

Carl Hagenbeck's Human Exhibitions and Whiteness (1880-1881) in Europe

doi: <https://doi.org/10.22380/2422118X.2501>

Recibido: 18 de octubre de 2022 • Aprobado: 28 de julio de 2023

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century, paying to witness live performances by individuals from foreign lands was a popular phenomenon in Europe. Paradoxically, few traces of these exhibitions exist today. However, they created a legacy by shaping public attitudes toward ethnic differences. In this study, I will analyze the diary of Abraham Ulrikab, a performer who left seemingly the only written source produced by one of the performers (not to say that foreign people co-created many of the archival remains of these shows). Through this analysis, I laid bare how whiteness was constructed through a series of cultural practices, that have largely remained unnamed but that nonetheless are part of a process of domination. The bodies conveyed meanings that were devised from an invisible position, a *zero-point* a marker, against which differences were measured. Consequently, these exhibited bodies became part of a long-standing phenomenon that originated in 17th century London and subsequently expanded outwards. The human body was targeted not only for being the most intimate space, but the signified through which dominance was asserted and reinforced.

Keywords: whiteness, human exhibitions, colonialism, bodies.

Resumen

En el siglo XIX, las exhibiciones de cuerpos no europeos se constituyeron en un fenómeno extendido en Europa. Paradójicamente, hoy son pocos los rastros de dichas exhibiciones. Sin embargo, han dejado un legado perdurable en la manera en que las sociedades europeas conciben las diferencias étnicas hasta el día de hoy. El diario de Abraham Ulrikab parece haber proporcionado el único relato escrito de primera mano existente de estas exhibiciones. A través de este análisis, indago cómo la “blanquitud” fue construida a través de una serie de prácticas culturales. Los cuerpos en exhibición servían como símbolos potentes, representando significados creados desde un punto de vista de invisibilidad, un punto de partida fundamental desde el cual se medían las diferencias. En consecuencia, estos cuerpos exhibidos se convirtieron en parte de un fenómeno de larga duración que se originó en Londres en el siglo XVII y se expandió

posteriormente hacia el exterior, lugar desde el cual se exportaron fantasías a todos los rincones del mundo a través de la prensa y los libros de viajes. El cuerpo humano fue objeto de atención no meramente como un espacio íntimo, sino como un medio significativo a través del cual se afirmaba y reforzaba la dominación.

Palabras claves: blanquitud, exhibiciones humanas, colonialismo, cuerpos.

Introduction

In the nineteenth century, paying to witness live performances by individuals from foreign lands was a prevalent phenomenon in Europe, North America, and Japan. These performers were typically colonized and non-European individuals¹ who had been imported² to perform songs, dances, and other ceremonies as a demonstration of their singular nature. The physical appearance of potential performers was of paramount importance: possessing features considered exceptionally beautiful or ugly in the eyes of Europeans was regarded as a valuable asset³.

This form of staging was one way of legitimizing the violent European expansion during the first wave of globalization. Indeed, the opening up of new markets globally promised increased profits but also fostered heightened rivalry among European powers. Concurrently, Germany was asserting its newfound role in global politics, seeking to secure a position among the world powers in a time of emerging globalization by emphasizing the display of its formidable military fleet

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- 1 The exhibitions introduced various groups from diverse backgrounds to Europe, and each troop possessed distinct characteristics that set them apart from one another. Thus, the degree of agency, aims, and outcomes differed based on the specific circumstances surrounding each group. For instance, the Khoisan had been entrenched in conflict with Dutch colonialists for decades, given that the Cape in South Africa had been under the rule of the Dutch East Indian Company since 1652. However, by the beginning of the 19th century, approximately 90% of their population had been decimated. In contrast, the Sami people stand as an exception; they were nomadic groups originating from within Europe.
 - 2 The majority of the groups hailed from Asia, primarily from regions such as Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), Samoa, and India. The African contingents predominantly originated from Somalia, Nubia, Cameroon, and Dahomey (now known as Benin).
 - 3 Hilke Thode-Arora, "The Hagenbeck Ethnic Shows", in *Staged Otherness. Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe 1850-1939*, ed. Dagnoslaw Demski (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 53.

in the colonies during these exhibitions, signaling that a strong fleet was a condition to obtain colonial possessions heap raw materials for the industry⁴.

