In Paris, Delalande was closely connected with the famous Swiss-French anatomist Baron Georges Cuvier, the dissector of Sara Baartman the 'Hottentot Venus' and a seminal figure in the development of 19th century 'scientific racism'.<sup>20</sup>

Jules returned to the Cape in 1825 and took up residence there until 1836. He was a naturalist interested particularly in birds, and a taxidermist supplying a Paris shop run by his father and two brothers. The Verreaux family brought to a peak the 18th century technique of recreating 'the appearance of live animals by stuffing the sewed-up skins with hay or straw'. (It was superseded in the later 19th century by 'modern taxidermy', stretching skins over 'anatomically correct manikins' sculpted in clay and plaster or molded in plastic.)

In the 19th century, taxidermy became firmly established as a museum art in the work of such commercial houses as Maison Verreaux in Paris, founded by a naturalist and explorer, which furnished great numbers of exhibits to museums.<sup>21</sup>

In 1829 Jules Verreaux was joined at the Cape by his brother Edouard. But it unlikely that Jules accompanied Edouard on long collecting trips in that year. He had been left in charge of the fledgling South African Museum, during the extended absence of its curator Dr Andrew Smith. Jules and Edouard are most likely to have ventured north to the frontier in 1830 or in 1831 before they went to Paris together.

The Paris newspaper *Le Constitutionnel* of 15 November 1831 tells us of an exhibition of taxidermia by the Verreaux brothers from Austral Africa at the emporium of 'le baron Benjamin Delessert' (# 3 Rue de Saint-Fiacre), including the lifelike body of a 'Betjouana' man. We are told that the 'Betjouana' wore antelope fur clothing and carried a spear, most intriguingly, a leather bag with contents including glass beads.<sup>22</sup>

Jules Verreaux appears to have started auctioning off the contents of Maison Verreaux after the deaths of his brothers Edouard and Alexis in 1868. He himself died on 7 September 1873, in France after a period of exile in England.<sup>23</sup> The Catalan naturalist Francesc Darder bought the remaining collection of the Verreaux brothers, including the body of the 'Betjouana', from their estate in 1880. Darder then exhibited his new collection at the Barcelona universal exposition in 1888.

The catalogue for that exhibit includes a drawing of 'El Betjouanas'. The antelope fur, in which he was presumably buried, had by now disappeared. So too had that little leather bag of bits and beads. But he stood erect with an hourglass-shaped shield and a very long, barbed spear. Bird feathers adorned his head.<sup>24</sup> All of these would have been characteristic of a Tswana warrior circa 1830. The barbs on the spear, making it a kind of harpoon, are

unusual; but a harpoon would have been necessary for the extremely dangerous sport of hunting hippo (*kubu*, 'sea-cow') along the Orange and Vaal rivers.

\*\*\*

While we cannot name any place or person with precision, we now have a good idea of what sort of person this 'Bechuana' might have been.

There were small groups of BaTlhaping (the mostly southerly Tswana or 'Bechuana') living on the lower Vaal near its junction with the Orange around 1830. This was the area where in the previous century the BaTlhaping had got their name as fish-eaters (*tlhapi*, fish as in 'Tilapia'). Since about 1800 the area had come under the general sovereignty of the Griqua republic which lay to the north of the Cape Colony frontier along the Orange river. To the north of the Griqua republic, lay independent BaTlhaping and BaRolong kingdoms.

