Staged Otherness

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PART THREE

Across Local Contexts
Chapter Nine


Andreja Mesarič

This chapter explores how encounters with racialized performers who visited the region with touring ethnographic shows and circuses in the late Habsburg period informed Slovene notions of “race.” It discusses how this experience not only contributed to the dissemination of Western racial discourses regarding blackness, savagery, civilization, and modernity, but also tied the emerging Slovene national identity to Europeanness and whiteness. Like all racial categories, whiteness is a historically contingent result of specific social and political processes of racialization but its unmarked nature often makes it invisible (Ahmed 2007; Frankenberg 1997; Garner 2007; Mills 1997; Wekker 2016), even in some scholarly analyses. This is especially so in the context of Eastern Europe, which does not have a history of overseas colonial expansion and postcolonial migration that made questions of race so central to Western European debates in the twentieth century. This lack of attention to race in scholarship on Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe is increasingly being questioned by scholars (e.g., Baker 2018; Bjelić 2021; Chang and Rucker-Chang 2013; Herza 2020; Imre 2005; Rexhepi 2018a; Shmidt and Jaworsky 2020; Urreña Valerio 2019). Yet much work remains to be done, especially when it comes to historically informed research on the formation

1 I would like to credit Jana Milovanović for her involvement in identifying relevant newspaper sources in the initial stages of the research that informed the writing of this paper.

2 I use the term “ethnographic show” as a common translation for the German Völkerschau, as most of the performances I discuss fall within this mode of living human display popularized by the German entrepreneur Carl Hagenbeck (see Ames 2008). I am aware of the critique that considers the term “ethnographic shows” problematic because it could reinforce the view that these performances represented “ethnographic reality” rather than choreographed fiction. However, I believe the term “show” captures well the performative element of this mode of human exhibition. I avoid the term “human zoos,” which has been criticized for erasing the agency of people involved in living human displays.
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of racial categories in these regions, and particularly the attachment of their dominant populations to whiteness. This chapter is intended as a step toward addressing this gap by exploring one particular phenomenon that contributed to the salience of race in a particular location: racialized popular entertainment forms in Slovene-inhabited regions of the late Habsburg Empire.

A substantial literature on living displays of indigenous people, commonly known as ethnographic shows or “human zoos,” argues that these performances offered Western audiences a palpable experience of their supposed racial and civilizational superiority. By portraying indigenous people as “savages” and placing them at a lower stage of human development, these shows served to justify Western imperial expansion (Atkin 2015; Ellis 2013; Lindfors 1999a; Manderson 2018; Mathur 2001; Poignant 2004; Purkayastha 2019; Qureshi 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Rydell 1993; Toulmin 2011; Vaughan 1996; Vinson and Edgar 2007; Welch 2011; Wiss 1994). The juxtaposition of non-European “savagery” and “barbarism” with modern technological achievements at a series of world’s fairs and exhibitions (Mathur 2001; Rydell 1993; Vaughan 1996), as well as the performers’ juxtaposition with audiences whose civilizational superiority as “modern man” they were meant to confirm, highlights modernity’s inseparability from coloniality, as theorized by Walter Mignolo (2011).

In an attempt to nuance analyses that emphasize the unequal power relations and objectification involved in such exhibitions, some scholars have highlighted performers’ agency in participating in shows and resisting unfair working conditions, as well as the variation in audience interpretations of the shows and the opportunities the shows created for interaction between spectators and performers (Ames 2008; Atkin 2015, 152–53; Ellis 2013; Qureshi 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Welch 2011). Despite these occurrences of “intercultural encounter” (Ames 2008, 88; Qureshi 2011, 8; Qureshi 2012a, 197–98), “the fundamental premise of cultural superiority and the hierarchical relationship between the observer and the observed would be shaken but never dismantled” (Ames 2008, 88). The shows remained inextricably linked to Western imperialism, both symbolically and materially. Most performers were recruited from European colonies and the North American West, and the characters they (as well as sometimes local performers) embodied featured in narratives that many spectators were familiar with through political press coverage and travel literature (Qureshi 2012b).
Furthermore, ethnographic shows played an important role in popularizing notions of race that developed earlier in the nineteenth century. They not only juxtaposed bodies racialized as black and brown with implicitly white audiences but also provided the audience with a frame for interpreting what they saw through pamphlets, lectures, and press releases, which inscribed the bodies on display with specific, racialized meanings. These interpretive devices in turn drew on scientific discourses, particularly ethnological and anthropological works, as well as travel literature and adventure fiction (Atkin 2015, 137–38; Qureshi 2011, 6; Qureshi 2012a, 2012b; Novikova 2013, 576–78; Strother 1999, 25). Ethnographic shows framed the otherness of the performers not only in cultural terms but also in racial terms. In acknowledgment of the shows’ active role in popularizing ideas of race, I use the term “racialized otherness” and “racialized Others” throughout this chapter. By “choreographing” racial difference (Ames 2008, 102), the shows “made the idea of scientific racism visible” (Manderson 2018, 260) to the masses. In short, the shows signaled “the West’s progressive transition from a ‘scientific’ racism to a colonial and ‘mass’ racism” (Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemair, cited in Novikova 2013, 576).

