PART ONE

European versus Indigenous Agency
Chapter Two

The Hagenbeck Ethnic Shows:
Recruitment, Organization, and Academic and Popular Responses

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Based on an actor-centered approach and thorough research in the Hagenbeck archives and the private papers of Johan Adrian Jacobsen, one of Hagenbeck’s impresarios, which consists of more than 5,000 letters, diaries, photos, and other archival material, this chapter provides an overview of the way the Hagenbeck shows were recruited and organized, how they worked behind the scenes, and how they were received by the public, the press, academia, and visitors. The research also sheds light on the motives and strategies of the non-European ethnic-show travelers and shows the personal expertise and continuity from ethnic show to filmmaking in creating a popularized “exotic” Other.

Terminology and Sources

This chapter is a summary of research spanning more than thirty years, resulting in a book and numerous articles focusing on the Hagenbeck ethnic shows (see for example Thode-Arora 1989, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2014, 2017, 2019). Although the catchy term “human zoos” has been propagated by the French researcher Pascal Blanchard (e.g., Bancel et al. 2002), I strongly prefer the term “ethnic shows” (Völkerschauen in German). In my opinion, although both were similar phenomena about othering, ethnic shows were conceptually different from freak shows in which people were staged due to their physical difference. Ethnic shows were much more about cultural differences and always included a staged performance of cultural pursuits considered characteristic of the subjects. Much more importantly, though, the term “human zoos” suggests a unilinear power relation and makes non-European ethnic-show participants into powerless victims, denying them
any agency, and screening out an entangled history. Although there were
some shows where the participants were kept like captives, and although
most ethnic shows took place in a colonial setting of structural inequality,
indigenous agency in the sense of capacity to act and negotiate was definitely
an important factor in many of them, as this chapter and the contribution by
Bodhari Warsame in this volume will show.

The Hagenbeck family was large and ramified. Carl Hagenbeck (1844–
1913) had half-brothers, brothers-in-law, sons-in-law, and nephews, who, like
him, worked part-time or full-time in the animal trade, as animal tamers
and trainers, in the circus business, as collectors and dealers of ethnographic
artifacts, or as taxidermists. Many of them were involved in the organizing
of ethnic shows or acted (occasionally) as impresarios, partly or mainly at
their own expense, running companies of their own at times. Rather than
disentangling this fuzzy pattern of family members and staff crossing per-
manently or occasionally between companies, helping out with certain
chores for a limited time or repeatedly, working for Carl Hagenbeck but also
independently, in this chapter, all ethnic shows organized by members of
the Hagenbeck family and employees of the Hagenbeck companies will be
subsumed under the term “Hagenbeck ethnic shows.” This makes sense as
there seem to have been long-term relations1 between the protagonists in the
Hagenbeck realm, and arguably this flexible network could be drawn on to
make Hagenbeck ethnic shows as commercially successful as they were.

The body of primary sources used for this chapter encompasses more than
5,000 letters of business and private correspondence, diaries, hundreds of pho-
tos, advertisement placards and bills, postcards sold with the shows, newspaper
coverage of the shows at many different tour stops, and other archival material.
In addition, oral history interviews with different members of the Hagenbeck
family were conducted.2 Many, though by no means all, of the archival sources

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1 Evidence for this is the extensive correspondence between these protagonists, kept in the Hagenbeck
and Jacobsen papers, encompassing decades and geographic areas across continents. Furthermore, these
sources show repeated collaboration between Carl Hagenbeck’s company and, for example, Josef Menges,
Johan Adrian Jacobsen, John Hagenbeck, and Heinrich and Johannes Umlauff. Furthermore, Carl
Hagenbeck seems to have employed persons from his network when in situations of need after they had
left the company: Johan Adrian Jacobsen, for example, was offered the management of the zoo restaurant
in 1907 and held this position till his retirement—two of his ethnic-show recruitment journeys (1910 and
1916) actually took place during this period.
2 Interviews were conducted with Eva Bremer-Hagenbeck (1985), Gisela Bührmann (1991), Caroline
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were found in the Hagenbeck archive and in the private papers of Johan Adrian Jacobsen, one of Hagenbeck’s recruiters and impresarios of ethnic shows. All these sources allowed for a detailed analysis of recruiting and exhibiting criteria. Apart from these primary sources, there are published autobiographies of Hagenbeck family members, city chronicles at the tour stops of the shows, and literature on the show and circus business of the times.

All sources have to be carefully contextualized and information taken with a grain of salt, however. It has to be kept in mind that Carl Hagenbeck was a masterful advertiser who strategically used the media of his day. Before an ethnic show even reached a tour stop, Hagenbeck’s marketing team would position favorable or exciting articles in the local newspapers, outdoing competitors by sheer manpower or financial resources. Similarly, the Hagenbeck family members’ autobiographies, some of them produced in high print runs and translated into different languages, gloss over some events and exaggerate others to create a positive image of the company (Dittrich and Rieke-Müller 1998, 237–43).

Johan Adrian Jacobsen (1853–1947) was a Norwegian who alternated in his professional life between working for Hagenbeck in different functions and going on long-term collecting trips for the Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin. Having started a family and settled down in Germany for good, he was keenly aware of his insufficient command of written German and lack of professional qualifications. Seeking to capitalize on his rare experiences as a recruiter of ethnic shows and as a well-traveled collector of ethnographic artifacts in unexplored areas, his diaries, with the exception of the beginning of the very first one, were all written in (broken) German and meant to be the basis for publications later on. This becomes evident from marginal notes clearly added later and from some publications referring to his diaries. Although his private papers are among the most valuable sources on the Hagenbeck ethnic shows, Jacobsen’s letters and diaries should be read with this background in mind (e.g., Jacobsen, Tagebuch 1877–81, 5; Jacobsen, Tagebuch 1884–85, 14; Hoffmann 1880).