The main roads for ox-wagon traffic from the Cape Colony to the Griqua settlements of Campbell and Griquatown ran through the area of the Orange-Vaal junction. Local people made a living servicing and assisting ox-wagons crossing the rivers, with labour and supplies. It also seems to have been a major centre for the sale and processing of wild animal skins. A famous sketch by Thomas Baines portrays the young chief of such 'Bechuana' as were living on the Vaal around 1850, surrounded by his mates and elders, all sewing karosses (furs) while they conversed in the kgotla courtyard.<sup>25</sup>

The McGregor Museum at Kimberley has identified the remains of an old Tswana town called Kgatlane on the Vaal near the Orange confluence. The people of Kgatlane can still be identified today, having been the victims of removal to the Schimidsdrift reserve further north on the Vaal in the later 19th century, and then again the victims of *apartheid* removal to faraway 'Bophuthatswana'—to make away for a South African Defence Force base—as recently as 1978. The people of Kgatlane appear to have been of the Sehunelo lineage of BaTlhaping. Their chief around 1830 would have been Makane or his son Samuel Makane (born c.1800). But Samuel appears to have lived on into the century and therefore could not be El Negro of Banyoles.<sup>26</sup>

Another apparently likely individual, a MoTlhaping called Adam, would have been too old. He was identified by William Burchell, a wagon traveller who came through the Orange-Vaal area in 1812. Adam had previously been captured and enslaved by Dutch Boer farmers in the Bokkeveld and Roggeveld of the Western Cape. He was now free and had decided to settle down on the Orange river, because he had lost his command of the SeTswana language and the mixed people (Griqua, Kora, and San, as well as BaTlhaping) on the Orange spoke the Dutch dialect in which he was conversant.<sup>27</sup>

There is of course no reason to take as a given fact the Verreaux' assertion that their 'Betjouana' was a chief. He was, after all, rather young for a chief if he was only 27. He was also rather young to be a full-fledged *ngaka* (doctor), and could have been an apprentice or journeyman to some master *ngaka*. He was certainly of warrior age, and had no doubt experienced skirmishes with neighbouring Kora and others in the running wars of the 1820s known as *Difaqane*.

As for dying of lung disease, that was entirely possible. It was probably not, in those early days, 'consumption' or tuberculosis: unless El Negro had been working for Boer farmers in crowded living conditions. But pneumonia was, together with gastric enteritis, the most common cause of death among the BaTswana. Winter nights could be frosty, and a chill was easily caught if clothes were wet after exertion. The fur kaross in which he was buried would have been absolutely necessary winter wear. As the best furs and pelts were hunted in winter, it is also likely that the Verreaux brothers would have come to the Orange-Vaal area to trade for wildlife specimens in the winter of mid-1830 or mid-1831.

## El Negro as El Negro

On his death, the naturalist Francesc Darder i Limona generously willed his whole natural history collection, including the body of El Betjouana, to the town of Banyoles, north of Barcelona, in return for hospitality during his lifetime while he researched in its lake, the Estany.<sup>3</sup> The town's museum housed the collection in an old school building and opened it in 1916 as the 'Museo Darder'.

The 'desiccated and stuffed' mummy of the warrior man had pride of place in the new museum. The body was given the popular Catalan name of 'El Negro' because it was extremely, indeed unnaturally, black after being coloured with boot-blackening. (Corpses naturally lose rather than gain colour, and the use of arsenic in preservation would have bleached parts of the body.)

Being Bechuana would have meant nothing to people in Catalonia or Spain. Negro/Black on the hand was one the three major racial classifications (together with 'Caucasian'/White, and 'Mongoloid'/Yellow) into which the human race was divided scientifically from the late 18th century until the mid-20th century. Such tripartite biological classification was the basis for all sorts of racial theories and racist practices, placing people in hierarchies as natural slaves and natural masters, and was elaborated into justifications of social discrimination and even biological extermination.

Since circa 1950, the new science of genetics and the discovery of DNA has knocked biological racialism out of the window. There are, properly speaking, no human races, but only one human race in one great gene-pool with its ebbs and flows and overlaps of disparate biological characteristics. The old science of tripartite or multipartite racialism is now considered pseudo-science.<sup>28</sup> But it takes time for the new paradigm to gain popular acceptance, particularly when there are supposedly scientific institutions like museums still dedicated to the old orthodoxy. Hence the incomprehension on the part of the Darder Museum, which expected a rash of naturalists coming to examine its unique specimen. Only one scientist arrived on their doorstep in all the years after the El Negro controversy blew up: a British professor only interested in the techniques of taxidermia applied to human bodies by the Verreaux family.

