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FREAK SHOWS. OTHERNESS OF THE HUMAN BODY AS A FORM OF PUBLIC PRESENTATION

ABSTRACT: The paper presents an anthropological analysis of freak shows as a form of an inhuman and Eurocentric approach to the physical and cultural differences of people from non-European cultures or to the physically handicapped. In the 19th century, their otherness became the subject of exhibitions and other forms of public presentation taking place mainly in circuses, zoological gardens or wax figure museums. The paper describes the principles and strategies of freak shows that were defined by prominent impresarios such as Phineas Taylor Barnum, Carl Hagenbeck and Albert Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Freak shows accentuated particularly the exotic features of the exhibited individuals, their morphological differences, deviations and anomalies differing from the norm of the European population. In this context, the paper follows from the work of Eugen Strouhal, a Czech physician, anthropologist and archaeologist, in the field of physical anthropology and paleopathology.

KEY WORDS: Freak shows – Anthropology – Otherness – Human body – Impresarios

INTRODUCTION

Depictions accentuating exoticism and differences saw their boom and were disseminated especially in the 19th century as a consequence of the developing colonial expansion of the Europeans. Colonized non-European native cultures and indigenous people added another layer of difference to the phenomenon of exoticism. This was partly due to formation of European national identities when national countries originated. An exotic picture of the members of non-European cultures or physically handicapped people evoked the triumph of

Western civilization over technological backwardness of preliterate societies; this tendency can be also observed in books by travellers and later by ethnographers and anthropologists. Presentation of exoticism and differences of native cultures seen from the perspective of Eurocentrism was additionally enhanced by the interest of the European natural scientists in racial classification, one grounded in description and measurements of physical features (anthropometry) intent on revealing the relations between different races. Physical differences were often incorrectly linked to cultural differences (Kérchy,

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Zittlau 2013). Body proportions and morphological features of tribal people from colonies were systematically compared with the morphology and anatomy of Europeans and consequently often abused as an ideological tool confirming the superiority of civilized nations over indigenous cultures that were relegated to the level of savagery and barbarism. The benchmark of civilizational advancement was the Western man, represented by the Caucasian race that was proclaimed as superior to other races for its alleged aesthetic beauty and corporal harmony, an idea promoted by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), one of the founders of modern physical anthropology (Baum 2008: 277). The inception of Darwin's theory of biological evolution led many scientists to search for the missing evolutionary element between the ape and the civilized Western man. Some racial scientists claimed that this evolutionary element were black people or Native Americans (Stocking 1987: 154, Goodall 2002: 44).

Anthropology of the 19th century was accompanied by the fact that this science was of a strongly academic nature and anthropologists studying exotic cultures worked with data and information they received from travellers, missionaries or people working in colonial administration. This did not change anything in their effort to get closer to the living subjects of their research, which could have been done either by carrying out field research in a remote country, or by importing indigenous people to the Western world. However, various types of freak shows in Europe and in the U.S. meant that a native human theatre came to the researcher; this, in all its obscenity, paradoxically contributed to academic anthropology shifting towards field research and direct social experience. Freak shows included presentation of members from non-European ethnic groups, physically different people whose appearance caused amazement, wax figures and exotic animals. In the first half of the 19th century, freak shows became part of zoological gardens, special exotic villages, circuses, anatomic museums, wax figure museums, cabinets of curiosities, exhibitions and fairs (Garland-Thomson 1997: 70).

Renaissance cabinet collections included bizarre and monstrous artefacts, but there was no hierarchy between them at that time (Eco 2009: 203). It was not until the evolutionary theory divided the world into colonies that created the monstrosity of the non-European world, "the world of savages". Native Americans were some of the few indigenous people who were regarded rather positively in the 19th century