Hundreds of newspaper articles have been part of my analysis. Apart from sample press coverage from many of those towns and cities at which

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Carl Hagenbeck had grown into his father’s animal trade and started running it on his own while still in his teens (fig. 2.1). Over the years, he managed to expand the business and to outcompete a number of rivals. The founding of more than thirty zoological gardens in Europe, as of 1880, and also the demand by traveling menageries, circuses, and wealthy private collectors resulted in an increasing market for wild animals. The spread of large circuses and traveling shows in the United States, in particular, provided new and regular customers.

The Hagenbeck company used several commercial strategies. In 1863, Carl’s father had bought the spacious St. Pauli estate of the Hamburg-born, but mainly London-based, Jamrach family, who were very successful

3 For a complete list of the newspapers studied, see Thode-Arora 1989, 203–4.
4 How carefully newspaper articles as sources should be analyzed is revealed by the coverage of two ethnic shows in Hamburg that took place at the same time. In 1890, a Bedouin troupe of the Egyptian Exhibition was constantly in the media, but it was the Amazon troupe from Dahomey, hardly ever mentioned, that was much more successful (Thode-Arora 1989, 137).
5 St. Pauli was a suburb just outside Hamburg’s city gates, well known as a place where fishermen would sell their catch and also as an area of entertainment, with small theaters, show booths, penny museums, circuses, a hippodrome, small shops with “curiosities” brought by sailors from overseas, and so forth. In 1894, St. Pauli became a quarter of the city of Hamburg.
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dealers in animals. The property was already well equipped with cages and other facilities. Furthermore, the Hagenbecks managed to make a contract of guaranteed purchase with Lorenzo Casanova, a regular trader of animals imported from northeast Africa and owner of a traveling menagerie. At the same time, Hamburg as a harbor city offered the opportunity of buying smaller animals that sailors had brought with them on their own initiative. Moreover, the harbor facilitated the reception of animals ordered from overseas and of their quick transport to customers via train or ship (Dittrich and Rieke-Müller 1998, 18–29, 34–46, 53–119). An (undated) advertisement for Hagenbeck’s menagerie, which put animals on display for a paying public before they were sold, mentions “10 African elephants, 1 giraffe, 1 Kudu antelope, 12 spotted and striped hyenas, 2 lions, 2 zebras of rare beauty, 1 gepard, 2 sacred baboons, 3 giant baboons, and several hundred other living mammals and birds” (Thinius 1975, 42). The 1870s European financial crash, a decreasing demand for wild animals, and the political instability of northeast Africa—one of the company’s main catching areas—with the rise of the millenarian Mahdi movement, led to a drop in the Hagenbeck animal trade and called for additional lines of business. The written history of the Hagenbeck company is riddled with anecdotes, but it seems to have been a family friend, the painter Heinrich Leutemann, who suggested having the next transport of reindeer be accompanied by a group of Sami people: they could present their work with reindeer and their mobile dwellings to the paying German public and at the same time offered a picturesque subject for

6 The Sami are historically known by outsiders as Lapps or Laplanders—these terms are considered derogatory by Sami, however.
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the painter (Hagenbeck 1909, 42–45, 80–83, 89–91). Although this might be true, the idea of ethnic shows was probably not new to Carl Hagenbeck: when he was a boy, a troupe of Zulus had a tour stop with extra performances for pupils in his native St. Pauli in 1854, and the American “circus king,” Phineas Taylor Barnum—who had ethnic shows among his multiple attractions—was one of Hagenbeck’s animal-trade customers.7

When the Sami show opened its gates at the Hagenbeck menagerie in 1875, it was an immediate success with audiences: the spectators were fascinated by what they took to be the unsophisticatedness of the Sami and were under the impression that they were witnessing a completely “unstaged” image of real life in Lapland (Hagenbeck 1909, 80–83). As a result, though interrupted by a one-year break following the demise of six Fuegians in 1881 and by a much longer break due to World War I and its impact, ethnic shows became a permanent business branch of the Hagenbeck company until 1932. In 1907, Carl Hagenbeck opened his zoo in Stellingen, at that time a suburb of Hamburg. This meant no more space limitations for ethnic shows, and until World War I, ethnic shows in Hagenbeck’s Tierpark would become ever more sophisticated and grandiose, at times encompassing troupes of several hundred people housed in large “villages” with artificial backdrops. When the spectacles were gradually restarted in the mid-1920s, it became increasingly difficult to recruit people who were unacculturated enough to Western ways to still be seen as an attraction by the paying audience. Furthermore, silent and, later, sound film, especially when set in exotic environments, would become a strong competition for spectacles like ethnic shows in creating exotic dream worlds (Thode-Arora 1997). Finally, the Nazi regime, on coming to power in 1933, prohibited ethnic shows, as friendly and especially sexual contacts between Germans and ethnic show participants, contrary to Nazi ideology, could never be effectively prevented.8

About seventy Hagenbeck ethnic shows were staged between 1875 and 1932. Participants were recruited from all five continents. Adding the

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7 Notizen, 1854, 8, and letter from A. Heinrich to director Damm, April 4, 1854, both in Patronat St. Pauli II C. 35/35 Vorstellung von Zulu-Kaffern 1854, StaHH; Fox and Parkinson 1969; Hagenbeck 1909, 430–32.

8 With the exception of the Deutsche Afrika-Schau (German Africa Show), between 1916 and 1940, in which Africans living in Germany after World War I and black Germans were meant to be concentrated to rekindle interest in the lost German colonies. Ironically, the show organized only very few performances but formed a safe haven for its participants, keeping them from forced labor or concentration camps (Forgey 1994).
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number of participants documented for all these shows suggests at least 2,650 performers during the course of nearly sixty years. This figure can only be a very rough estimate, however. Especially with the Somali performers who monopolized all shows with a northeast African theme or label (cf. Warsame’s chapter in this volume) between 1885 and 1929, it can be expected that a certain number of the same individuals took part in several shows. The Sinhalese-Indian shows, which were another recurring feature in the Hagenbeck entertainment business, also had a certain degree of fluctuation and crossovers: members of the troupes split off during some seasons to become part of the Hagenbeck circus; and highly specialized participants such as mahouts or bamboo-pole artistes joined other shows and circuses.