People, especially impressionable children, who went to the Darder Museum up until the 1990s, were effectively taught by the prime exhibit that here on display was a 'type' or representative individual of all the Blacks in the world.

Prof. A. F. Robertson, a social anthropologist who was former director of the Centre of African Studies at Cambridge University, visited the museum at Banyoles just before the controversy broke in 1991:

Now housed in what was once the Municipal School building, the collection is a classic example of the nineteenth century craze for natural history—catch it, stuff it, classify it. The five rooms are clean, nicely arranged and lit, but the exhibition is truly a period piece, a curious mixture of schoolroom and carnival. Shells, birds and insects are pedantically arranged in glass cases, but much of the space is taken up by ferocious lions, apes and crocodiles. After a century of wear and tear, some of the taxidermy looks distressingly like road-kill. Local children, clutching their drawing pads, cluster round various freaks among the exhibits—a five-legged calf, a malformed human embryo crouching in its jar. Man—the apogee of this natural historical circus—is well represented in gangling skeletons, rows of skulls from all quarters of the globe and, of course, the African.

He stands about 130 cm. high, wears a flat leather apron and carries a small [sic] spear. Some parts of him appear to be naturally desiccated, others seem to have been filled or reconstituted with wire and plaster. His large glass eyes concentrate fiercely on some invisible prey. There is no explanatory legend.

Children and casual visitors may rarely read beyond one line of caption, but explanations are needed for teachers and other key communicators to children and the public. In

particular, Robertson remarked, 'there has been no evident concern for the sensibilities of the very considerable number of West African labourers in Banyoles'—to which we may add, especially their children receiving taunts in the school playground.

### **El Negro as Il Bosquimano**

In December 1991, before the 1992 summer Olympic Games were due to be held in Barcelona, a medical doctor practising in the town of Cambrils, named Alphonse Arcelin, began to protest about the degrading exhibition of El Negro at Banyoles. He wrote to the national daily newspaper *El Pais*, demanding that the exhibit be removed before it caused offence to Olympic visitors and African athletes.

It is incredible that at the end of the 20th century, someone still dares to show a stuffed human being in a show case, as if it were an exotic animal. Spain is the only country in the world where this occurs.

If the man is not moved, I'm willing to ask all black athletes not to participate in competitions in a place where such a racist statement is made even worse: it is a man stolen from his grave.<sup>2</sup>

As another observer put it, 'How would a Dutch athlete feel if he saw one of his compatriots dried-out and propped up in the local museum?'

Conservatives and socialists on Banyoles town council's responded alike to Arcelin's agitation with a mixture of bewilderment and defiance. They voted to keep 'El Negro' on display in his glass box as before. In the words of councillor Carles Abella, who was also the Darder Museum's curator: "El Negro is our property. It's our business and nobody else's. The talk of racism is absurd. Anyway, human rights only apply to living people, not dead." On a subsequent occasion Abella justified the retention of the exhibit as an integral part of the thematic 'unity' of the museum:

The black man of the [Darder] museum forms part of the city's popular culture taught in school...of course we don't consider it [racist]...this is a museum that shows different races and cultures with adequate respect. It is a racial exhibit, and racism or morbidity may be a personal attitude from visitors which the museum does not foment.<sup>4</sup>

Among others Dr. Arcelin recruited to his cause the Nigerian ambassador in Madrid. Ambassador Yasusu Mamman expressed his dismay that 'a stuffed human being can be exhibited in a museum at the end of the 20th century.' He added:

I have already consulted with other African countries and we are making a protest at the highest levels of the Olympic Organising Committee in Barcelona and the Spanish Foreign Ministry.