A notably influential player in this sphere was Carl Hagenbeck's company, which elevated the "Völkerschau" business to an unprecedented level of fame. His shows, characterized by their high mobility and extensive tours across Europe, had a more substantial impact compared to others⁵. Based shows he had attended, Hagenbeck organized grand exhibitions and used all means of advertising to make his shows public⁶. Consequently, this phenomenon stands at the intersection of colonial history, the history of science, and the history of world entertainment.

Even though the importation of native people was banned in Germany in 1890, Carl Hagenbeck's private company maintained an unrestricted relationship with German colonialism. This allowed him to assemble ethnographic groups with permission from other colonial powers, even after that proscription⁷. For this reason, I will consider this phenomenon in the broader context of its European influence, rather than narrowing my focus to one specific place.

Paradoxically, few traces of these exhibitions remain today⁸, although they had been so popular and massive in the latter half of the nineteenth century⁹ and the first decades of the twentieth¹⁰. However, they created a legacy by shaping public attitudes towards ethnic differences¹¹. Undoubtedly, these exhibitions have left traces in European thinking that persist to the present¹². Current notions of

4 Anne Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde. Die Zurschaustellung exotischer Menschen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2005), 276.

5 Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 66.

6 Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 51.

7 Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 100.

8 In June 2013, President François Hollande signed the Canada-France Enhanced Cooperation Agenda, in which he committed to working with the appropriate authorities to facilitate the repatriation of Inuit remains from French museum collections to Canada.

9 During the era characterized by scientific racism, some Latin American thinkers, on the other hand, were developing theories about the connections between racial mixture and social democracy. Often, these theories emerged as reactions to northern imperialism and undemocratic racism.

10 Since non-European people travelled by train, they were restricted to visiting cities and towns with railway connections. As the network of train lines expanded during the nineteenth century, the exhibitions similarly grew in scope.

11 Sadiyah Qureshi, "Conclusion", *Peoples on Parade. Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. Sadiyah Qureshi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 284.

12 Balthasar Stähelin, *Völkerschauen im Zoologischen Garten Basel, 1879-1935* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1993), 152.

belonging and national identity in official historical discourse emphasize ethnic otherness. Furthermore, the historiography concerning this topic has yet to explore this phenomenon within the *long duree* of whiteness. On the contrary, some historians maintain that Hagenbeck’s project was an innocent enterprise mostly driven by economic and scientific motivations, thus, they overlook the underpinning violence of scientific production and of the museum’s foundations. However, it is vital to recognize that consumption has always been intertwined with meanings, symbols, attitudes, identification patterns, desires, feelings, and fantasies¹³.

For these reasons, in this paper, I will explore how whiteness was consolidated through the exhibitions run by Carl Hagenbeck during the period of 1880-1881. To address this, I will analyze the diary of Abraham Ulrikab from 1880, which appears to be the only existing written source from one of the performers¹⁴. By doing this, I aim to reveal how whiteness was built based on a set of cultural practices that, although unmarked and unnamed, are intrinsic to a process of domination¹⁵.

In the first chapter, I will explain the concepts of whiteness and symbolic violence. Afterward, I will explain how travel literature and scientific racism served as foundational pillars in the construction of whiteness. In the second chapter, I will critically analyze the Diary of Abraham Ulrikab. By doing this I will shed light on how a stereotype cycle emerged that involved the triggering of some collective images in the public imagination that were further implemented in the staging of the display.

The Construction of Whiteness (17th-19th Centuries)

Whiteness: A History of a Concept

Whiteness came under scholarly scrutiny in the 1990s in the United States. By then, it was claimed that immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe to the

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 13 Hartmut Böhme, “Consumer Culture and Fetishism”, in *Fetishism and Culture. A Different Theory of Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 73.