Recruiters and Recruiting

In France and to some degree in Britain, even small ethnic shows at country fairs seem to have been very much embedded in a colonial-propagandistic context (cf. Blanchard et al. 1995; Bergougniou, Clignet and David 2001). By contrast, only very few shows in the history of the Hagenbeck enterprises actually came from the German colonies: it was mainly through the long-established, worldwide network of the animal trade that the Hagenbeck company recruited its troupes. Most recruiters and/or impresarios were family members or had been in contact with the company as animal catchers, for example. Some of them were very knowledgeable and experienced about the area in which they recruited. Josef Menges (1850–1910), for example, had specialized in northeast Africa; he traveled and researched there repeatedly during his lifetime. Apparently, he could communicate with the Somali ethnic-show troupe members without a translator. John Hagenbeck (1866–1940), Carl’s younger half-brother, settled down in Ceylon in 1891 and became a successful planter and dealer in animals. From that point (at the latest), all the successful Ceylon-India ethnic shows were organized by him. By his own account, his command of Sinhalese and Tamil was such that he could communicate without a translator. John had a son with his high-ranking Sinhalese wife: John George Hagenbeck (1900–59) was even more integrated in Ceylonese society and arguably the impresario most responsive to the ethnic-show participants’

9 See the list of Hagenbeck ethnic shows in Thode-Arora 1989, 168–75.
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wishes and needs. Some recruiters made ethnic shows their profession; others brought the troupes with them as a sideline, so to speak, from their journeys as sailors, merchants, or game catchers. There is no doubt that both the professional careers and the personalities of the men had an impact on the ways cultural contact took shape both in the home countries of the troupes and in the venues of the shows (Thode-Arora 1989, 40–58).

Recruiting Criteria

According to Carl Hagenbeck, in 1910 an average ethnic show would cost approximately 60,000 marks, a considerable sum that had to be recouped by the box-office takings. Consequently, the planning was done very carefully: ethnic shows, although the organizers never failed to stress the educational value of their enterprises, were a business and needed to turn a profit. From the 1880s on, ethnic shows were so common in many parts of Europe that they really needed to offer something special to be able to compete. Hence the criteria for selection reflect the ideas of the entrepreneurs about qualities of ethnic shows in terms of public appeal and, thus, profitability.

With regard to selecting specific “ethnic groups” for ethnic shows, there were some limitations from the very beginning. Permission of the respective government was needed when recruiting troupes from non-German colonies or from the territories of other nations. Sometimes a deposit had to be made to cover expenses for the return journey of the participants and their fees. Recruiting ethnic-show troupes in the German colonies, which the Hagenbeck company only rarely did, became prohibited in 1901 and could only be done in exceptional cases with a special permit. During World War I, recruitment in foreign countries was almost impossible.

Keeping these limitations in mind, three main criteria for recruitment can be extracted from the sources (Thode-Arora 1989, 59–90). Firstly, the ethnic group and the individuals selected had to be not too similar in

10 Letter by Carl Hagenbeck to Senator Diestel of November 6, 1910, StaHH C1. IV Lit. No. 4, Vol. 2 a Fasc. 2 Inv. 16 i Conv. 1 Blatt 80.
11 The terms “ethnic group” and “ethnic unit” will be used interchangeably in this chapter for readability reasons. Strictly speaking, in the social sciences, a group is defined as consisting of members interacting with each other and, thus, is usually smaller than an ethnic unit.
culture and looks to Central Europeans. They could come from Europe’s fringes—Lapland, for example—but better was an overseas background. On the other hand, contact with Europeans in their region of origin had to be established to a certain degree so that the organization of the show could run smoothly (efforts to recruit troupes among the reclusive Wedda in Ceylon or Andaman Islanders from India failed). Secondly, the physical appearance of potential recruits was of utmost importance: special beauty or ugliness in the eyes of the European beholder or cultural deformations were considered an asset, as they promised to make an ethnic unit interesting for the paying crowds: the tall and slender Somali with their Caucasian features, ease, and experience in dealing with Europeans (cf. Maow 1985, 12; see also Warsame’s chapter in this volume); the small-boned, gracefully built Sinhalese; Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) women with their artificially elongated heads; or Sara women with their huge lip plugs are discussed in the sources. Thirdly, it was of advantage if the potential recruits’ material culture—for example, clothes and dwellings—or their customs held the potential of being “picturesque” or even “spectacular,” which again can be translated as “very different” from the spectators’ everyday world. The alleged
“guard of the King of Dahomey” or “Dahomey Amazons” (cf. Blier 2008), consisting of supposed female warriors, falls into this range, as do the many Indian-Ceylonese troupes comprising professional performers, such as snake charmers, magicians, bamboo-pole artistes, and bear trainers, whom recruiter and impresario John Hagenbeck claimed to be the “characteristic figures of folk life” (Hagenbeck 1922, 49) (fig. 2.2).

Johan Adrian Jacobsen as Recruiter

Once the ethnic unit had been decided on, there were a number of criteria for choosing the individuals, many of which I could deduce from the material of the Jacobsen papers.12

Johan Adrian Jacobsen (fig. 2.3) acted as recruiter for the Greenland “Eskimo” show of 1877–78, for a Sami troupe from Norway (1878–79), for an Inuit13 troupe from Labrador (1880–81), for a Kwakwaka’wakw troupe from America’s northwest coast (who did not materialize in the end) (1882), for a Nuxalk (Bella Coola) troupe from America’s northwest coast (1885–86), for an Oglala Sioux/Lakota troupe from Pine Ridge Reservation in the United States (1910), and for a Sami troupe from Norway and Sweden (1926–27). Although Jacobsen thus was responsible for the recruitment of less than 10 percent of all Hagenbeck ethnic shows, his correspondence and diaries give a detailed, day-to-day insight of the recruiting process and, during certain intervals, span nearly the complete history of the Hagenbeck shows. They thus allow for an analysis of the considerations and challenges of recruiting. Apart from the Sami recruitments—as Jacobsen was familiar with the Scandinavian surroundings and could converse with the recruitees in Norwegian—he relied on local European or American traders and colonial officials for his first contacts and on translators. There were detailed instructions from the Hagenbeck company on whom to recruit (or not to recruit), how many animals to purchase, and what kind of ethnographic equipment to bring.

