Figure: El Negro on display in the Francesc Darder Museum, Banyoles. The body, with backbone, sacrum and ribs removed but skull and arm- and leg-bones still intact, was stuffed with grass and supported by an internal iron frame. Hair and skin (including stuffed penis but apparently not testicles) were also intact, though the skin had been bleached with arsenic and strengthened with stucco, and had been painted black. Glass eyeballs had been inserted in the eye-sockets. He holds a long, barbed fishing-spear in one hand, and an hourglass-shaped Sotho shield in the other. His crane feather headdress has slipped off his head and onto his back, but otherwise he is as exhibited in 1888 at an International Exposition in Barcelona. Note the exhibition of human skulls on shelves behind him.

For other pictures of El Negro see <http://ubh.tripod.com/afhist/elnegro/eln0.htm>.

Introduction: El Negro and the Hottentot Venus

Two famous dead bodies of southern Africans were on public display in European museums for the best part of two centuries. The stuffed and dessicated body of Le Betjouana (born c.1803, died 1830-31) stood first in a Paris taxidermy emporium and later travelled to Spain, where it was displayed under the cognomen of El Negro in a small municipal museum for most of the 20th century. The skeleton, assorted body parts, and bloated plaster-cast of the body of Sara Baartman (c.1789-1816), known as 'La Venus Hottentote', remained in Paris from her death in 1816 up to 2002. They were prime exhibits with pride of place in the great national museums of Paris.

El Negro and the Hottentot Venus were not alone on display in 19th century Europe. The stuffed body of an old 'Bushwoman' collected in 1830 reached England via Hamburg taxidermists and is believed to have been displayed in a museum at Hull. Another Bushman body, pickled in brine twenty years later, is believed to have reached Berlin. Other Bushmen or 'Earthmen', brought to England for live display, died and were eagerly dissected and their bones stored in anatomical museums. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries the trickle of skulls and bones exported from southern Africa to national, medical, and commercial museums in Europe and America had become a flood (Legassick & Rassool 2000).

News of the impending repatriation of the body of Sara Baartmen from France was received as this issue of *Pula* was going to press. A special law initiated in the French Senate was passed by the National Assembly in Paris. It is anticipated that arrangements will be completed for her interment in a South African grave later in 2002, with the subsequent erection of a monument as a symbol of national reconciliation.

The repatriation of Sara Baartman's body from France follows the precedent of the repatriation of El Negro from Spain. The intercontinental debate that commenced with El Negro in 1991 was picked up in 1996 for Sara Baartman, and her actual repatriation looks set to follow his to Southern Africa two years earlier. Incomplete remains of El Negro, after arriving from Spain the day before, were buried in Tsholofelo Park in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, on October 5th, 2000.

The issue of repatriating the remains of the Hottentot Venus touched deeply on the national honour of France, as it involved a great national museum and the question of the body being a 'national asset'. El Negro, by contrast, was an exhibit in a small provincial museum, and the Spanish could somewhat smugly point to the body's original theft and exhibition by Frenchmen. In the judgement of Western nations, the assets acquired by their great museums up to the Second World War are inalienable, whatever fraud or force may have been used to obtain them originally. To agree otherwise, it is argued, would empty the great museums of Europe and America of some of their most prized assets. The British Museum would have to repatriate the Elgin Marbles to Greece, German museums would lose monumental Assyrian assets, Belgium and Holland would lose much of their incomparable collections of 'tropical art', etc.

The decision to repatriate Sara Baartman's body is important because France has fallen in line with UNESCO conventions on the repugnancy of some types of exhibition. A distinction has been made between human remains and artifacts or non-human remains as national assets. This distinction was not made by the Spanish government, which repatriated El Negro not as the remains of a human being but simply as a museum asset being donated to Botswana.

Sara Baartman's repatriation is also the return home of a known individual, with significant details of her last six years already uncovered and many more clues for historians and biographers to pursue. The original identity of El Negro, by contrast, may be for ever obscure beyond being his a 'Bechuana' from or beyond Cape colonial frontiers. Sara Baartman is already the subject of ethnic politics in South Africa, with the organised Griqua group of Khoe people in the Northern Cape province claiming her as 'family', despite her origins among Khoe people in the coastal area where the Eastern and Western Cape provinces meet. Where she will be buried is a question that may not easily be resolved. In Botswana, the government preempted inter-ethnic contention by treating him as a symbol of broad pan-African identity and burying him almost immediately in a capital city park. The question of El Negro's possible identity as a 'Bushman' (San) rather than a 'Bechuana' (Tswana) was neatly sidestepped, to the chagrin of activists for Basarwa/San human rights in Botswana.[1]

Sara Baartman is a potent symbol of Khoe, and wider Khoe-San or Khoisan, identity, which has been submerged for too long in South Africa, as such people were incorporated over two or three hundred years as 'Coloureds' into Afrikaans-speaking societies. The figure of El Negro, though 'ethnically' Bantu-speaking Tswana, may equally serve to remind us that probably even greater numbers of Khoisan people have been incorporated, over a time period up to two thousand years, into Bantu-speaking societies. The extreme southern Tswana, from whom El Negro probably came, lived in small groups among greater numbers of Khoisan communities in the Orange-Vaal area, a vicinity under the general sway of Griqua chiefs at the time of his death in 1830 or 1831.