By late February or early March 1992, the matter of El Negro was before the International Olympics Committee, whose vice-president, Keba Mbaye, was from Senegal. He raised the issue in committee, saying that the mummified man was exhibited 'in such a way that it might cause offence.' An American member of the IOC, Anita de Frantz, was quoted as saying: 'It is unbelievable. I can't imagine that a country hosting the Olympic Games can be so inhumane and insensitive. It's time for Spain to join the modern world.' The IOC 'ordered an urgent investigation after African diplomats in Madrid threatened to boycott the [Olympic] games unless the mummy is removed.'<sup>5</sup>

At some stage by the beginning of March 1992, exactly when is unclear, 'El Negro' or El Negro became transmogrified into 'Il Bosquimano', the Bushman. It certainly was the belief of the then curator of the Darder Museum, Carles Abella, that the skull shape of El Negro was that of a 'Bosquimano' from the Kalahari rather than that of a 'Negro'. Whatever the background and reasons for this conviction, it served to pass the buck from West Africa to Southern Africa, and to Botswana in particular.

A body called the Center for Inter-African Cultural Activities, presumably in the United States, showed its support for Dr Arcelin early in 1992 by awarding him its Martin Luther King Prize—and announced that it was making ‘efforts with Botswana authorities’.<sup>6</sup>

European newspapers, such as the Brussels and London weekly called *The European* (5 March 1992) and the London Sunday *Observer* (8 March 1992) were given to believe that El Negro was a ‘Kalahari bushman’. The *Observer* story, under a graphic photo of the man in his glass box, was a short piece on page 2 titled ‘Dead African who haunts the Barcelona Olympics’. The newspaper added, entirely incorrectly and to the subsequent confusion of people in Botswana and Britain, that the man had been dead for 104 years, i.e. since 1888. The headline in *The European*, ‘Mummified bushman sparks Olympics storm’, appeared under the front-page title banner of the newspaper, and reported that he had become ‘Banyoles’ most famous celebrity’.

The Lagos *Daily Times* in Nigeria carried a report on March 11th with further information, apparently gleaned from the investigative journalism of *El Pais* in Spain. *El Pais* had not only viewed the exhibit in the museum but had also unearthed a descriptive catalogue published at the time of its exhibition in Barcelona in 1888. (This much more accurate reporting seems to have gone by the board in newspapers outside Spain, which had by now tired of the story.) Under the headline of ‘Row over stuffed black man in Spanish museum’ the *Daily Times* made no reference to ‘Bushmen’ but reported that ‘he was chief of a Bechuana tribe in Bechuanaland, currently Botswana.’ Darder was quoted as crediting ‘the audacity’ of the French ‘explorer’ Edouard (rather than Jules) Verreaux ‘who stole the chief’s body from the tribe after he was buried’:

In one of his many trips, Verraux [sic] and his brother stole the body at midnight when the families and assistants to the ceremony had left the spot.<sup>8</sup>

None of this supplementary and corrective information was available to the Botswana government, or subsequently to the Botswana media, when the government was approached through its Brussels embassy in early March 1992. The Brussels embassy coordinated its response with the high commission in London, and prepared a statement for Gaborone to release during the week of Monday March 9th. The present writer was consulted through Ms Selebanyo Molefi, the commercial attachée in London. Our only sources of information were what had been carried by the *European* and the *Observer*. The former said that ‘El Negro is said to have been taken from a grave in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and brought to Banyoles in 1916’, while the latter told us that ‘El Negro has been dead since 1888.

My opinion was given to the high commission on March 9th. It consisted of two points. First, that the term ‘Bechuanaland’ had been applied south of the Molopo river—now South Africa—as well as to Botswana to the north. Second, that the 1888 date suggested that the body might have been stolen by a notorious grave-robber called ‘Scotty Smith’, who was active between Kimberley and the Molopo river.

Rumbles about the Olympics and the controversy in Spain continued into Easter 1992. Apart from T-shirts and balloons, with slogans like ‘Banyoles loves you El Negro. Don’t go!’ the citizens of Banyoles were treated with his likeness in bite-sized Easter chocolates.