12 John George Hagenbeck 1932, 12, 46–47; letter by Carl Hagenbeck to Jacobsen in English of January 5, 1910, HA; letters by Jacobsen to his wife, Hedwig, of January 10, February, 13, and February 25, 1926; two letters by Heinrich Hagenbeck to Jacobsen of January 21, 1926; Jacobsen 1877–81, 22 (quoted after translation from the Norwegian by Henning Freudenthal), insertion pp. 30, 44, 48; Tagebuch Pine Ridge: February 3, 9, 11, 16, 22, March 6, 12; idem, Anwerben von Sioux–Indianern 2; idem, 1926, January 29, February 12, 20, 23; idem, 1929, 91; idem, 1924–25, 5; Woldt 1884, 130.

13 The term “Inuit” is not synonymous with “Eskimo” but denotes a smaller cultural and linguistic unit.
Quality-minded organizers like Hagenbeck and recruiters like Jacobsen took extra care to select only those persons who looked like the physical “ideal type” of the chosen ethnic unit. Thus, Jacobsen is known to have refused contracts to Sioux “Indians” who had cut their long hair short or to a red-haired Sami from Lapland. One of his standard complaints in his diaries and letters was the “untypical” appearance of persons willing to work in a show whom he thus had to reject.

Furthermore, whenever possible, people of different ages and genders were to be represented among the troupe, “as the audience is eager to see family life among the so-called savage peoples” (Jacobsen 1924–25, 5) and “I moreover believe that the entire camp becomes too lifeless without a few young people to liven it up” (Jacobsen 1926, March 6).

Original clothing, dwellings or housing material, and equipment considered typical of the respective ethnic group were of utmost importance. If Jacobsen could not buy pieces to his liking, their manufacture had to be commissioned to local specialists.

Perhaps even more important were the performative skills of the participants in staging the “typical” activities. Before taking “Eskimo” under contract, Jacobsen is known to have tested their abilities by paying for a competition in doing the “Eskimo roll,”14 and in Pine Ridge he treated the Oglala to a feast to see them dance.

As most of the tour stops were negotiated only when the shows had already arrived in Europe, planning and matching the number of partici-

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14 A 360-degree flip of a kayak whereby the occupant turns the boat upside down and himself headfirst into the water, then brings himself and the kayak back into the starting position.
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pants and the equipment of a show when recruiting with the size of possible future stages or performance grounds could be quite a tricky task.

Carl Hagenbeck attached much importance to keeping contact between the troupes and the audiences to a minimum: ideally, only just enough troupe members should have a command of a European language as was necessary to guarantee the smooth running of the show. In addition, it was important that potential participants had no bad reputation with regard to heavy drinking or other bad habits and, after the sad demise of the Inuit from Labrador and many of the Fuegians, that they were in good health: a medical test was standard procedure.

Jacobsen’s personal papers show a careful and constant balancing of all these selection criteria. His diaries and letters make very clear that recruiting was not a straightforward process, but involved several changes of mind on the part of the potential recruitees and also compromises on his part; for example, in the case of the Sami show in 1926, Jacobsen had been instructed to keep the costs low even if this meant that he would bring along “types” that were “less good.”

Depending on the “quality” of an ethnic show based on the above-mentioned criteria,\(^\text{15}\) it was thus necessary to budget for higher or lower costs, in the hope that the entrance fees would cover the expenses and yield a profit.

The Organization of the Shows

The Hagenbeck company concluded contracts with the ethnic-show participants in which, among other details, travel costs, board and lodging, medical treatment, fees, and the nature of the actual performances were defined.\(^\text{16}\) Ideally, the recruiters saw to it that living animals of the area\(^\text{17}\) and raw materials for building authentic houses at the showgrounds or, in the case of mobile dwellings like yurts, originals were brought to Europe to equip the shows (figs. 2.4 and 2.5). If the climate allowed, these structures served as accommodation.

\(^{15}\) That these criteria were shared by other organizers and impresarios becomes clear, for example, from a letter written by Eduard Gehring when referring to “a solid ethnic show,” as opposed to the “motley crowd of riff-raff” of other shows (Gehring to Jacobsen, February 28, 1915, JA).

\(^{16}\) All the primary sources used for this chapter on organizing the shows are given in Thode-Arora 1989, 91–119, fn. 50–66, 183–85.

\(^{17}\) For a detailed account of the catching, transporting, and keeping of elephants for the Hagenbeck ethnic shows (and for the animal trade and circus business), see Thode-Arora 2019.
Figure 2.4. A rare photograph of an ethnic show village under construction. The erection of houses with thatched roofs and of a temple structure in the background around wooden or metal poles are clearly discernible. Indian-Ceylonese performers are visible in the foreground. Postcard. Private collection of Hilke Thode-Arora.

Figure 2.5. Kalmyks in front of their yurt, 1883–84. Museum am Rothenbaum, Kulturen und Künste der Welt.
Alternatively, the performers would live in heated rooms and use the buildings from home just for the performances. At smaller tour stops that did not provide enough space for original dwellings, backdrops or stages were used.

At least until the early 1880s, the Hagenbeck shows traveled with a housekeeper who cooked and did laundry for the troupe. Unfamiliar food could be a cause of tension, however, and gradually the organizers began to supply the performers with ingredients and let them cook for themselves. In this way, preparation rules, food taboos, and dietary habits—especially among some Indian, African, and Muslim performers—could be taken into account. Special care is documented for several cases in which extra meat portions, alcohol, or even opium rations were dished out as the troupe members were used to them from home (fig. 2.6).