Europe. Other non-European indigenous people, for instance Aboriginal Australians or African Khoikhoi, San people and Zulu were considered as human beings distinguished by monstrosity, animality or physical anomaly. These were ethnic groups and native tribes whose members were presented as people on the technologically lowest level of culture. The fact that they were presented as human curiosities confirmed to the members of the civilized Western society their cultural superiority and their right to colonial expansion. In addition to racial inferiority and superiority, the existence of freak shows contributed to establishing hierarchy and normality, introducing an order. A savage presented by theatrical means as a coloured, different or abnormal monster evoked fascination, fear and amazement. At the same time, these presentations contributed to the reproduction of cultural stereotypes, education and knowledge (Snoep 2011: 114). That is the reason why the barriers formed on the background of human freak shows preserved until the middle of the 20th century, only beginning to recess after the collapse of colonial empires, when they became their constitution became the subject of anthropologic research. An anthropologist "has to break down the barriers of race and cultural diversity; he has to find the human being in the savage; he has to discover the primitive in the highly sophisticated Westerner of to-day, and, perhaps, to see that the animal, and the divine as well, are to be found everywhere in man" (Malinowski 1937: vii).

The Birth of Freak Shows

The origins of the freak shows date back to the beginnings of zoological gardens and parks in Europe at the turn of the 18th and 19th century, especially in Paris (1793), Madrid (1822) and London (Regent's Park, 1824). Non-European indigenous people started to be presented as exotic subject evoking laughter and amusement in the times of dropping interest in zoological gardens. The objective was to innovate and extend the exhibition portfolio, attract more visitors, offer a new attraction to the public and break out of the economic decline that affected most European zoological gardens. The popularity of freak shows peaked approximately at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Depending on the cultural context, the shows had their specific names and style, while many types were similar or complemented each other; in the UK and U.S. there were human zoos and freak shows, sideshows or dimeshows, in German States they were referred to as *Kuriositäten*, *Spezialitäten*, *Völker-*

schauen or Eingeborenendörfer (Szabo 2006: 107–110). Freak shows accentuated particularly the exotic features of individuals, their bodily otherness, physical handicaps, actual or presumed anomalies and any deviations from European population norms. Although simple freak shows were held in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 19th century, they later underwent transformation, consolidation and became popular especially around the middle of the century when commercial shows experienced a boom. At the beginning of the 20th century people could still marvel at, educate and amuse themselves by looking at Siamese twins, bearded ladies, dwarfs, giants, albinos, monkey woman and monkey man and other abnormal creatures (Griffiths 2002: 55, 99).

These freak shows became popular in the 19th century thanks to a native African woman called Saartjie Baartman from the Khoisan tribe, brought to London in 1810 by the British doctor William Dunlop. Baartman, nicknamed Hottentot Venus, was shown under humiliating conditions in marketplaces and circuses until her death in 1815. What evoked laughter, surprise and amusement in the public was particularly her buttocks and genitals, perceived as oversized and abnormal (Garland-Thomson 2002: 7). "One pinched her, another walked round her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; and one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, natural. This inhuman baiting the poor creature bore with sullen indifference, except upon some great provocation,



FIGURE 1: Love at first sight. Or a pair of Hottentots, with an addition to the broad bottom family. A caricature of the Hottentot Venus. William Heath, 1810, hand-coloured etching. The British Museum.



FIGURE 2: Woodcarvers (Courtyard of Indian Palace). Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, London. Illustrated London News 17 July, 1886. Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.

when she seemed inclined to resent brutality, which even an Hottentot can understand. On these occasions it required all the authority of the keeper to subdue her resentment" (Matthews 1839: 133). From 1814, Saartjie was exhibited for eighteen months in Paris where she was also subjected to an anthropometric study by the French natural scientist Georges Cuvier (Crais, Scully 2011: 135). After her death, her body was passed to the National Museum of Natural History (Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle) in Paris for the purpose of further research, measuring, making plaster casts and organ preservation (Hall, Tucker 2004: 83–86, Danquah 2009: 15).