As for Botswana, the official and public reaction seems to have been one of some perplexity. Given doubts about El Negro being from South Africa (which had not yet quite rejoined the community of nations in 1992) rather than Botswana, the expected government pronouncement was delayed until April after the Botswanan government received outside assurances of his ‘Kalahari Bushman’ (and thus supposedly Botswana) provenance.

In his *Midweek Sun* (Gaborone) column, Sandy Grant was typically forthright about the irrelevance of a Kalahari Bushman who died so long ago:

The rumpus over the long dead El Negro should not be allowed to distract us from more immediate horrors.

The 'horrors' that Grant referred to were contained in Alice Mogwe's recent report to the Botswana Christian Council on the human rights status of Basarwa ('Bushmen' or Khoisan) today in Botswana. The report carried allegations of police and game-guard brutality and torture towards people who tried to stay on their ancestral land in proclaimed game reserves and to hunt there for their subsistence.<sup>10</sup>

Jeff Ramsay, *Mmegi/The Reporter* columnist, remonstrated with Grant. The 'mummified Mosarwa', he said, might have caused 'greater concern in Lagos and London than in Lehututu (his possible hometown)', but 'both controversies are about the same issue: the continued marginalization of this region's Khoisan-speaking communities.' Quaint stereotypes justified their continued separation and exploitation. Anatomical stereotypes like El Negro had been conjured up by 'generations of anthropologists and other assorted charlatans'. Equally pernicious were recent romantic images of childlike Harmless People peacefully surviving, until rudely disturbed, as 'isolated, dancing innocents of Nature's Last/Untamed/Wild Eden.' They denied the Khoisan their dignity and their role as autonomous individuals with a long history of interaction with their non-Khoisan neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

Then there was silence, more or less, for five years. The issue, however, then came before the Organisation of African Unity. The representatives of the Republic of Botswana were persuaded of their duty anew, to receive and lay the body of El Negro to rest. In the *Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone) of 9 July 1997, Ernest Mpofo, now permanent secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs, was quoted as saying:

whether we like it or not, people are saying that the remains are that of a Motswana. We have no choice.

By 'Motswana' he meant of course the usage of the term adopted since independence in 1966, covering any citizen of Botswana regardless of original ethnicity. (Both Mpofo and his minister, as well as the president, were themselves ultimately of non-Tswana origin.) The Botswana government, Mpofo said, was willing to accept the body from the Spanish government, and would then bury it. (Exactly how and where the body would be buried was not elaborated.) The *Gazette* then suggested to Mpofo that the body was only being accepted 'because of the pressure put on the government by some West African countries.' Mpofo denied such pressure but added that Africans wanted the body repatriated from Spain, and the Botswana government was doing 'what we can do as Africans.' This was despite his department's view that that *during the 1880's* [sic] there had been Basarwa 'all over Southern Africa: Bechuanaland, Northern Cape, Western Transvaal and Namibia.'

The socialist mayor of Banyoles, Joan Solana, announced that the OAU and Botswana had agreed to the repatriation of El Negro. The ball was now back in the Spanish court to initiate repatriation arrangements.

Two and a half years later, in January 2000, the 'controversy on the possibility of repatriating the desiccated remains of the bosquimano soldier' resurfaced in Banyoles. It was in the form of a challenge by the socialists now in opposition to a newly elected conservative municipal government.

The most prominent person to add his voice to the call for repatriation was Jaume Camprodon, Bishop of Girona, the capital of Catalonia, on January 24th. He had two points to make. Firstly, that all degrading human exhibits in museums should be removed: he mentioned in particular the foetuses and human parts exposed in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Second, the need for cultural sensitivity in the new pluralism of his diocese, packed with new mosques and other non-Catholic places of worship.