In Hamburg, starting in 1899, as at other tour stops, it was compulsory to have troupe members and their living quarters monitored by a public health officer, mainly to prevent the introduction of tropical, contagious, and especially venereal diseases. Doctors routinely enforced hygienic procedures and checked whether the accommodations were adequate from a medical standpoint.

Diseases, sometimes resulting in death, did happen in the context of ethnic shows—usually because of insufficient medical care, such as failure to provide vaccinations or clothing that was suitable. Gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases due to unfamiliar food and the European climate and accidents during the performances or when working with animals are mentioned again and again. First aid and household remedies were usually applied in these cases. A stay in the hospital, if inevitable, could be a frightening experience to those not used to it from home. One of the Sami men, for example, suffering from severe diarrhea, refused hospitalization for some weeks. Brought there eventually, he was convinced he had been brought there to die when seeing all the ailing patients and he refused to undress and, finally, had to be picked up from the hospital as he was adamant that he would not stay (Jacobsen 1877–81, 52).

Although mentioned only rarely in the sources, seasickness and homesickness were ailments that probably afflicted quite a number of ethnic-show performers. In spite of having signed a contract, many of them had no previous ethnic-show experience or realistic understanding of what it meant to be far away from home for a long time. Symptoms of depression are described for
some of the Inuit from Labrador and for a man from Patagonia who stopped participating in the performances and one day saddled his horse, asking for the way home. Inadequately but apparently with good intentions, Carl Hagenbeck traveled to Berlin and organized an entertainment program for the three Patagonians, including theater shows, city tours, and restaurant visits, but to no avail. Finally, he had the troupe return home before the season ended.

In a dramatic combination of disastrous circumstances (cf. Thode-Arora 2002, 2011), all eight Inuit from Labrador died from smallpox in 1881, and five of eleven Fuegians died from infectious diseases in 1881–82. In 1910, some of the Oglala, although they had been medically tested at recruitment, succumbed to tuberculosis. Tragic, painful, and traumatic as these documented cases were, they should be seen in perspective: even if we triple or quadruple them to account for hypothetical undocumented casualties, the

18 There were some casualties during the Somali shows and among the Samoans performing in, among other tour stops, Umlaufl’s Weltmuseum, run by Carl Hagenbeck’s nephew Heinrich Umlauf. Their impresario Robert A. Cunningham had a bad reputation among his contemporaries for mistreating ethnic-show performers (cf. Thode-Arora 1989, 41–42).
death toll of the Hagenbeck troupes would still be way under 5 percent of all persons who performed in the shows. It has to be kept in mind that also for Europeans, traveling shows and circuses and work with animals at that time were far from hygienic and safe: staff members with severe injuries and casualties are mentioned, for example, regularly for Buffalo Bill’s traveling shows and for a number of Hagenbeck company activities with animals.

Written sources and a number of placards with printed start times of the performances allow an estimate of the working hours in ethnic shows. In many shows, there were eight to ten performances a day, more on Sundays and holidays. This means that performances must have taken approximately thirty to forty-five minutes.

Hagenbeck ethnic shows were advertised by newspaper announcements and by colored, painted placards. The program brochures sold with the shows often had a colored title page that was identical with posters advertising the spectacle. Apart from the guided tour through the showgrounds and the sequence of the performances, the program brochures contained a sort of ethnographic description of the depicted country and its people, their customs and culture. Moreover, many of the brochures included black-and-white photos that often appeared again as motifs of the picture postcards sold during the show. Postcards depict either portraits of individuals or groups taken in the studio or, with equipment, at the showgrounds, or they portray scenes and scenery from the show: dancers, musicians, craftpeople, and acrobats at work; rickshaw or bullock cart drivers; mahouts and dromedary or horse riders; and “village” streets, dwellings, mosques, or temples. Only very few cards show a staged dramatic scene—for example, a mock scalping on one of the cards sold with the Sioux show.

The postcards for some shows were printed in large quantities and circulated not only in Germany but also abroad, as the same visuals appear with English, French, Spanish, and Eastern European text. The purchasers seem to have either kept them as a souvenir (a number of cards carry ethnic-show troupe members’ autographs in Arabic, Russian, or Sinhalese script); used them to send specific greetings from the show, referring to it in their messages; or sent them with a message having no connection at all with the spec-

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19 See the list of newspaper ads corroborating this in Thode-Arora 1989, 184, fn. 59.  
20 For ethnic show placards, see Malhotra 1979; Schmid-Linsenhoff 1986; Thode-Arora 2001.
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tacle. The sale of the postcards and the proceeds from them were sometimes in the hands of the ethnic-show participants themselves.

Carl Hagenbeck’s main interest was in animals, and his original idea of presenting ethnic shows was to demonstrate to the spectators how people in faraway regions of the world caught animals or worked with them. After the success of the Sami show in 1875, which centered on the work with reindeers, he had two shows from northeast Africa organized that were to give an impression of the Africans’ stalking and hunting wild animals for the Hagenbeck trade. Accordingly, Carl Hagenbeck did not use the term *Völkerschauen* in his writings, but usually called them *anthropologisch-zoológische Schaustellungen* (anthropological-zoological shows) (Hagenbeck 1909, 83). The two attractions for the audience were the performances and the “villages.”

Performances, given several times a day on a stage or on a set, got more elaborate over the years. Irrespective of the world region depicted, the shows invariably encompassed dancing, music, combat scenes, and, if possible, scenes with animals. Originally a loose sequence of unconnected presentations, the scenes were combined into a dramaturgical sequence with dramatic climax and a happy ending in later years. With variations depending on the region depicted, a typical Hagenbeck performance as described in the program brochure would start with, for example, a peaceful village scene in which people did their daily chores. Then enemies attacked, setting fire to the dwellings or abducting a woman. This gave ample opportunity for battle scenes. In the end, peace negotiations settled the issue, culminating, for example, in a North African–style horse fantasia; a marriage between members of the enemy groups, featuring singing, dancing, and a parade with animals carrying bride wealth; or a Sinhalese-Indian parade with elephants. Singing, dancing, and battle scenes as well as animals could be integrated into different parts of the show (cf. Demski’s chapter in this volume).