Another key event was the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 that echoed in France and awoke interest in the indigenous people from colonies. A part of the London exhibition was dedicated to India, considered "half the fun of the whole show" (Hobhouse 1937: 116) including its products from silk and cotton. However, presentations of other colonies, including New Zealand and Australia, played only a marginal role here, as the exhibition was primarily concentrated "round the economic sun of Britain" (Hobsbawm, Wrigley 1999: 116). Indigenous people were shown at other world exhibitions, for instance in Philadelphia (1876) and in Paris (1878, 1889). Colonies – their indigenous people and artefacts – were given a special space at colonial exhibitions that took place, for instance, in Amsterdam (1883), London (1886), Marseille (1906), Brussels (1910) and Paris (1931). At the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889 or at the International and Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883, a series of photographs were taken by Prince Roland Bonaparte (1858–1924), who was in 1884 a member of the French Anthropologic Society. Bonaparte either took pictures of indigenous people in front of a Western scenery decorated with jewels, clothed or holding weapons, or within clichés of anthropometry – in profile or en face (Quatrefages de Bréau 1875: 258). Bonaparte strove to create a representative sample of photographs depicting inhabitants from other countries (1884: VI). However, his photographs represented universal human types, not particular individuals in their authentic environment and natural cultural context. Indigenous people could thus be placed in an artificially arranged taxonomic array in a photograph album.

Basic Principles and Backstage of Freak Shows

Organizers of freak shows – impresarios, usually focused on shows presenting primarily physical

differences of individuals that could be accompanied by acrobatic or other artistic abilities. Freak shows took places in zoological gardens, circuses, museums, rented buildings and halls, provisory wooden huts, tents in squares or at places intended where funfairs or markets were usually held. For the organizers, it was important to simulate the routine life of indigenous people in a village through which visitors could walk and participate in various activities. Figure museums and anatomic museums presented a special form of these shows, where human curiosities were usually shown sitting at elevated places, or in front of special stage sets within which visitors could walk like in a museum. Every curiosity had a description tag specifying the origin, age and details of the body.

Interest in and desire to see human freaks was stimulated not only by impresarios, but also by traders in colonies, colonial office workers and missionary societies. This in turn was enhanced by positive reactions of the public that required more exoticism, more colonial products and more native populations living under the civilized custody of the white man. Organizers usually searched for new and fresh human freaks with distinctive features and abilities, or for people who could be incorporated into a show. Impresarios focused on commercial success, which is why they also took advantage of stereotypes and presentation clichés in a manner that corresponded to the purpose to satisfy the public expectation (Mason 2004: 251). Every new type of difference was linked to a certain dramatic repertoire that was repeated, with slight variations, over and over again at almost all shows; the public knew it well and expected it. Another feature that mattered was a unique appearance and its authenticity, connected to a story about discovery and origin. For this purpose, impresarios published "publicity pamphlets, which were for sale at their appearances to a distinct race hitherto unknown to civilization" (Bogdan 1988: 119–120).

Impresarios, via their traders or agents, acquired individuals and groups from different geographic and cultural areas. They made agreements with the people they exhibited that defined working hours, salary, duties and medical checks. Some individuals from colonies actually took the opportunity to participate in shows in Europe voluntarily and willingly in order to receive money, such as Inuita Abraham Ulrikab (1845–1881) from Labrador (Lutz 2005: ix). They returned home after several years relatively rich, although they were not paid more than a fraction of the total income from the shows they participated in

(Rothfels 2002: 139–140). By contrast, some exhibited individuals could not return back to their home country or adapt to the world in which they were subjected to being a mere amusement. Most of them did not speak the language of the exhibitor. Although they later started understanding it and learnt to communicate, they were usually unable to write. There were also many human freaks without an impresario. Either they were able to join seasonally circuses or they gathered under larger circus societies where they performed during the entire season and shared the profit they made.

Another task of impresarios was to inform about their shows as large public as possible. As Bogdan writes,

Display of non-Westerners in freak shows was not intended as a cross-cultural experience to provide patrons with real knowledge of the ways of life and thinking of a foreign group of people. Rather, it was a money-making activity that prospered by embellishing exhibits with exaggerated, bogus presentations emphasizing their strange customs and beliefs. Showmen took people who were culturally and ancestrally non Western and made them into freaks by casting them as bizarre and exotic: cannibals, savages, and barbarians (Bogdan 1988: 177).