The question of repatriation of bodies fits into the much greater issue of the repatriation of bones, the 'skeletons in the closet' of Western museums which the newly assertive representatives of 'first nations' in North America and Australasia have been demanding back for reburial over the past two decades or so.[2] This question has been taken up in archaeological and anthropological publications, and the renowned anatomist/ palaeontologist Philip Tobias, of the University of the Witwatersrand, has been probably the most influential individual in obtaining the repatriation of the body of Sara Baartman from France. Modern anatomists such as Tobias and Alan G. Morris of the University of Cape Town have been anxious to distance themselves from their 19th century predecessors, and to distinguish between 'trophy' skulls and bones seized during imperialist outrages (which should be repatriated) and the skeletal materials needed for medical training and research (which should be retained so long as useful).

A somewhat more flexible attitude towards recognition of scientific value may exist among indigenous people in Africa than is reported from America and Australasia. We may cite the instance of three chiefs from Botswana visiting the London Hospital, Whitechapel, in October 1895. Chiefs Khama, Sebele and Bathoen were shown, unexpectedly, into the dissecting rooms where medical students were 'slicing away at dead bodies.' The three men 'decamped at an undignified pace' in horror at what they had seen in a supposedly Christian nation. (Myths abounded in Africa during the era of the slave trade, persisting into the colonial period, that Europeans were witch-cannibals who stole people to butcher them overseas.) But they were persuaded to return when the importance of dissection in medical training was explained. In that case, said one of the chiefs, 'he would not mind his body being cut up if it were to save other people's lives.'[3]

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This issue of *Pula* contains papers read at a Workshop on the Repatriation of El Negro, convened by the Department of History at the University of Botswana, in May 2001. The workshop was attended by delegates from the McGregor Memorial Museum at Kimberley in South Africa, and issues surrounding the repatriation of Sara Baartman to South Africa featured heavily in discussions.

Three important areas of academic interest and debate were identified, raising questions about reconstruction and representation of the past in the present.

(Pseudo-) scientific racism

The first area of interest is the growth and persistence of scientific racism, also known as 'pseudo-scientific' racism. The racist paradigm of official science emerged in late 18th and early 19th century Europe and persisted into the mid-20th century. It was based on classification of types of human beings into watertight compartments, ranked into hierarchies of greater and lesser value. Where official science led, popular science followed, in a wide new world being opened up by capitalism and commercialism.

Early 19th century anatomists refined and ramified the late 18th century division of human beings into three major 'races' or racial types: Negro/ Black, Caucasian/ White, and Mongolian/ Yellow. Such races were in effect separate human species, supposedly pure in themselves and able to successfully breed only among themselves. The Spanish word 'Negro' was used to denote the black race of Africa. Another Spanish word, Mulatto, meaning a mule that cannot perfectly breed, was applied to the supposedly unsuccessful products of misce-genation between races or racial types.

Mid-20th century genetics refuted this racist paradigm, showing all humans to be successful 'mulattoes': out-breeding rather than in-breeding was the key to success. But racist popular science survived into the late 20th century, not only in the *apartheid* politics of South Africa but also in the racial assumptions behind museum displays such as El Negro in Banyoles, the Hottentot Venus in Paris, and the group of Bushman plaster-casts in the premier diorama of the South African Museum at Cape Town. These graphic exhibits conditioned younger minds with pernicious old ideas and seduced older minds with their antique quaintness.

Freakery

The second area of academic interest is 19th and 20th century Western developments in viewing the human body as a 'spectacle' and the increasing commodification of the display of human bodies. This is related partly to changing ideas of science and the 'invention', institutionalization and professionalization of Western or 'allopathic' medicine in the 19th century, with the human body at its central classificatory feature. The writing of Michel Foucault (1975) has been particularly influential in deconstructing such ideas.

Ideas about the human body were also transformed under the impact of the development of commercial and industrial capitalism. The body came to be seen as well-greased machinery which must be kept efficient by standardized criteria, at the same time as liberal ideas raised the consciousness of physical self-development and personal ownership of one's body. Deviations from the norms of standardized beauty were at first seen as repugnant 'freakery', and eventually after World War I came to be seen as being pitifully pathological. It was in this earlier era of repugnancy that 'freaks' or deviant bodies in the West became spectacles of popular scientific entertainment masquerading as public education.