The next to enter the fray was Joan Domenech, the delegate or provincial minister for cultural affairs in Girona. He saw no need for repatriation and thought that 'politicians would better concern themselves with live black people than dead.' He reserved particular ire for Dr Arcelin, the originator of the controversy, as having given 'the impression of a grievance about having been born black' and being 'incapable of understanding that rationale behind the Darder Museum [representing] another way of thinking, pertaining to another time.' As for 'the bushman warrior', he would be no better off if repatriated and 'will not [then] revive either.'

The majority view in the Banyoles town council, however, remained in favour of repatriation. The deputy major, Jordi Omedes, insisted that 'the return of the soldier to his country of origin is the most satisfactory solution', and the position on the municipal governing party on 'the repatriation of the body of il bosquimano' would 'not change'—whatever the opposition parties did. The point was won in town council debate on Friday or Saturday February 4th-5th, though a formal vote was postponed until later in the month.

The matter was then taken up by the Spanish national government. The minister of culture, Jordi Vilajoana, welcomed the decision of the Banyoles council after such extended debate. The minister reminded people that UNESCO had recommended that exhibits that offended people's sensibilities should be withdrawn. The responsibility for the actual repatriation would be handed over to the Spanish ministry of foreign affairs, which would now consult and make the arrangements.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Whoever El Negro was, his body has served at least three different symbolic roles over the past two centuries. The body was originally 'collected' and exhibited as an example of a Tswana person ('Betjouana'), from the most remote part of the African interior known in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. As such, the body was a curiosity in Paris, a sample of the people across the Orange river and in the area we today call Lesotho, whom the Paris Evangelical Mission was even then setting out to convert to Christianity and Western civilization. The body was that of a 'noble savage' from a land beyond coastal slavery, but not as strange and exotic/erotic as the plastercast and female body parts of Sara Baartman also being displayed in Paris. The body of the Betjouana remained in a commercial institution as a prime exemplar of that institution's taxidermic skills, rather than being exhibited in a public museum like Sara Baartman's remains.

Both the Betjouana and the Hottentot Venus were brought back to prominence in the late 1880s. Darwinian Evolution had become the new orthodoxy and a prime justification of the new imperialism in terms of racial hierarchy. The body of the Betjouana was a temporary exhibit at Barcelona's international exposition of 1888 that displayed Spain's imperial modernity. The Hottentot Venus became a key feature in the permanent exhibition of a great new museum that together with the Eifel Tower celebrated one hundred years of French republican civilization. The two bodies were shown as tokens of the triumph of imperial science in reconstructing primitive or past forms out of which Modern Man had emerged. Sara Baartman was being transformed from Venus, an object of lust, into African Eve, the savage mother we had lost. The Betjouana man, after 1916 exhibited in a Spanish municipal museum and painted jet black, lost his original geographical identity and became the archetypal primitive Black Man—El Negro in the Catalan language, El Negro in Spanish.

Finally, in the late 20th century, both El Negro and the Hottentot Venus became objects for cultural reclamation, for political struggle, and for possible reconciliation of historic antagonisms between Black and White, Africa and Europe. There were also struggles within the struggle. When the repatriation of El Negro and the Hottentot Venus became inevitable, some Western museologists deliberately undermined the arrangements—

including mysterious bureaucratic bungles and 'loss' or destruction of body parts and accompanying cultural artefacts. In the case of El Negro, fire was fought with fire, one accusation of racism was countered by another. It was asserted that El Negro was not a Black man at all. He was Il Bosquimano, the Bushman. The assumption being that Blackmen and Bushmen are racially distinct and therefore, in the best tradition of scientific racism, must be mutually antagonistic. (In fact, Negroid and Khoesan gene pools overlap considerably, especially in Southern Africa, not least in Botswana.)

The idea of El Negro being a Kalahari Bushman was duly accepted by the Organisation of African Unity, which therefore nominated Botswana as the natural place for repatriation of the body. The idea has been assiduously repeated by the world press ever since, even after it was shown to be a lie. (The Spanish press continues to assert that a 'Betjouana' is a type of 'Bosquimano'.) But at least a Tswana man has been returned to a Tswana country.