That is why the main advertising campaign started by choosing an exciting title, e.g. Wild African Savage or Amazon Corps that was complemented with a corresponding illustration in a poster or billboard. After participants arrived to the place of the show, eloquent barkers invited the public to enter. Information about the show could also be presented by impresarios giving a short "lecture", leaflets were handed out in the streets or freaks were advertised in newspapers. Visitors of the shows could buy souvenirs, posters, illustrated postcards, photographs, leaflets or the above mentioned pamphlets with a CV of the freaks exhibited. Some human freaks went after their performance among the public and signed autographs. Promotion included cooperation with anthropologists, anthropologic societies and organizers of the shows. If researchers confirmed authenticity of the show, organizers could refer to it as an educational programme and thus did not have to pay amusement tax that would otherwise be up to 40% of the gross income. There were various cheaters who sponged on shows, especially people such as circus entrepreneurs who enriched themselves through mystification. As a consequence, they distorted the origins of freaks,

imitated other performances or claimed that live exhibits participated in world shows. Holding freak shows along with quasi scientific and educational programmes focused on exchange between the emerging disciplines of the time and on popular culture.

Phineas Taylor Barnum

A new concept of freak shows was introduced by the U.S. impresario Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–1891). In the 1830s, he presented his first freak show which consisted in displaying a presumably 160 year old and blind former nurse of George Washington (Streissguth 2009: 26–30). From 1842 he ran Barnum's American Museum in New York. Before the museum was destroyed by fire in 1865, it was visited by approximately 38 million visitors (Kreiser – Browne 2011: 193). In addition to exotic animals, wax figures and jugglers, Barnum also presented freak shows with Albinos, Lilliputians, giants, bearded women or Siamese twins. A significant person of the freak show was Charles Sherwood Stratton (1838–1881), a boy of a small stature who performed under the nickname General Tom Thumb. Barnum taught Stratton to sing, dance, tell jokes in rhymes, do pantomime and imitate various historic or mythological persons such as Cupid, Samson, Hercules, Napoleon Bonaparte or Robinson Crusoe (Kirk 1972: 25). In 1844–1847 they went on a tour in Europe where they visited the royal court of the British Queen Victoria, Queen Isabel II of Spain, Russian Tsar Nicolas I in St. Petersburg and Royal Palace of Louis-Philippe of France. In 1863, Barnum arranged a wedding of Stratton with a dwarf girl called Lavinia Warren. News of the stage-managed dwarf wedding appeared in many newspapers, spread over the Atlantic and soon became an example that was followed in Europe and the U.S. until the middle of the 20th century (Garland-Thomson 1997: 190–191).

Among those who had success in Barnum's freak show in 1860 were also Maximo and Bartola (Maximo Valdez Nunez and Bartola Velasquez) nicknamed Aztec Children or The Last of the Ancient Aztecs. Although they were bought when they were children in San Miguel in Salvador for presentation purposes, in order to achieve more publicity a rumour was circulated that they were found in a lost Meso-American town of Iximaya (Qureshi 2011: 166). This confirmed the fact according to which shows "depended on a supply of curiosities from abroad, which in turn provided racial theorists with new "specimens" to analyze. Racial characterizations were

then funneled back into the materials purveyed by freak show promoters, lending them an air of respectability and further securing scientific to mass culture. Ethnology gained access to rare specimen, and racial ideology was disseminated to a broad public" (Aguirre 2003: 44). Maximo and Bartola were regarded not only as the last living descendants of the Aztecs, but also as members of a worshipped clerical caste, which means they were promoted to a subject of religious worshipping. Their different social status and ethnicity were used commercially by exhibitors and impresarios. "They do not appeal to the public as dwarfs, hunchbacks, Tom Thumbs, Siamese Twins or other distorted curiosities: but belong to another category. While to a European public they are *sui generis* they are placed before the public as exemplars of a race of people hitherto unknown – a race unlike in form and feature all the modern inhabitants of the earth" (Anonym 1853: 8). Owing to their unusual physiology, it was also considered that they could be affected by microcephaly that is demonstrated by an abnormally small head and insufficiently developed brain (Garland-Thomson 1997: 167).