14 In 1980, ethnologist Dr. James Garth Taylor discovered a copy of the German translation of Ulrikab’s diary in the Moravian Church archives located in Pennsylvania. It was through this discovery that the story of the eight Labrador individuals was unveiled to the twentieth-century public.

15 Clive Gabay, *Imagining Africa: Whiteness and the Western Gaze* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 17.

United States were rewarded with “wages of whiteness”, which were not only financial but also public and psychological. Being white brought privileges in the workplace and the public sphere¹⁶.

Similarly, the concept of whiteness has been described as a dominant and normative space against which difference is measured, a constantly shifting frontier of power and privilege. Essentially, it serves as a conceptual category delineating the vantage point from which white individuals perceive and speak about others. Furthermore, it is entangled with other markers such as Nordic or European. However, it is invisible not only to those who inhabit it but also to those who get so used to it, as they learn not to see it¹⁷. Thus, individuals do not have to be white to reinforce and act in the interest of whiteness¹⁸.

The first concept of European whiteness as an ethnic ideal and identifier marker was seemingly articulated on the Iberian Peninsula in 1332, when Christians used “*blanco*” as an ethnic term to differentiate from the Moros¹⁹. Likewise, according to medieval theories proposed a relationship between geography and skin color, a notion contradicted during Columbus’s third voyage when he reported encountering white-skinned individuals. A more relevant concept of whiteness emerged in 1624, becoming a popular cultural trope in London. By 1660, race had evolved to be the key factor distinguishing slavery from labour, and by 1691, the general concept of whiteness had been legislated by many colonial legislatures. Consequently, whiteness began to assume a variety of new meanings²⁰.

Consequently, through constant repetition and authoritative endorsement by parents, schools, and the government, the concept has become an integral part of what Pierre Bourdieu describes as “linguistic habitus” a pattern of mental actions so ingrained that we are, for the most part, unaware of its operations. Besides, such endorsement was possible because London monopolized English

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16 Jochen Lingelbach, “Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa During and After the Second World War”, in *On the Edges of Whiteness. Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa During and After the Second World War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 4.

17 Josephine Hoegaerts, “Introduction”, in *Finnishness, Whiteness and Coloniality*, ed. Josephine Hoegaerts (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2022), 9.

18 Josephine Meer, “The Wreckage of White Supremacy”, in *Whiteness and Nationalism*, ed. Nasar Meer (London: Routledge, 2021), 5.

19 Meer, “The Wreckage of White Supremacy”, 55.

20 Gary Taylor, “Introduction”, *Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip Hop*, ed. Gary Taylor (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2005), 5.

book production, allowing whiteness to permeate the anglophone world, radiating from an imperial linguistic base²¹.

Symbolic Violence: The Invisible Dominance of Meanings

Although Bourdieu initially developed the concept of symbolic violence to explain the patriarchal system, it can draw some parallels to understand whiteness. This concept of symbolic violence was developed to explain how social hierarchies and inequalities are perpetuated through forms of symbolic domination. Such systems of symbolism and meanings are imposed on groups in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. Hence, the dominance emanating from symbolic violence becomes effective when those who are dominated stop questioning the existing power relations, as they perceive the world as a natural, given, and unchangeable²².

Furthermore, Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as a gentle violence, invisible even to its victims, primarily exerted through symbolic channels of communication and cognition. Besides, he underlines how the dominant group accepts its dominance as legitimate, relying neither on physical violence nor coercion. Instead, this domination becomes an integral part of the cognitive structures, ingraining a hierarchical division between the dominant and the dominated groups that becomes internalized by social agents and seen as a natural order. This perception fosters a self-regulating mechanism where individuals willingly accept their societal roles, considering them the standard conditions of social life²³.

Similarly, Fanon portrays colonialism as an order upheld through a combination of brute force and psychological and symbolic domination. Thus, both thinkers describe how the colonial system imposes the colonizer's cultural paradigms onto the colonized habitus, fostering a scenario of symbolic domination²⁴.