### Notes

*Address:* Department of History, University of Botswana, Private Bag UB-00703, Gaborone.  
*email:* <nparsons@mopipi.ub.bw>. This paper is based on 'El Negro of Banyoles: Bushman from Bechuanaland, or Bechuana from Bushmanland?' originally delivered at the University of Botswana (Gaborone) History & Archaeology Research Seminar, 30 March 2000, and in revised form at a University of Western Australia (Perth) seminar on 13 June 2000 and at the University of Pretoria Interdisciplinary Seminar, 10 August 2000. My thanks go to participants in those seminars, to other scholars and journalists some of whose names are mentioned below, and to Dr Alphonse Arcelin of Cambrils, for their helpful comments.

1. Miquel Molina <mmolina@vanguardia.es> to Bruce Bennett <bennett@mopipi.ub.bw> Mon 07 Feb. 2000 at 15:19; Tues 08 Feb. 2000 at 20:32 (enclosing *La Vanguardia* stories in Spanish dated 25 Jan., 3 & 6 Feb. 2000)
2. A.F. Robertson (1993), 2-3 (copy courtesy of Fiona Barbour, McGregor Museum, Kimberley).
3. *The European* (Brussels & London), 5 March 1992, 1 ('Mummified bushman sparks Olympic row'); A.F. Robertson (1993), 2-3.
4. *Daily Times* (Lagos), 11 March 1992, 7, with no credit to agency source (copy courtesy of Prof. Bernth Lindfors, University of Texas at Austin)
5. Jeff Ramsay (1992a); *The European*, 5 March 1992, 1
6. *Daily Times*, 11 March 1992, 7; *The European*, 5 March 1992, 1; *The Observer* (London), 8 March 1992, 2 ('Dead African who haunts the Barcelona Olympics')
7. *The European*, 5 March 1992, 1
8. *Daily Times*, 11 March 1992, 7
9. Personal communications to author by Selebanyo Molefi, London, Mon. 9 March 1992 (enclosing copy of clipping from *The European*, 5 March 1992, 1); Draft press statement by Botswana High Commission, London, 9 March 1992' (copy in author's possession); Ramsay (1992a)
10. *Midweek Sun* (Gaborone), 3 April 1992 ('Etcetera, Etcetera' column by Sandy Grant)
11. Jeff Ramsay, Jeff (1992b)
12. *Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), 9 July 1997, 6 ('El Negro will finally rest here')
13. *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 25 Jan, 3 & 6 Feb. 2000, translated by <<http://babelfish.altavista.com>>.
14. email Neil Parsons <nparsons@mopipi.ub.bw> to Miquel Molina <mmolina@vanguardia.es>, 09 Feb. 2000 at 15:19
15. email Molina to Parsons, 14 Feb. 2000 at 10.11am; Parsons to Molina, 14 Feb. 2000 at 11.42am
16. Molina to Leshwiti Tutwane <tutwane@yahoo.com>, Tues 15 Feb. 2000 at 9:17am, copied to Parsons
17. Leshwiti Tutwane (2000), accessed at <<http://www.mmegi.bw>>.
18. *Mmegi/The Reporter*, 3 March 2000
19. Postmortem report summarized in English, by Darder Museum, copy given to participants at meeting in Ministry of Foreign Affairs conference room, 26 Sept. 2000; personal communication to author from Miquel Molina, n.d.
20. Information from *El Pais*, copies courtesy of Jacinto Anton'; Mearns & Mearns (1998), 404-407. See also miscellaneous web-sites on African bird-collecting and Australian natural science under