In 1866 Barnum started exhibiting in his freak shows also a nine-month old Annie Jones who was first shown as the Infant Esau or the Bearded Girl, later as the Esau Woman or the Bearded Lady. When she was born, her face was covered with dense hair. At an older age she had a thick moustache, long beard and hair (Drimmer 1973: 167–169, Peterkin 2001: 102–103). Bearded women were considered to be strange people. Barnum used their popularity from the very beginning of his career – in 1853 he exhibited in his museum his first bearded woman – Josephine Ciofullia nicknamed Bearded Lady of Geneva. Barnum had her wearing Victorian clothes, her beard was trimmed in the style of the French Emperor Napoleon III and she often wore jewels (Durbach 2009: 105–107). Besides bearded women, Barnum's shows included also bearded men such as Fedor Jeftichew performing as Jo-Jo from 1884. Barnum increased the attractiveness of his origin with a story according to which Fedor was found by a hunter as a wild man in a cave in the deep woods in the central part of Russia. First he only barked and growled, later he was domesticated and transported to the U.S. Jo-Jo's appearance was similar to that of a Scottish terrier as his entire face and body was covered with hair (Bondeson 2000: 23).

Barnum involved more and more indigenous people in his freak shows such as Zip, whose real name was William Johnson. He was a black man with a conic

head and Barnum first called him "What Is It?", in the 1870s he started calling him "Zip, the What Is It?". Zip accentuated the shape of his head by having it shaved – except for a small tuft of hair on top similar to a mohican of the Native Americans. His pin-head witnessed of microcephaly (Ciarlo 2011: 137). Barnum considered Zip to be a living example of the missing element between the man and the ape. He wanted to stir discussion through Zip and get viewers involved in a scientific discourse (Garland-Thomson 1997: 145, 316). There was also a story concerning Zip's origin. "From the interior of Africa. It was captured by a party of adventurers who were in search of the gorilla. While exploring the river Gambia, near its mouth, they fell in with a race of beings never before discovered. They were six in number. They were in a PERFECTLY NUDE STATE, roving about among the trees and branches, in the manner common to the monkey and orang outang. (...) The present one is the only survivor" (Lindfors 2014: 167).

After the Barnum's American Museum was destroyed by fire, Barnum returned to the idea of the Congress of Nations that he formulated in the 1840s. In 1860, he started promoting this intention and exhibited members of five African tribes such as Zulu or Khoikhoi. His intention was not fully implemented until 1884 when he held the Great Congress of Nations. During the congress he presented indigenous people from areas that he considered 'uncivilized' such as Oceania, Australia, Africa, Scandinavia, Asia and from the Great Plains in the U.S. It was a showcase of hundreds of human curiosities that formed a part of the circus called the Greatest Show on Earth that he opened in New York in 1881 together with other U.S. impresarios – James A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson (Brownell 2008: 22–24). In his shows, Barnum managed to concentrate remarkable and peculiar tribes with physical types never seen before. His sets of indigenous people, presented later at World Exhibitions in Paris in 1889 and in Chicago in 1893 referred to live pictures, first conceived by Barnum. In 1885, Barnum started working on his own again, but he renewed his cooperation with Bailey in 1888 under the name Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth (Danilov 2013: 99).

Carl Hagenbeck

Barnum's Great Congress of Nations was inspired and elaborated by the German impresario and trader Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913). In this case, it was a show of indigenous people (Völkerschauen) that he brought, as a new field of trade, to an unprecedented



FIGURE 3: Ringling Bros.' big new parade. Circus poster showing five separate parades of people in costumes together with animals representing a "caravan crossing the desert", "children's fairyland", "famous mounted military companies of the world", "warfare in the Punjab" and "national English Derby Day." 1899, chromolithograph. The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

degree of sophistication. The first show was held in 1874 in Hagenbeck's zoological garden in Hamburg. Although there was a relatively low degree of exoticism of the individuals exhibited, a group of Sami people accompanied by reindeers and sledges in combination with weapons and tents became immediately a great success. Hagenbeck also intensified and opened the cooperation between impresarios and scientists, especially Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory (Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte) founded in 1869. Its co-founder, long-time chairman, physician and physical anthropologist Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902)