21 Taylor, "Introduction", 13.

22 Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, "Exploring Symbolic Violence in the Everyday: Misrecognition, Condescension, Consent and Complicity", *Feminist Review*, Vol. 112, n.º 1 (2016): 144-162, <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2015.53>.

23 Masoud Kamali, "Introduction", *Neoliberal Securitization and Symbolic Violence. Silencing Political, Academic and Societal Resistance* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 4.

24 Roxanna Curto, "Bourdieu and Fanon on Algeria", in *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Raphael Dalleo (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 116.

Scientific Racism: Hierarchies Based on the Body

Race has always been a cultural, political, scientific, and social construction. The interconnection between these domains renders them interdependent and inseparable. Theories rooted in race proliferated across various disciplines, becoming a prevailing principle of academic knowledge in the nineteenth century²⁵.

Particularly, in the nineteenth century, scientists sought to emphasize the differences individuals to establish correlations between genetic data, intellectual capacity, and moral behaviour. They sought to achieve this by adopting the concept of “type” from botany and zoology to bolster the assertion that each *race* represented a fixed category with inherent characteristics that were transmitted from one generation to the next. In conjunction with other factors such as climate and geography, the taxonomy of bodies was used to explain social and cultural differences²⁶. Thus, according to these racial theories, one’s anatomy was destiny²⁷.

Furthermore, scholars sought to establish human hierarchies based on physical attributes. Consequently, they needed to see, touch, measure, and study of living individuals to develop racial typologies²⁸. By doing this, otherness became rationalized and rationalizable, while the yardstick remained the Caucasian man²⁹. According, the lower the *race*, the closer to nature it was, and the higher the race, the closer it was to culture. Under this premise, it was through the concept of culture (or civilization) that European defined itself and against which all other societies were judged³⁰. Indeed, the concept of civilization quickly permeated Western Europe of European sense of superiority and becoming an integral part of ideological worldviews³¹ on a transnational scale.

25 Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (Hoboken: Routledge, 1994), 93.

26 Young, *Colonial Desire*, 25.

27 Young, *Colonial Desire*, 115.

28 Pascal Blanchard, *Human Zoos. The Invention of the Savage* (Paris: Arles, 2011), 5.

29 Blanchard, *Human Zoos*, 8.

30 Rikke Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Ethnic Displays* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 26.

31 Theo Hermans, *Translation and History* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 87.

Besides, the emergence of the Darwin's theory of biological evolution prompted many scientists to perceive black people and Native Americans as representing the missing evolutionary link between apes and civilized Western man³².

Traveling books: Creation and Diffusion of Images of Non-Whites

Since ancient times, accounts of the monstrous *races* have exhibited a pronounced ethnocentrism, wherein the culture, language, and physical appearance of the observer as the standard for evaluating other people³³. Likewise, the appeal for monstrous *races* by medieval Europe men was based on the joy of imagining and fearing the unknown. Consequently, the sense of otherness associated with these marvellous races was so significant to exclude them from the epithet "men"³⁴. Indeed, the world's edges were related to the monstrousness of those races in character and appearance. Thus, the medieval world map gave a visual schematization to these ideas, confining the races to specific parts of the world, while their physical appearance and moral character were explained by the influence of extreme temperatures³⁵.

Moving forward, early modern writers fixated on black women's breasts and their reproductive capacities as sources of fascination and markers of primitiveness. Alongside Amerindian women, they emerged in the imagination of the sixteenth century as figures deemed monstrous and inhuman. These writers, predominantly based in London, succeeded in convincing readers who may never have travelled themselves of the supposed connections between non-white sexuality and savagery. Thus, travellers provided a wealth of material from which subsequent writers drew when creating images of Native American and African women³⁶. Likewise, during the Victorian era, novelists from the British Empire took advantage of the opportunity to publish books aimed at reaching a large public

32 Barbora Putova, "Freak Shows: Otherness of the Human Body as a Form of Public Presentation", *Anthropologie* 56, no. 2, Special Part 1 (2018): 91-102, <https://doi.org/10.26720/anthro.17.07.20.1>.