If “the context of the show was not necessarily the venue, but the political and ideological message that it conveyed” (Toulmin 2011, 270), what does this mean for ethnographic show performances taking place on European peripheries with only tenuous links to European imperial expansion? I focus on what encounters with racialized otherness embodied in ethnographic shows and circus acts might have looked like from the perspective of what could be considered a “double periphery”—Slovene-inhabited lands of the Habsburg Empire. Focusing on the period between 1880 and 1914, I examine Slovene-language newspapers published in the regions of Carniola, the Austrian Littoral, and Lower Styria as an example of a geopolitical and

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3 I should add that while these links were tenuous, they were not non-existent. The Habsburg monarchy’s rule of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878–1918) is now widely recognized as colonial, and its civilizing mission in the region relied considerably on Slavic bureaucrats and medical professionals from various regions of the Habsburg monarchy (Fuchs 2011; Rexhepi 2018b; Ruthner et al. 2015). Furthermore, the Habsburg monarchy was not without overseas imperial ambition (Sauer 2012). We can also trace the region’s broader colonial entanglements through Habsburg citizens’ involvement in Christian missionary work (see below), commercial ventures, travel, and scholarship. Suffice it to mention Bronisław Malinowski, a native of Kraków, and his crucial contribution to British anthropology based on research in the Australian-controlled Trobriand Islands.
linguistic periphery within the Habsburg Empire. I supplement this examination with German-language sources published in the same regions.

One challenge of researching ethnographic shows in peripheral contexts is the relative lack of sources. In imperial metropoles shows were more frequent. One group of performers could stay for months at a time. In the regions discussed in this paper, groups were merely passing through and often stayed no more than a few days. Some records can be found in city archives, but they are few and far between. It is the traces of these performances captured in the local press that offer us most insight into the subject. Although many newspaper mentions of ethnographic shows are paid advertisements placed by tour managers, press releases, or short news pieces that offer scant information, we can occasionally stumble across articles that offer insight into how local audiences would have understood and engaged with these performances of cultural and racialized otherness. Glimpses into how performers might have engaged with audiences are even less frequent, not to mention filtered through the journalist’s gaze.

My primary sources were Slovenski narod (Slovene Nation) and Slovenec (The Slovene), the main Slovene-language newspapers published during the period in question. Slovenski narod first began publication in the Lower Styrian town of Maribor in 1868 but moved its seat to Ljubljana, the capital of the neighboring crownland of Carniola, in 1872. The newspaper addressed a politically liberal Slovene-speaking audience and promoted a Slovene nationalist agenda. In 1873 it was joined by Ljubljana-published Slovenec, which shared its nationalist outlook but addressed a Catholic conservative audience and at times considered the political views promoted by Slovenski narod as adversarial as German nationalism (Oven 2016, 46; Vodopivec 2006, 84; Zajc and Polajnar 2012, 36). Although both newspapers were published in Ljubljana, they featured reports from other Habsburg provinces with Slovene-speaking populations—namely, Lower Styria, the Austrian Littoral, and Carinthia. This played an important role in popularizing the idea of a Slovene-speaking reading public and a Slovene national space. In addition to these two newspapers, I drew on Laibacher Zeitung (Ljubljana Newspaper), the principal German-language newspaper published in Ljubljana since the

4 But not the region of Prekmurje/Muravidek (now the northeasternmost region of Slovenia), which formed part of Hungary and was not conceived as part of Slovene national space until later on.
late eighteenth century, which doubled as the official gazette (Oven 2016, 27; Zajc and Polajnar 2012, 33). This was a welcome addition to my analysis not only because it offered a potentially different perspective but also because, especially in the early part of the period in question, German-language newspapers often provided more detailed information about circus and ethnographic show performances (cf. Demski 2020). I also drew on a number of smaller, more short-lived Slovene- and German-language newspapers published in Ljubljana during this period.