FIGURE 4: Carl Hagenbeck's Sioux Show. Adolph Friedländer, lithography, 1910. Snoep.

recommended that participants in the shows of indigenous people are studied (Dreesbach 2005: 303). He participated in several such exhibitions himself, in 1886 even with the U.S. anthropologist Franz Boas in Berlin during Hagenbeck's tour where he presented a show of the Bella Coola tribe. In Boas' case it was a crucial milestone in his career as inhabitants of the American Northwest became a subject to his anthropologic research (Jacknis 1985: 91). Virchow performed anthropometric measurements of indigenous people, especially of the Inuits and Bella Coola or Tehuelche tribes at Hagenbeck's shows (Dreesbach 2005: 284–285, Pöhl 2009: 71).

Hagenbeck based his shows of indigenous people on accentuating the context of their authentic geographic environment including their homes, animals, plants, weapons, tools and other ethnographic artefacts. These were simultaneous shows of groups of native people and animals from the same cultural and geographic areas. Hagenbeck usually presented in his

shows groups from Africa, the Arctic, India and Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Ames 2008: 26). In order to get them, he sent his agent, the Norwegian ethnologist Johan Adrian Jacobsen (1853–1947) to the various parts of the world. In 1876 he held, through Jacobsen, a show of Nubians, who, surrounded by animals and artefacts, engaged in their daily routines. "The attractions of this Nubian caravan were a sensation of the highest order. With the ornamentation of their wild bodies, their animals, tents, domestic tools and hunting gear, the guests proffered a highly interesting anthropological-zoological picture of Sudan greatly increased by the number of domestic animals which people brought with them, their great black dromedaries, for instance (...)" (Hagenbeck 1909: 20).

Hagenbeck also organized a tour of shows of indigenous people in Germany and Europe and in 1880 his tour came to Prague with a group of Inuits from Labrador (Rothfels 2002: 9). All his tours started in Hamburg, and continued to other German cities and towns. For instance, in 1876, a show of Nubians was

first presented in German cities, then in Paris and London. "In 1877 an even bigger Nubian show followed the same route" (Debrunner 1979: 271). Between 1874 and 1913, Hagenbeck organized in total 54 shows of indigenous people. However, not all of them were based on juxtaposition of people and animals.

Hagenbeck is considered to be a pioneer of modern zoological gardens where he tried to create conditions for animals that would be as similar as possible to their original environments. In 1907 he opened in Stellingen in Hamburg Tierpark Hagenbeck (still exists today), the first zoological garden where he applied a new principle of no bars by using simple natural barriers such as trenches, rocks and water reservoirs.

Albert Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire

Carl Hagenbeck and his Nubian show went to the Jardin zoologique d'acclimatation in Paris in 1877 and 1879. It was a zoological garden that was inaugurated in 1860 by the French Emperor Napoleon III. In 1865, Albert Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1835–1919) became its



FIGURE 5: Carl Hagenbeck's "Galla Truppe", a group from the Oromo people. Exhibition at the Zoo of Hamburg. Photo, 1910. Peter Weiss Collection.

director and in 1877 he included freak shows in the programme (Bergougniou, Clignet, David 2001: 52–55, Mason 2001: 19–54). The exhibition of Nubians consisted of fourteen Africans and animals from Somalia and Sudan such as dromedaries, elephants, giraffes, rhinoceros and ostriches (Rialle 1877: 198). The show became an immediate success that opened new opportunities to Jardin d'acclimatation that was experiencing financial trouble after the Franco-Prussian War and Paris Commune. Shortly afterwards, in the same year, a show of Inuits was held. The World Exhibition in Paris in 1878 attracted visitors and thus also Jardin d'acclimatation had a record breaking number of visitors. It offered shows in which Sami people performed. Until 1883 several tribes or representatives of ethnic groups such as Fuegians or Kalmyks were presented in Jardin d'acclimatation. The interest in these shows is evidenced by the numbers of visitors: show of Fuegians in 1881 attracted 4,000 visitors. First shows were not that theatrical, indigenous people lived in huts and they were separated from visitors with a fence. During the day they engaged in their daily routines such as cooking, educating children or taking care of animals (Robles 2014: 53).