Ethnic shows could be seen in Hagenbeck’s menagerie or on special exhibition grounds. From 1875, they toured several cities or towns. As tour stops were negotiated only after an ethnic-show troupe had reached Europe, the dependence on show venues required a limited troupe size: ideally, a troupe should be large enough to arouse the audience’s interest but small enough to easily find a venue, which could be a small stage in a theater or restaurant or a skating ground or park.
In 1907, when Carl Hagenbeck opened his zoo, there were no more space limitations. As a consequence, ethnic shows became increasingly elaborate, and sometimes there were several troupes from different parts of the world performing at the same time. Troupe sizes reached more than 400 persons at this time. Between 1907 and World War I, but to a certain degree even with his earlier traveling shows, Hagenbeck went to great lengths to create “authentic” scenery in which the ethnic-show participants performed and often lived; apart from dwellings, even landscapes with plants, animals, and famous sights from the depicted region—for example, temples from India or the Egyptian pyramids—were erected. A veritable sightseeing tour with numbered attractions, described in the program brochure, took the spectators around the exhibition grounds, highlighting special house forms, the replicated sights of the region to be depicted, food stalls at which delicacies of the troupe’s region of origin could be tasted, artisans producing handicrafts in front of audiences, the stall of a magician giving regular performances, or the dwelling of a famous warrior who had fought against the colonial powers in a well-known battle. During the open hours of the showgrounds, the spectators could roam these “villages,” as they were frequently announced, freely: they could observe the troupe members’ cooking and eating, apart from other daily pursuits such as milking reindeer, weaving, and carving. The illusion of travel to the region depicted was aspired to and used in advertising slogans—a form of travel without any risk and affordable costs: “Do not take a long trip to see Africa, but come to the 100 Somali in the Somali village. Hagenbeck’s Zoo” (Hamburger Anzeiger [Hamburg Gazette], May 21, 1927) (figs. 2.7 and 2.8).

Hagenbeck thus capitalized on the principle of immersion, which had already been a crowd pleaser during the world’s fairs, with their staged exotic ambience: at a time when Europeans could hardly travel and information on faraway countries could only be drawn from books, newspapers, and journals with few photos or illustrations, the “villages” with their illusion of a travel adventure proved to be a top draw. The few protests against the shows were concerned with aspects of the staging but not with the fact of putting human beings on display per se.22

21 Um Afrika zu sehen, macht keine lange Reise, sondern kommt zu den 100 Somali im Somalidorf. Hagenbeck’s Tierpark.
22 In and after World War I, there were protests in the Netherlands (cf. Hagenbeck 1955, 106–7) and Poland against the Hagenbeck circus. These, however, had nothing to do with the staging of ethnic shows.
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Figure 2.7. Arab city and mosque as backdrops behind a small stage, probably 1912. Postcard. Private collection of Hilke Thode-Arora.

Figure 2.8. Street scene from the “Ceylonese village” erected at Hagenbeck’s zoo, 1908: more than 400 people were recruited for the largest troupe ever under contract with Hagenbeck’s and went on tour, to the Franco-British Exhibition in London among other venues. Postcard. Private collection of Hilke Thode-Arora.
The Reception

Ethnic Shows and Academia

Although the spectacles were a phenomenon of popular culture, the connections between ethnic-show organization and academia were numerous and manifold. Still a young discipline, but haunted by the idea of vanishing “races” and cultures, anthropology strived for an all-encompassing database of humankind’s physical and cultural characteristics, indulging in extensive body measurement and collection activities. Most academics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had few or no opportunities to travel overseas and were excited about the presence of people from foreign cultures in Germany. It is no coincidence that large ethnic-show enterprises went to great lengths to create what they saw as “authenticity,” achieved by employing authentic human beings, artifacts, scenery, animals, and plants from the region to be depicted; this was consistent with academic views of the time. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropology adhered to the paradigm that there existed not only a zoological and phenotypic inventory of every region of the world but also a cultural inventory for every ethnic unit—including material objects and certain values and social structures or typical configurations, patterns and leitmotifs combining them.²³ The cultural inventory of an ethnic unit was thus considered to be finite and, as a consequence, “completely” collectible and depictable. It is in this context that the tireless body measurement and collecting activities of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropologists have to be understood: ethnicity was seen as a rigid quality and research tried to establish factual instead of perceived differences among human cultures.

Carl Hagenbeck became a member of the academic Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory in the 1870s and had regular extra performances organized for academic societies at the different tour stops.

²³ Cf. Malefijt 1976, 138–59, 256–92. Today’s anthropological paradigm, by contrast, understands ethnicity as a fluid concept, governed by highly negotiable and context-based ascriptions of Self and Others constructed by actors in social interaction: even if there were two ethnic units whose cultural inventory did not differ in one single item in an outsider’s perception, they could still define themselves as two ethnic units by symbolically creating (perceived) differences among each other.
Afterward, the scholars were usually allowed to take body measurements of the troupe members. Anthropological photographs depicting members of ethnic shows in frontal, profile, or half-profile view for studies of typical physical features as well as charts with body measurements can frequently be found in relevant professional publications of the time and in museums. In some academic societies plaster casts were made of the face or body—unpleasant procedures to which the ethnic-show performers sometimes refused to subject themselves (Thode-Arora 1989, 127–36).

Scholars of non-European languages, musicologists, and museum ethnologists interviewed participants of the shows regarding their traditions or artifacts in the collections or taped their songs and myths. As many ethnic shows had a collection of artifacts on display as a sideshow and others were used as show props, museums often benefitted by acquiring these pieces after the end of the show season.