While I focused my analysis largely on Ljubljana, I followed clues that Ljubljana-based newspapers offered about performances in nearby regions. I therefore also drew on Slovene-language newspapers published in Maribor, Trieste, and Gorizia and on the German-language Marburger Zeitung (Maribor Newspaper). All of the towns and cities in question were multilingual. According to government census numbers, Ljubljana (Ger. Laibach) was the only one among them with a Slovene-speaking majority of around 80 percent and an elite German minority of around 15 percent (Matić 2002, 433). The situation in Maribor (Ger. Marburg an der Drau) was the reverse, with roughly 80 percent German speakers and 15 percent Slovene speakers (Ferlež 2012, 42–43; Jenuš 2011, 85), although the proportion of Slovene speakers in the rural areas surrounding the town amounted to nearly 80 percent (Jenuš 2011, 85). In Trieste (in Italian, Trieste; in Slovene, Trst; in German, Triest) and Gorizia (in Italian, Gorizia; in Slovene, Gorica; in German, Görz), just over half of the population was Italian speaking, roughly a quarter Slovene speaking, and a tenth German speaking, with the remainder composed of a mix of the monarchy’s languages (Pletikosić 2006; Marušič 2013; Miklavčič Brezigar 2012).

I begin by briefly discussing some of the opportunities local audiences had to encounter people from outside Europe earlier in the nineteenth century. I then move on to newspaper representations of ethnographic shows and racialized circus performers between 1880 and 1914. I tease out some of

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5 Austrian census forms recorded the language of daily communication, which cannot be straightforwardly converted into native language, let alone national affiliation (van der Plank 2012). The percentages given above are averages for the period in question, with numbers fluctuating in different census years, sometimes considerably, due to migration, shifting allegiances, and irregularities in census data collection. In 1910, concerns around politically motivated misrecording of language data even led to the annulment of the census results in Trieste and Gorizia (Pletikosić 2006; Marušič 2013). While Ljubljana and Maribor are in present-day Slovenia, Trieste and Gorizia are in present-day Italy.
the common themes in the reception of ethnographic shows that extended to such performances elsewhere, particularly in relation to the highly racialized perceptions of performers and anxieties around racial mixing. I explore the interplay between wider media reporting, particularly on Africa, and the characters performers came to embody. I also observe the life those characters took on in media, political, and popular discourses at the turn of the twentieth century, beyond a direct link to African bodies. The chapter then turns to the question of how ethnographic shows and racialized circus acts were experienced from the perspective of an imperial periphery. I argue that the German Kulturmission, aimed at non-German Habsburg citizens in general and Slavs in particular, forms a crucial context for understanding how the reception of ethnographic shows might have differed in a Habsburg peripheral context. Viewing racially and culturally othered ethnographic show performers enabled a Slovene-speaking audience to assert its position as “civilized Europeans,” despite German claims that they could achieve this only by embracing the civilizing power of German culture. By extension, this embrace of generalized Europeanness, along with its assumed civilizational superiority, also implied an assertion of whiteness.

**Encounters with Racialized Others on the Habsburg Periphery**

While ethnographic shows in the true *Völkerschau* fashion did not appear in Carniola until the 1880s, this was not the first time local audiences had the opportunity to encounter people from Africa and Asia. A particularly interesting, while perhaps not obvious, example are public baptism ceremonies of African children brought to Carniola in the 1850s. Ignacij Knoblehar, a local Carniolan, and the Genovese Niccolò Olivieri were Catholic missionaries, who bought enslaved children in Sudan and Egypt and brought some of them back to Europe to train as missionaries. The Catholic newspaper *Zgodnja Danica* (*Morning Star*) regularly reported on the work of both missionaries, collected donations for the purchase of slaves from its readers, and reported on children arriving to Carniola, specifically to Ljubljana and Škofja Loka (Ger. Bischofslack; Frelih 2009, 150–52; Kolar 2003; Šepetavc 1994, 26–27). The children’s baptisms were elaborate ceremonies, open to the

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6 Ignaz Knoblecher in German-language sources.
public, that attracted large crowds of spectators (Frelih 2009, 151–52). The public was not charged admission and the events were not claiming to introduce audiences to African customs, as would be the case with ethnographic shows, but the events nevertheless framed blackness as otherness in need of Catholic domestication. On the pages of Zgodnja Danica, missionary discourse blended into ethnography as frequent reports from Knoblehar’s mission in southern Sudan included detailed descriptions of local customs. While a detailed exploration of Carniolan missionary engagement with Africa is outside the scope of this chapter, this phenomenon highlights how peripheries that did not sit at the centers of European imperial power could still be implicated in imperial projects (Wendt 2018).