It was a disgraced former lecturer in anatomy from Edinburgh University, Robert Knox, who in the middle of the 19th century first combined the theatrical display of ethnically exotic people on stage with popular scientific lecturing on the Races of Man for a paying public. The exotic, i.e. non-Western, people in this case being Khoisan or Bushmen. (Robert Knox is generally regarded alongside the French noblemen De Gobineau as the greatest proponent of pseudo-scientific racism in the 19th century.)[4]

The later 19th century American impressario P.T. Barnum perfected the circus 'freak show', as the exposition of exotic ethnic people together with physically disabled or mutilated people. The new 'freak' was the old fairground human curiosity paraded and interpreted by a barker pretending to be a scientific lecturer or 'professor'. Such 'Freak discourse..seized on any deviation from the typical...to produce a human spectacle [of people] whose bodies violated the categorical boundaries that seem to order civilization and inform individuality' (Thompson 1996:5).

Barnum used the elevated educational language of 'lectures' and lecture-halls, preferring the term 'museum' rather than circus for his displays of human beings. The freak mode of discourse and exposition was central to the popular education of European and White American racism in relation to non-European peoples. Freaks were displayed as exemplars of the 'higher' and 'lower' races. People of 'other' human races were being displayed as freaks as late as the 1930s-40s, when Africans were exhibited in the touring human zoos of Nazi Germany.

Ethnic 'freaks' alive or dead were collected, identified (re-identified in the case of Le Betjouana becoming El Negro), and displayed as stereotyped images of the Races of Man. In the 19th century they also became a commodity or thing with a cash value that persisted until the collapse of scientific racism and freakery in the mid-20th century.[5] The arenas of display for live and dead 'freaks' were widened by (and circuses were eventually killed off by) the new imaging technologies of photography and cinematography (and television) and by the expansion of science and education, which went hand in hand with mass consumer society. Freakery and scientific racism, which had their origins among the Western scientific elite and aristocracy in the early 19th century, filtered down through the bourgeoisie to the newly educated proletariat during the course of the century.

The Hottentot Venus and Le Betjouana/ El Negro were two of the greatest ethnic 'freaks' ever exhibited; they fell among the earliest and persisted among the latest. Here it is worth noting that while ethnic freakery abated in Western eyes, with the growth of multi-racialism and multi-culturalism during the 20th century, it persisted in relation to the most 'remote' peoples of the world.

The Bushmen of Southern Africa were re-presented to the world as an extraordinary and distinctive separate race, by the still photography and documentary films of so-called scientific expeditions into the Kalahari from the 1920s onwards.[6] This provided a new discourse into which the Hottentot Venus and El Negro could be fitted, and their continued display justified. Indeed in the case of El Negro he was finally re-classified (a term echoing *apartheid* bureaucracy in South Africa) as a Bushman by scientists and museologists.

Display of dead bodies

The third area of interest, raised by the paper of Bruce Bennett, is that of different or changing ideas and representations of the dead human body held in different times and climes and cultures. There have been, and continue to be, very different ideas about the sanctity or profanity of the display of dead human beings..

It not enough to say that there are different cross-cultural and cross-temporal perspectives, and leave it at that. These perspectives should be examined within the matrix of competition for prestige, wealth and power, between individuals and groups. An example was quoted from the *Botswana Gazette*, published on the day before the El Negro Workshop, reporting anger in Malawi over plans to display the dead body of ex-president Kamuzu Banda:

> Banda, who led Malawi for 30 years, was embalmed and buried in an airtight gold coffin on the outskirts of Lilongwe, Malawi's capital, in 1997. However, according to the report, he is to be re-embalmed, placed in a see-through cabinet and placed before a high-tech viewing gallery in the nation's most expensive building.[7]

The anger came not from Banda's own family and admirers, but from the families of former political opponents who had suffered and were 'disappeared' under Banda.

In discussing repatriation, redemption, reparation and reconciliation, we cannot escape the present politics of competing families, ethnicities and nationalities, genders, classes—and of the individuals who stand or pose as their representatives. Nor can we escape the politics of the past, national or international, and of present manipulation of past images and texts as 'usable history'. [8]

N.P.

Notes

1. See the paper by Ken Good in this issue, 52-56.
2. See the paper by Robert Hitchcock in this issue, 57-67.
3. *Liverpool Courier*, 11, 14, & 15 October 1895—quoted in Neil Parsons (1996), *King Khama, Emperor Joe and the Great White Queen: Victorian Britain through African Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 156.
4. See the paper by Miquel Molina in this issue, 30-36.
5. For commodification in England and about Africa see Richards (1991) and Burke (1996).
6. See Gordon (1997) & Jones (2001). Mphinyane (2002) makes the point, echoing Edward Said's *Orientalism*, that it is not possible to talk about Bushmen/Basarwa/San today without accepting the presuppositions of this Western discourse (and we should add imagery) about Bushmen.
7. 'Decision to uproot Banda rouses anger', *Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), 23 May 2001, 5.
8. Such points are taken up in this issue by the papers of Alinah Segobye (14-18), Neil Parsons (19-29), and Jan-Bart Gewald (37-51).

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