In 1877, Saint-Hillaire started inviting members of the Society of Anthropology of Paris (Société d'anthropologie de Paris) to visit the shows in the Jardin d'acclimatation. They, under the management of the French anthropologist Paul Broca (1824–1880), visited the shows several times and they did not only focus on the skull morphology (craniometry and frenology), but also on human anatomy of "live species". They published their scientific conclusions in the press and contributed to the general public acclaiming the freak shows. However, in the 1880s more and more reproaches appeared in the public claiming that the indigenous people in the shows did not correspond to travellers' reports and ethnographic descriptions of their cultures. Indigenous people in the Jardin d'acclimatation were actually civilized, which was due to their contact with the West. Other reproaches concerned the "natural" environment that did not include all ethnologic artefacts. Through the shows, indigenous people became "savage animals" rather than natural savages (Berliner 2002: 110–111).

Between 1884–1885, no shows were held in the Jardin d'acclimatation. In 1886 Saint-Hilaire performed a reorganization that overlapped with the Berlin



FIGURE 6: Indiens Galibis, Jardin zoologique d'acclimatation, Paris. Jules Chéret, lithography, 1882. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

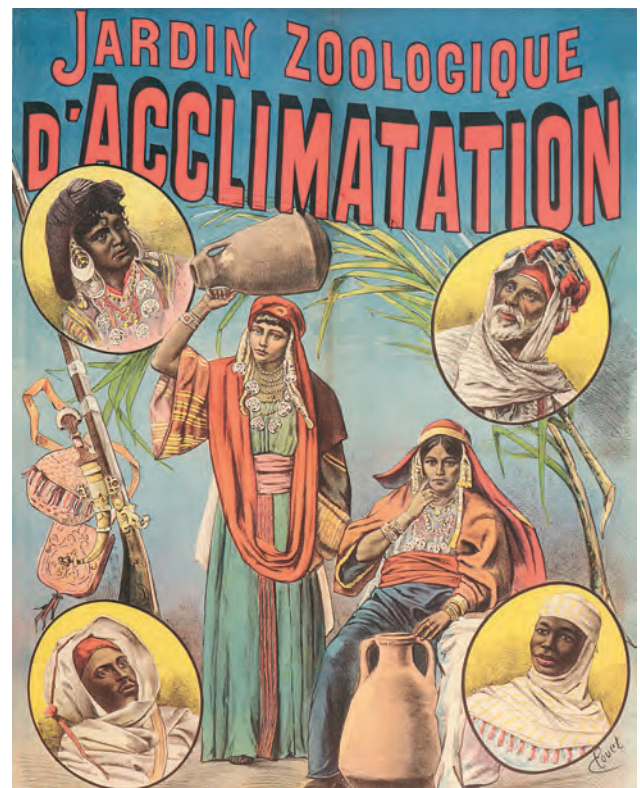


FIGURE 7: Jardin zoologique d'acclimatation, Paris. C. Clouet, lithography, 1891. Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Conference and limited his contacts with the Society of Anthropology of Paris. At this time, there was a reversal in the concept of the Jardin d'acclimatation as its biased perspective started shifting from presenting savages of the New World (the "enlightened other") to presenting of exotic black Africans as the "modern other". Reorganization drew the Jardin d'acclimatation nearer to the circus-like form of entertainment. In the decade following the reorganization, there were shows of African human curiosities presenting Ashanti, Tuareg, Khoikhoi, Somalis or Dahomey. The visiting shows of Somalis and Dahomey were arranged again by Hagenbeck. The shows were similar to one another. Africans were presented in huts, engaged in their daily routine activities. Then there was a programme in which they performed dances, traditional rituals and battles, including colonial battles of Africans against the French or the British. During a show of Dahomey in 1891, there was a reconstruction of the First Franco-Dahomean War of 1890 (Robles 2014: 53–54). What resonated in the Jardin d'acclimatation was the captivation by Egypt. In 1891, there was a show called the Egyptian caravan that lasted for two months. Although Saint-Hilaire managed the Jardin d'acclimatation from 1893, freak shows continued, despite an interruption between 1911 and 1925, until 1931 when native Kanak people from New Caledonia, presented as savage polygamists and cannibals, were the last people to be shown (Gordon 2009: 9).