In the same period, Carniolan audiences also had the opportunity to see non-European circus performers who came to the region with touring circuses. German and Italian circuses, along with other forms of popular entertainment such as panopticons, panoramas, and menageries, had been coming to Ljubljana since the late eighteenth century (Budna Kodrič and Pešak Mikec 1999; Drašler 2009). Newspaper sources mention non-European circus performers only in passing. For example, an 1854 issue of the Laibacher Zeitung mentions a troupe of Chinese jugglers that stopped in Ljubljana. The newspaper gave their performance a lukewarm review, noting that its highlight was “the appearance of the Chinese themselves. Once you have seen and heard them, the punchline is over” (Laibacher Zeitung, November 4, 1854). An 1876 issue of the Laibacher Zeitung is even sparser with information, briefly mentioning the “American negro violin clown Breatori” in its announcement of an upcoming performance of circus Sidoli that was making its way to Ljubljana from Zagreb (June 22, 1876).

Ljubljana saw a lot of passing traffic that did not necessarily make a stop in the city. It was positioned along the Southern Railway, the main transport link between Vienna and Trieste completed in 1857 (Judson 2016, 120). Trieste was the Empire’s largest port, which held Europe-wide importance.

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7 The jugglers’ performance is mentioned in Budna Kodrič and Pešak Mikec (1999, 33). The translation of the quotation is based on the original article in Laibacher Zeitung.

8 I use the term “negro” at several points in this chapter as a translation for the German Neger and Slovene zamorec. I recognize the problematic nature of all three terms, but I feel I could not write about the racializing effects of ethnographic show performances by omitting terms so crucial to nineteenth-century racial discourse. I limit the use of these terms to direct quotations and descriptions of newspaper reporting.
as a transport hub. Ethnographic show managers relied on existing international trade and transport networks in recruiting performers and planning tour itineraries (Demski 2020, 206; Ellis 2013, 195; Qureshi 2011, 108), which would have made Trieste and the Southern Railway an important route for performers traveling from Africa to Europe. This was the route taken by the “Nubian caravan” brought to Hamburg by Carl Hagenbeck in 1876 (Rothfels 2002, 55; on Hagenbeck also see Thode-Arora in this volume). In June of that year, the *Laibacher Zeitung* reported how a shipment of “interesting passengers” passed through Ljubljana’s train station on its way from Trieste to Hamburg zoo, including “lions, tigers, elephants, panthers, and other tropical inhabitants . . . accompanied by several negro keepingers” (*Laibacher Zeitung*, June 21, 1876). While the newspaper does not name Carl Hagenbeck or Bernhard Kohn, who arranged the shipment of animals and recruited the performers at Hagenbeck’s behest (Ames 2008, 29), the dates and locations do match up. The reference to the animals’ “nego keepingers” (*Negerwärten*) is particularly interesting as performers in Hagenbeck’s first “Nubian caravan” are known to have worked as animal traders prior to joining the troupe (Ames 2008, 29).

Ljubljana and other towns in the region did not have a zoo, a common setting for ethnographic shows in larger cities (e.g., Ames 2008; Balme 2007; Scott 1997; Thode-Arora 1989). Shows were staged in theaters, beer halls, public squares, and, towards the end of the period in question, open-air entertainment venues at the city edges. Performers who made a stop in Ljubljana were often passing through on their way to larger cities in Central or northwestern Europe. In February 1880 a five-member Zulu Kaffir troupe (in Slovene, *Culukafri*, in German, *Zulukaffern*) led by a proprietor from London called Wood⁹ stopped in Ljubljana. They did not set up in a dedicated performance space, where the troupe would live throughout their stay, as would be the case with future shows; instead, the troupe performed two shows at Ljubljana’s provincial theater (*Landestheater*) and stayed with their manager at the Elefant (Elephant) Hotel (*Laibcher Tagblatt*).