33 John Friedman, "The Plinian Races", in *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, ed. John Friedman (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 26.

34 Friedman, "The Plinian Races", 34.

35 Friedman, "The Plinian Races", 38.

36 Jennifer Morgan, "Male Travellers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1700", in *Bodies in Contact. Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. Tony Ballantyne (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 54.

and bring home their ideas and symbols of Victorian conquest³⁷. In these novels, characters were often portrayed in stark dichotomies of good versus evil, serving as illustrations of the ongoing struggle between the mother country and the colonies. This binary opposition allowed readers to easily identify with the narratives³⁸.

Furthermore, fantasies about Africa were rooted in the physical descriptions of its people and had the consequence of denying Black individuals any capacity for rationality. As a result, the creation of such stereotypical images played a pivotal role in establishing the Europeans as superior in comparison to the deemed “inferior” *races*. The creation of such stereotypical images was a process of controlling human action by influence. This process of distancing the other implied the creation of archetypes easily identifiable as inferior in comparison to the white *race*.³⁹ Classification, categorization, hierarchy, and the belief in the economic, moral, cultural, and political superiority of the Christian faith and the sciences contributed to the distorted image of the native population in the colonies and their otherness in contrast to the purity of the colonizers⁴⁰.

As a result, novels contributed to the diffusion of images of the colonies. In certain literary works, Africans were depicted akin to native woman who lured colonizers into the wilderness. Conversely, white travellers often appeared as fascinated fear. Thus, the African wilderness and sexuality were alluring but dangerous in so far as they both seduced the white⁴¹.

The Consolidation of Whiteness in Human Exhibitions

Whiteness and the Diary of Abraham Ulrikab

The family of Abraham Ulrikab, along with the *unmarried* Tobias and the Tirrianiakat family from the north, were taken to Europe by Mr. Jacobson, the agent of C. Hagenbeck. Abraham Ulrikab entrusted his diary to his friend and *teacher*, Br. Elsner, upon their departure. This group of eight Inuit from Labrador embarked on a tour through Hamburg, Berlin, and Prague in the autumn of 1880. During their

37 Morgan, “Male Travellers, Female Bodies”, 15.

38 Morgan, “Male Travellers, Female Bodies”, 169.

39 Morgan, “Male Travellers, Female Bodies”, 103.

40 Morgan, “Male Travellers, Female Bodies”, 109.

41 Morgan, “Male Travellers, Female Bodies”, 33.

exhibitions, they depicted scenes from their everyday life. Tragically, all of them succumbed to smallpox the following year, and their physical remains were placed in museums in Berlin and Paris, where they have yet to be repatriated.

The Labrador Inuit people had already been in contact with European explorers for at least two centuries prior to these exhibitions. Notably, five of the eight performers were already Christians and members of the Moravian Church, which had developed a wide network of settlement congregations around the world. The missionaries, by providing them with desired goods, eroded the authority of traditional leaders and assumed important position in their communities⁴².

Likewise, the story of the eight Inuit individuals from Labrador in Europe is marred by economic exploitation, prejudice, and racism. Unfortunately, the original Inuktitut text is lost. However, there is a 14-page handwritten translation into German by *Brother Kretschmer*, a missionary who had served in Labrador. The translation has been described as having an awkward and grammatically flawed style. Such awkwardness may stem from the rapid translation process, differences in syntactical structures between Inuktitut and German, or Kretschmer's partial loss of his mother tongue after years of living in a linguistic diaspora⁴³. Nonetheless, it appears to be the sole written source produced by one of the individuals exhibited during these human shows.

Regarding the content, in the first part of his diary, Abraham described the severe culture shock brought on by the constant, loud, and unfamiliar presence of crowds of people. He also expressed his dismay at the forceful attempts of the crowd to enter their dwellings. Secondly, he described the emotional stress and violence inflicted upon the Inuit by their master, upon whom they were entirely dependent. However, the fact that Abraham could read and write provided a potential safeguard against further abuse, and he was even advised not to report such events. Besides, it appears that Abraham's submission was influenced by his devout religious beliefs, which led him to believe that such hostility was a result of his fervent religious orientation.