As anthropology’s database of a phenotypic and cultural inventory of different populations was small and insufficient at the time, the academ-
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ics faced a serious problem, however: ethnic-show participants were not always from the area or ethnic unit the impresarios claimed participants were from. In fact, to draw the crowds, labels for ethnic shows were often chosen to relate them to countries or ethnic groups mentioned in the press. For example, people from northeast Africa were frequently announced as “Abyssinians,” as Abyssinia was in the newspapers quite a lot. The anthropologists’ dilemma in working with ethnic-show participants thus consisted in finding out whether these people actually were from the area they were claimed to be from and, at the same time, in getting to know more about this very area by relying on exactly the same troupe members. Circular reasoning was a constant methodological danger.

Encountering the Others: Audience Reactions

While the smallest Hagenbeck ethnic-show troupe comprised no more than three persons, the largest troupes encompassed up to several hundred individuals. In 1908, for example, the show called “Ceylonese Village,” starting in Hagenbeck’s Tierpark in Stellingen and moving on to the Franco-British Exhibition in London, housed more than 400 participants (figs. 2.9 and 2.10). In contrast to the huge colonial exhibitions and colonial trade fairs bound to one city, the commercial Hagenbeck shows were highly mobile and toured all over Europe, often including small towns, thus reaching several hundred thousand to millions of spectators, as indicated by their impressive attendance figures. They thus had a more significant impact than the few immobile ethnic shows at colonial exhibitions with their educational and colonial-propagandistic intentions. The extent to which Hagenbeck ethnic shows served to reinforce—or perhaps even to shape—ideas about people of foreign cultures and regions of the world that had existed in the minds of Europeans since the Middle Ages or the Enlightenment should therefore not be underestimated, even if the shows were just a form of entertainment (Thode-Arora 2014, 2017).

The crowd could be considerable: 30,000 to over 90,000 visitors on just one Sunday with fine weather or reduced entrance fees are mentioned for several shows in big cities like Berlin or Paris (Thode-Arora 1989, 168–73). In addition to a voyeuristic, patronizing attitude, curiosity, and fascination with the “exotic” that many viewers likely adopted—and although Hagenbeck saw to it that only a few troupe members were able to speak a European language so that the spectacle could run smoothly but the contact with the
The audience would be made difficult—sources point to an often overwhelming need on the part of visitors to communicate with the ethnic-show performers in German, English, French, or Spanish, or by using sign language. Jacobsen’s unpublished letters show that visitors were often reluctant to leave at night and almost had to be forcibly removed from the grounds at closing time. Fences and barriers served not so much to keep the ethnic-show participants from leaving the premises or, indeed, to cage them up, but rather to protect them from the sometimes pushy crowds of visitors. One aspect of the ethnic shows surely has to do with the erotic appeal that many of the non-European men and women had for German visitors. Jacobsen’s papers (e.g., Jacobsen 1929, 88–90) describe a number of incidents involving flirtations and love affairs. This was seen as acceptable in the case of European men and non-European women, yet if it involved European women and non-European men—which was not all that rare, even in the 1880s—it was considered scandalous. A social distance through ethnic othering, as intended by the organizers, could thus not always be maintained. In fact, it seems to be exactly the perception of an ethnic Other that encouraged spectators to shed their inhibitions and establish communicative or even physical contact.

Figure 2.10. Title page of the program brochure for the “Ethiopia” show at Hagenbeck’s zoo, 1909, featuring an original Christian Ethiopian painting. Private collection of Hilke Thode-Arora.
In the late 1910s and in the 1920s, more and more German silent movies had a plot set in faraway places. Most of these films were shot at home, so non-European people, landscapes, artifacts, and components had to be used to create the overseas scenery: as with ethnic shows, a number of film directors put great emphasis on “authentic” sets. While the main characters were usually played by German actors, the extras and some minor roles could be filled by persons of (partly) non-European descent who had the desired phenotypes.

As ethnic shows and a number of movies followed a similar ideal and method of creating “authenticity,” it is perhaps not surprising that there was collaboration and exchange among the creators of ethnic shows and movies to a certain degree. In the 1920s, the contracts of ethnic-show participants with the Hagenbeck company had a clause committing them to appear as extras in movies. Furthermore, since 1919, Hagenbeck had leased a vast area of his zoo to a film company; a number of movies of this time—for example, by Fritz Lang—were filmed in the artificial landscape of the zoo (fig. 2.11).
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The blurs and overlaps in creating representations of an ethnic Other were also reflected in Hagenbeck’s staff—some experts at creating exotic ambiances made a career of moving swiftly between academic and entertainment requirements when collecting and presenting artifacts and animals or when recruiting people from overseas. The well-known Hamburg-based dealers in ethnographic objects, the Umlauff company, for example, sold well-documented, high-quality collections to museums but at the same time equipped ethnic shows from their artifact pool and built elaborate background scenery for them. On an even more superficial level of the entertainment business, they provided Egyptian mummies with fish tails and sold them as “mermaids” to traveling fairground showmen in Eastern Europe, most often in Russia. Later, the Umlauff company also equipped films. Heinrich and Johannes Umlauff, who occasionally also organized ethnic shows, were Carl Hagenbeck’s nephews (Thode-Arora 1992, 1997).

The Troupe Members

Although turn-of-the-century ethnic shows were set in a hierarchical colonial power structure, it would be too simplistic to see non-European actors always as powerless in this setting. Some participants were indeed abducted, tricked, or kept under degrading conditions (see Eißenberger 1996). However, there was a wide range of constellations already in the situation of recruitment, as Jacobsen’s private papers reveal.

Even if they voluntarily signed contracts, received good pay, and had a thirst for adventure, some ethnic-show participants were unable to assess what it meant to be away from home for months or even years and to be in a completely foreign world. Abraham Ulrikab’s diary (Thode-Arora 2002) provides eloquent testimony for this. Others, by contrast, such as the Oglala-Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, actually became professional show “Indians,” performing successively for Hagenbeck, for Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, for the Sarrasani circus and for other organizers and, acting from a reservation-life background full of deprivation, were able to negotiate good fees due to high demand. In 1926, in negotiations taking several hours at a stretch, Sami demanded contract changes, higher fees, and paid substitutes to look after their herds in their absence from Lapland before signing contracts with Jacobsen. Like the Oglala, Sami
people also had previous experience with work in ethnic shows and knew what to expect.