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⁹ The local press unfortunately only gives his surname, which makes it difficult to establish his identity. It might be John Wood, who brought a Dahomey group to Europe in 1891–92 (see Novikova 2013, 579 for Paris and Czarnecka 2020 for Warsaw, Poznań, and Kraków); however, I found no conclusive evidence for this.
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February 26, 1880). They came to Ljubljana from Gorizia (Soča [Isonzo River], February 27, 1880) and continued on their way to Vienna (Laibacher Tagblatt, February 25, 1880). In June 1885, a “Sudanese caravan,” managed by Heinrich Möller11 from Hamburg, stopped in Ljubljana for five days on its way from Trieste to the world’s fair in Antwerp. The group made up of sixteen men was accompanied by a number of animals including camels and gazelles and set up a performance space in one of the city’s public squares12 (Ljubljanski List [Ljubljana Paper], June 8, 1885; Laibacher Zeitung, June 8, 1885). In May 1899, the Sudanese “Shilluk village,” made up of twenty men, women, and children, also made their way to Ljubljana from Trieste. They stayed for ten days but, according to the Laibacher Zeitung (May 18, 1899), could not extend their stay any longer if they were to keep their three-month engagement at Amsterdam zoo. By then, Ljubljana had a dedicated outdoor entertainment venue called Lattermannsallee (in German) or Lattermanov drevored (in Slovene), which became the main setting for various forms of popular entertainment including circuses and ethnographic shows (Budna Kodrič and Pešak Mikec 1999, 29–30). The Shilluk group was housed in huts set up in Lattermansallee/Lattermanov drevored,13 which doubled as their performance space (Laibacher Zeitung, May 18, 1899).

Another Sudanese group billed as Nubian came to Ljubljana in 1911 with manager Charles Crassé and stayed for just over two weeks between May 22 and June 5 (Slovenec, May 22, 1911; Laibacher Zeitung, June 3, 2011).

10 The building of the Landestheater, located in present-day Congress Square, now houses the Slovene Philharmonic. The Elephant Hotel continues to operate under the Slovene name Hotel Slon, although its building was entirely reconstructed in the 1930s. The institution was purportedly named after the first elephant that visited Ljubljana and was housed in the courtyard of an inn standing in the same location. The hotel’s advertising and local tour guides claim this was the famous Soliman or Suleyman, who accompanied the future Holy Roman Emperor Maximillian I on his way to Vienna in 1552. An elephant from the Portuguese colony of Kotte in present-day Sri Lanka did make its way to Vienna via Lisbon and Habsburg Spain in the company of the future Emperor (Jordan-Gschwend 2010; Saurer and Hinshaw-Fischli 2003). However, historical sources show that the pair arrived in Austria via Tyrol, bypassing Carniola entirely. The story and its deployment nevertheless raise interesting questions regarding connections between provincial Habsburg lands and European overseas colonial expansion as well as past and present local attempts at insertion into that history. The hotel was most likely named after another elephant called Misibaba, who was exhibited at the location around 1818 (Pešak Mikec and Budna Kodrič 2002, 345).

11 This is most likely Willy Möller. Both the Volkerschau literature that mentions Willy Möller (Ames 2008, 74; Dreesbach 2005, 52–53) and the advertising in Ljubljana-based newspapers mention a man called Stüber as Möller’s collaborator.

12 Emperor Joseph’s Square, present-day Krek Square.

13 This was located on the grounds of present-day Tivoli Park.
The twenty-five-member group arrived from Gorizia where they performed between May 7 and 14 (Soča, May 6, and 13, 1911). The newspapers do not mention the next stop of the Sudanese group, nor its final destination. The Laibacher Zeitung does mention, however, that Crassé stopped in Ljubljana sixteen years earlier as part of another “big tour of Europe” with his “Suaheli” or Swahili group (Laibacher Zeitung, May 19, 1911). I unfortunately could not locate evidence of this earlier group in the local press in Ljubljana; however, mention of Crassé and a Suaheli group from East Africa appears in Maribor-published Marburger Zeitung and Slovenski gospodar (Slovene Landowner) in March of 1892 (Marburger Zeitung, March 6, 1892; Slovenski gospodar, March 3, 1892). The group—made up of sixteen or seventeen men, women, and children—performed at the Götz beer hall in Maribor for four days and continued on to the Styrian capital of Graz after leaving the city (Marburger Zeitung, March 6, 1892).