Steadily, his feelings of homesickness became more evident in his writings. Towards the end, he documented the heartbreaking death of his daughter and how he and his wife regretted undertaking the journey, despite the counsel of the

42 Krizova, Marketa. "Alone in the Country of the Catholics: Labrador Inuit in Prague (1880)." *Ethnologia Actualis* 20, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.2478/eas-2021-0010>.

43 Harmut Lutz, *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab. Text and Context*. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), 70.

Moravians⁴⁴. This regret contrasted with his earlier resignation, during which he had expressed that even his own daughter knew there was no alternative but to endure the experience. Furthermore, he detailed his efforts to spread the gospel to the non-Christian crowd and lamented the disobedience of Tobias towards their master, which resulted in subsequent violence against him. As a result, his diary provides clues that suggest he had internalized a docile and subordinate position toward their white masters through Christianity.

Whiteness in Exhibition Posters

To gain a better understanding of the cultural context in which the diary was written, it is essential to explore how whiteness was portrayed in the exhibition's posters. In those, Africans were often characterized by their perceived willingness to engage in physical combat and their close association with wild animals. Some depictions even suggested that they shared the unrestrained nature of certain animals. Moreover, the way the exhibited individuals were perceived as exotic objects were intricately linked with sexual perceptions. Women were often presented in a manner that emphasized their sexuality and erotic appeal, while men were portrayed as sexually aggressive and burdened by uncontrollable masculinity⁴⁵. This led to the assumption that both women and men possessed a strong and unbridled sexual drive. Ironically, Africans were described as unattractive and ugly in appearance, yet paradoxically, they were often portrayed as sexually attractive⁴⁶.

Stereotypes, like those activated by posters in the public's imagination, were brought to life in the staging of the display of exotic people, turning them into a reality. This gave rise to a cycle of stereotypes, commencing with associations linked to preexisting stereotypes and continuing through the enactment of these stereotypes⁴⁷. Consequently, the objective was to conjure images of recognizable exoticism by portraying *Others* who adhered to predictable scripts⁴⁸.

Undoubtedly, these exhibitions had a profound impact on the audience by activating collective images rooted in European minds for centuries. Thus, the

44 Lutz, *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*, 85.

45 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 119.

46 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 113.

47 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 183.

48 Dagnostaw Demski, "Introduction", in *Staged Otherness: Ethnic Shows in Central and Easter Europe, 1850-1939*, ed. Dagnostaw Demski (Budapest: Central University Press, 2021), 16.

promise to show in real life what one had already heard or read set the expectation of the audience. Such expectations drew on the posters that had been spread beforehand and that were accepted by most people as genuine representation of reality. Similarly, the pamphlet's advertising relied on travel literature and its principal aim was to engage the imagination and fantasies of potential spectators.

Non-European People's Agency and the Question of Representation

The humans exhibited would play the roles assigned to them, illustrating the fantasies and projections constructed around the concept of the savage, native, or exotic body⁴⁹. Although they were paid, only rarely they had any influence on how they were presented to the public⁵⁰. Additionally, the language barrier further reduced the encounters to purely visual experiences. Thus, the possibility of meaningful communication was often discouraged have disturbed the expectation of encountering a perceived *barbaric* being. Instead, throwing cigarettes and coins would be the role of the audience⁵¹.

For many of those involved, the prospect of remaining in Europe after the exhibition served as a compelling motivation for playing the roles assigned to them. Otherwise, many saw their involvement as a lucrative business opportunity. Thus, it seems there was some degree of agency in the recruitment process⁵². Nevertheless, they were isolated from their own geographical and cultural contexts and became representations of whatever society projected onto them by the societies to which they were introduced to⁵³.

However, the absence of written sources by these individuals (except for Abraham, who belonged to a community that had been evangelized two hundred years earlier) poses a significant problem of representation. There is even a risk of perpetuating epistemic violence, as the subaltern cannot articulate their own voices within the dominant discourse. Therefore, we are confronted with a dual impossibility: neither can the privileged speak on behalf of the subaltern, nor can the

49 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 16.