Legacy and Decline of Freak Shows

What formed freak shows and exhibitions of human curiosities was imperial colonialism, culminating in the 1870s. Colonial expansion of the West contributed to the development of anthropology and ethnology that were involved in scientific reflection and in forming of a picture of non-European native nations and cultures. The imperial context of geopolitical, scientific and economic expansion made freak shows a relatively available means of entertainment. A role was also played by a wider consumerism spreading in the middle and lower working class that determined the perspective through which the exhibited human subjects were seen. The public often did not realize that exhibition of the culture of indigenous people was not authentic. Many physical atavistic stigmas and recessive features of human freaks used and accentuated by impresarios with the view of making more profit contributed to the fact that the status of the individuals exhibited decreased their humanity and

drew them inhumanely into the world of animals. Physical abnormalities, corporal oddities and other exotic features were not only biologically innate, but also culturally formed (Herzl-Betz 2014: 19–20). The cultural category of freak shows is historically, ideologically and socially determined and grounded in Eurocentric cultural norms and values. Every oddity and otherness of the body presented in freak shows became a subject that was visually consumed, which decreased the authenticity and humanity of the person exhibited. On the background of the shows, performances and exhibitions making use of drama, accentuated through props, costumes and narration of otherness and exoticism, a visually digestible, impressive and seemingly plausible construction of a culturally or physically different individual was created (Pécoil 2007: 9).

The emphasis on abnormality, otherness and exoticism together with the preference of physically



FIGURE 8: Ota Benga at the Bronx Zoo. Photo, 1906. The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

disfigured people – subject of the shows and performances – destabilized the traditional normative approach to the human body. In the second half of the 19th century, there was a new concept of a normal body defined as an average body. The presumably neutral concept of the normal was an ideological construct represented by the bourgeoisie. Mediocrity was defined as a moral ideal and it was supported by the middle class. A normative body was, with its proportions, measurable, classifiable and relatively stable (Gelder 2000: 93, Chemers 2003: 296). However, freak shows presented a different body that was formed, interpreted and reproduced in the context of unequal power relations. Therefore, the manner in which human curiosities were presented meant that different bodies were in contrast to everyday reality (Garland-Thomson 1997: 133). The physically disabled body became "a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity" (Garland-Thomson 1992: 6). It was a projection area stemming from the power position of the Western man reflecting his fears, fantasies or doubts about the categories of normality and normal identity. That is why some bodies from this hierarchy are perceived "as ugly, disgusting, or degenerate" (Young 1990: 11). Freak shows often intentionally accentuated the dimension of ugly, different, abnormal or otherwise bizarre bodies that were regarded from the superior power perspective.

Until the First World War, freak shows were a sought-after form of entertainment. Just as Saartjie Baartman anticipated and symbolized the nascence of these shows, their extinction was heralded by Ota Benga (1883–1916). This member of the Pygmy tribe of Batwa was first presented in a zoological garden in Bronx in 1906 in a cage in the chimpanzee and orangutan pavilion. After he left the garden he learnt English and worked in a cigarette factory in Lynchburg. Since he could not return to Congo due to the First World War, he suffered from depressions and committed a suicide in 1916 (Ward 1992: 14). Recession of freak shows occurred in the post-war period when they started gradually disappearing from the European entertainment scene. At the same time, Nazism was growing in importance and it refused immigration of the foreigners who appeared in the shows. After the Second World War, freak shows could only be seen sporadically as traditional popular entertainment found itself suddenly in competition with the movie industry. What can be regarded as shows of different cultures after the Second World War are tours of African, Asian

or Native American dancing groups in Europe and tours of folklore groups from European countries in different continents. The development of international tourism in the 1950s then led to their total extinction as indigenous people could be visited and admired in their home countries in the context of their native culture and everyday life (Dreesbach 2005: 150, 306–307).

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