- 'Verreaux' on Internet web-site <<http://www.google.com>>, accessed 7 Sept. 2000. Pierre Antoine Delalande wrote a 50 page report, 'Précis d'un voyage au Cap du Bonne-Espérance' (1821) for the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, a copy of which is in the Mendelssohn collection of the South African Public Library in Cape Town.
21. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on 'Taxidermy' accessed at <<http://www.britannica.com>> on 7 Sept. 2000.
  22. *Le Constitutionnel, Journal du Commerce, Politique et Littéraire* (Paris), 15 Nov. 1831, 2 (copy courtesy of Jacinto Anton). Miquel Molina to Parsons, email 3 March 2000 at 7:10am added that Jules Verreaux wrote a report titled 'Ethnographie du Cape: recueil des dessins manuscrits rehaussés d'aquarelles', which was on the card index of the Museum of Natural History in Paris but has since been marked *introuvable* (unfindable). Apparently it narrated some of his travels and listed his specimens of natural history with their prices. He and his brother Edouard also published articles in the *Revue Zoologique* as well as 'a huge book' on their travels to South-East Asia and northern Australia. (However, there are no works by Verreaux in the online catalogues of either the South African Public Library or the Library of Congress, while the online catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris is not available without a password to log-in.)
  23. Australian National Botanic Garden web-site on 'Verreaux, Jules P.' accessed on 7 Sept. 2000, citing A.E. Orchard (n.d.), *A History of Systematic Botany in Australia*, 1, 2nd edn.
  24. Catalogue in Spanish for Darder exhibit at Barcelona Universal Exposition, 1888 (partial copy courtesy of Miquel Molina)
  25. Parsons (1983), 42-44 (illustrations) & 80-89 (text). See also Willcox (1986)
  26. email Parsons to David Morris <[dmorris@kimberley.co.za](mailto:dmorris@kimberley.co.za)>, 16 Feb. 2000 at 7:39am, 20 Feb. 2000 at 10:13am; Morris to Parsons & Molina, 22 Feb. 2000 at 5:50am & 1:39pm, 23 Feb. 2000 at 12:30pm; Breutz (1968), 33-34, 38, & 243-261. The BaKgatlane are currently returning to their sequestered ancestral land at Schmidtsdrift on the Vaal—rather than to Kgatlane further south on the river. My original paper on El Negro in March 2000 suggested that repatriation and reburial among them of a putative ancestor would be a fitting gesture.
  27. William J. Burchell (1822/1953), 2, 264-265
  28. See Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1996)
  29. A.F. Robertson (1993), 2-3

## References

- Breutz, Paul-Lambert (1968), *The Tribes of the Districts of Taung and Herbert Pretoria*: Department of Bantu Administration and Development (Ethnological Publications, 51)
- Burchell, William J. (1822/1953), *Travels in the Interior of South Africa* London: Batchworth Press, reprint
- Cavalli-Sforza, Luigi Luca, et al. (1996), *The Great Human Diasporas: The History of Diversity and Evolution* Perseus Press
- Mearns, Barbara, & Richard Mearns (1998), *Biographies of those Commemorated in Western Palearctic Bird Names* London: Academic Press
- Morris, Alan G. (1987), 'The reflections of a collector: San and Khoi skeletons in museum collections', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 42, 12-22
- Parsons, Neil (1983) *A New History of Southern Africa* Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 2nd edn.
- Parsons, Neil (2000) 'El Negro of Banyoles: Bushman from Bechuanaland, or Bechuana from Bushmanland?' unpubl. paper delivered at University of Botswana History & Archaeology Research Seminar, Gaborone, 30 March 2000 (currently available on the Internet at the UB History web-site <<http://ubh.tripod.com>>).
- Ramsay, Jeff (1992a), 'Lost in time' *Mmegi/The Reporter* (Gaborone), 3 April ('Back to the Future' column no.67)
- Ramsay, Jeff (1992b), 'Why El Negro matters', *Mmegi/The Reporter*, 8 May ('Back to the future' column no.71)
- Robertson, A.F. (1993), 'The desiccated African in Banyoles', *Anthropology Today*, 9/1, 2-3
- Tutwane, Leshwiti (2000), 'El Negro—where did you come from?' *Mmegi/The Reporter*, 3 March
- Willcox, Alex R. (1986), *The Great River: The Story of the Orange River* Winterton, Natal: Drakensberg Publications