50 Blanchard, *Human Zoos*, 121-187.

51 Stahhelin, *Volkerschauen im Zoologischen*, 94.

52 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 121.

53 Demski, "Introduction", 190.

subaltern speak for themselves. Any attempt at representing others run the risk of erasing the subjectivity of the subaltern⁵⁴.

Consider, for instance, the case of Saartjie Baartman, an African woman from the Cape Colony who was part of these exhibitions, and whose remains were displayed in France until the late 1970s. She is particularly notable for her absence; her original name is not even known. She will forever remain elusive, and if we practice an ethic of care, we should acknowledge that not everything can be known, nor should we seek to know it all⁵⁵. Indeed, for 159 years, her fate symbolized the shame of bodies that were subjected to relentless scrutiny. It was not until her burial in 2002 that she returned to the private sphere⁵⁶.

Conclusion

Human exhibitions have often been misconceived in isolation, viewed either as innocent forms of entertainment or peculiar curiosities orchestrated by recruiters. However, as demonstrated in this paper, the pamphlets disseminated images of non-whiteness that had been in circulation for centuries, serving specific political purposes. Consequently, through the particular manner in which non-whites bodies and foreign artifacts were displayed, these exhibitions imbued them with new significance within the European context. Such meanings were devised from an invisible position, a *zero-point*, a marker, against which differences were measured. As a result, the exotic, dangerous, and monstrous bodies that were exhibited were part of long duration phenomenon that began in London during the 17th century and was expanded outwards through travel literature and scientific expeditions⁵⁷. It is vital to recognize that such fantasies were never benign; rather, they were appropriated and perpetuated with the intent of establishing alterity as a preliminary condition for domination⁵⁸.

I assert that the recruiters who carried out such acts of violence may have been encouraged or even directed by policymakers within the European empires.

54 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66-111.

55 Natasha Gordon, *Representation and Black Womanhood* (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2011), 29.

56 Gordon, *Representation and Black Womanhood*, 72.

57 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 27.

58 Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions*, 33.

Their role was crucial as they not only took tools, bodies, and instruments but also served as intermediaries between scientists, politicians, investors, audiences, and performers. Furthermore, the political milieu against which these shows took place was the Berlin Conference, during which the African continent was partitioned, and its borders were drawn up. Thus, the imperial ambitions of whiteness were reinforced through human exhibitions, presenting bodies in highly sexualized and exoticized forms. Hence, bodies served as the arenas through which imperial and colonial power were conceptualized and exercised⁵⁹. The body was not only targeted due to its intimate space but also as the signifier through which domination was consummated.

Similarly, these exhibitions not only reinforced European identities but also cultivated an attitude among the European audience⁶⁰, which learned to regard the violent colonial expansion and the downfall of non-European cultures as an unstoppable natural phenomenon⁶¹. In this way, Europe sought to reinforce its global hegemony by asserting mastery over other ethnicities⁶².

In the same token, actors who had been indoctrinated into the Christian religion appeared to have internalized the worldview of their masters. While the concept of *whiteness* was not explicitly addressed in Abraham's diary or the posters, it loomed as an unspoken presence. The anxieties and guilt associated with this presence were resolved through the traumatizing process of racialization⁶³.

Building upon the conclusions I have drawn, further research can delve into examining and assessing the silences, absences, and invisibilities that underpinned dominant discourses. This strategy of asking what something has to do with those who are being portrayed would uncover dominant discourses.

59 Morgan, "Male Travellers, Female Bodies", 6.

60 However, societies in Central and Eastern Europe adopted numerous racial theories that impacted non-European people, even though these societies were considered peripheral by the colonial empires.

61 Stahelin, *Volkerschaueu im Zoologischen*, 146.

62 Blanchard, *Human Zoos*, 10.

63 Anoop Nayak, "Critical Whiteness Studies", *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 2 (2007): 737-755, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00045.x>.

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