There were numerous cases in which owners refused to part with ethnographic pieces Jacobsen was interested in or with parts of their animal herds, and sometimes owners insisted on high prices or on selling artifacts only in lots. Some of the Kwakwaka’wakw seem to have instrumentalized Jacobsen’s recruitment efforts for their own agendas\(^4\) and threatened to hold him responsible for people lost to the dangers of travel.

Especially for those performers who were aware of what to expect, as also for the organizers and impresarios, ethnic shows were primarily about business. In a number of documented cases, individual troupe members sought work in ethnic shows repeatedly; some even became ethnic-show entrepreneurs and impresarios themselves (see e.g., Brändle 2007). While some hoped to escape debt or depressing living conditions under colonial rule, others had primarily financial motives for joining a show. In spite of all its hardships, work in an ethnic show could sometimes be much less burdensome and more profitable than making a living at home by hunting, herding, or toiling in the fields. Apparently, it allowed some performers to earn good money in a relatively short time, enabling them to pay off debts or acquire their own piece of land, for example (Hagenbeck 1932, 77, 156, 160–62; Thode-Arora 1989, 150–57).

There are a number of documented cases in which ethnic-show participants strategically and aptly used European forms of display, stereotypes, and expectations for their own gain. Some of them thus took an active part in negotiating the image of an ethnic Other. Indian and Ceylonese ethnic-show participants often were professional show people and used to European audiences from back home; they presented the same numbers and tricks in Europe as on the Indian subcontinent. Some of them made careers in European and American circuses (Thode-Arora 1989, 89–90). Indian-Ceylonese elephant specialists ran their own small-scale shows as early as the 1880s. Hersi Egeh Gorshe (also spelled as Hersi Ige Gorse) from Somalia had come to Germany as a troupe member in the 1880s but soon was the one to recruit and organize the Somali shows for Hagenbeck and other companies, effectively monopolizing the lucrative ethnic-show business for mem-

\(^4\) E.g., eloping and joining the ethnic show with a woman against her family’s will.
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bers of his own clan. Part of the Somali strategy was to successfully mimic and act the role of neighboring ethnic groups—adopting their attire, songs, and dances, and thus covering ethnic-show themes from all over northeast Africa (cf. Warsame's chapter in this volume). Moroccan artistes have monopolized the “human pyramid” act right up to the present day and connected it with their own traveling ethnic shows in the 1920s. The years after World War I also saw a number of black Germans run ethnic shows of their own (Escher 1999; Thode-Arora 1989, 163–65; unpublished interview with Theodor Wonja Michael, November 1999).

Ethnic shows offered an opportunity to the spectators for face-to-face contact with the performers. This bore the risk of unexpected behavior, of communication and images not intended to be conveyed by the organizers of the exhibition. There are documented cases of show participants trying to communicate their own messages about their culture, and of others who strived to change their hairstyle or put on European clothes, thus reducing the impression of an ethnic Other; there were performers who regularly went to pubs or dance halls; and there were flirtations, love affairs, and even marriages with spectators. Samson Dido from Cameroon, for example—a supposedly high-ranking man who came to Germany with one of the few Hagenbeck shows from the German colonies—chaired the performances given by his countrymen dressed in African attire but took no part in them. Outside performance hours, he made a point of donning a European dress coat and top hat with his loincloth. Abraham Ulrikab, a Christian Inuit from Labrador who kept a diary about his ethnic-show tour through Central Europe, was shocked by the spectators’ ignorance concerning his native country and about their indifference toward Christianity, which was a central aspect of his life. He actively tried to influence their image of his home region by seeking to engage the visitors in conversation and by illustrating his words with drawings (Leutemann 1887, 69; Thode-Arora 1989, 156, 2011).

Conclusion

At the time of the German Empire few were able to undertake journeys to distant countries. People could inform themselves about remote parts of the world through newspapers, magazines, and books but not through direct, personal observation. Part of the appeal of the ethnic shows for a European
public certainly was that the shows offered a surface on which to project images of an ethnic Other, fed by academic and popular paradigms of the time. The Hagenbeck company’s approach of audience immersion in staging the “villages”—giving the visitors a feeling of face-to-face encounters and the illusion of a journey—must have corroborated these images. From today’s perspective the ethnic shows can thus indeed be understood to represent what is called “ethnic othering” or “alterity”; for the people in Europe, it was a form of constructing one’s own identity, of distinguishing oneself from the perceived and construed physical and cultural otherness of the ethnic show participants—all the more important in Germany, which had only recently been unified from many small states into an empire.

For the last two decades, scholarship has concentrated on this aspect, especially the field of ethnic shows as linked to colonialism and the development of racial categories in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western academia and society. While this approach is no doubt important, it has, in my opinion, taken only Western perspectives into focus, thus reproducing discourses of Western agency and non-Western powerlessness that were virulent at the time of the ethnic shows.

Ethnic shows, however, were a complex phenomenon with a wide continuum of power relations in the processes of recruiting and organizing, as I hope to have shown in my actor-centered approach, concentrating on recruiters and organizers but also participants, relying on a large body of primary sources. Studies on a micro-level like this, examining in detail relevant individual cases, can reveal a subtext of indigenous agency in European sources, giving evidence of ethnic-show performers’ roles in the recruiting and organizing processes of the shows. I would like to argue here that the wide continuum of power relations between organizers and show participants has been under-researched, as scholars have mainly concentrated on European agency and perspectives, without critically challenging this ethnocentric view. Indigenous agency, motives, and strategies in ethnic-show recruitment and organization, even in adapting to audience expectations, backed by a number of sources, have been widely neglected and should be reconsidered in the future.
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