The presence of non-European performers, and their billing as such, in circus troupes seems to have intensified around the turn of the century (see Baraniecka-Olszewska in this volume). Circuses included these performers as acrobats or horse riders but also framed them as representatives of “their peoples.” For example, the German Strassburger circus, which visited Ljubljana and Maribor in July 1911, featured Völkergruppen including “Mamluks, Arabs, Riff Kabyles, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians, who will display the most outstanding in their native arts” (Marburger Zeitung, July 18, 1911). A few months earlier, another German outfit, the Schmid circus, stopped in Ljubljana. It included Chinese acrobats and “black Sudanese” in its program, although the act performed by the latter was not specified in the press (Slovenski narod, May 31, and June 1, 1911). While these circus performances attracted a significant audience, it was the Americans Barnum and Bailey and Buffalo Bill’s visits in 1901 and 1906, respectively, that really drew crowds. Buffalo Bill came to Ljubljana via Trieste and continued on to Zagreb, Maribor, Klagenfurt, and Graz, while Barnum and Bailey’s tour avoided the Austrian Littoral, coming to Ljubljana from Hungary via Zagreb and continuing on to Maribor and Graz. If press coverage is to be believed, Barnum and Bailey’s two shows in Ljubljana on May 30, 1901 attracted 30,000 viewers, including an estimated 8,000 nonresidents who came to Ljubljana specifically for the occasion (Slovenski narod, May 31, 1901; Budna Kodrič and Pešak Mikec 1999, 34). Buffalo Bill’s show five years later had a
slightly lower turnout, with *Slovenski narod* (May 17, 1906) claiming that both of the shows attracted 11,000 viewers, while *Slovenec* (May 17, 1906) stated that the afternoon performance attracted 9,000 visitors, while the evening show attracted a somewhat larger audience.14 While both of these estimates put the number of visitors lower than for Barnum and Bailey’s show, *Slovenec* nevertheless observed that “wherever you go these days, all anyone talks about is Buffalo Bill” (May 22, 1906).

It is interesting to note that advertising and reporting on Barnum and Bailey’s shows do not focus on racialized performers, even though it is known that the circus included exhibits of non-Europeans in its program (Qureshi 2011, 141–42). The only reference in the local press that we could find is to a “Hindu, who grew a second body” in a review of Barnum and Bailey’s “abnormalities” sideshow in *Slovenski narod* (May 31, 1901). This lack of emphasis on racialized difference might be a reflection of Barnum’s focus on displaying human oddities that built on the freak-show tradition, in which “physical oddity trumped national character” (Ames 2008, 70), distinct from the *Völkerschau* approach in which performers were framed as “typical” representatives of their peoples (Ames 2008, 70–71). Advertising and reporting on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, in contrast to coverage of Barnum and Bailey’s shows, feature the wide array of “peoples,” including Bedouins, Japanese samurai, and Cossacks, and particularly its one hundred Native Americans, who performed in the show (cf. Barabas in this volume; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020).

**Ethnographic Shows and Racialized Circus Performers in the News**

Newspaper coverage of ethnographic shows and circus acts involving non-European performers in Ljubljana and other towns and cities in the wider

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14 Ticket sales for performances are difficult to verify. One factor that might have contributed to the large attendance at Barnum and Bailey and Buffalo Bill’s shows is the intensive marketing campaigns undertaken by the shows’ promoters (cf. Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020; see also Barabas in this volume) and the fact that both stopped in Ljubljana for only one day, while other circuses and ethnographic shows stayed longer and would have had visitors distributed over the entire duration of the stay. For example, *Slovenec* and *Slovenski narod* report the number of visitors for the Nubian ethnographic show in Ljubljana in 1911 for only two days out of its fifteen-day stay. The show was reportedly attended by 1,300 adults and 336 children on May 25 and by 2,317 adults and 279 children on May 28—the latter, being a Sunday, attracted a larger number of visitors. Over the entire stay this could have added up to a significant number.
region is in many ways reminiscent of what we know about ethnographic shows elsewhere. While members of ethnographic shows often performed an act involving skill, such as dancing, singing, and mock fighting, the main point of interest for the audience was their appearance. This is reminiscent of the *Laibacher Zeitung* description of the 1854 Chinese juggling troupe, wherein seeing and hearing the performers was considered to be the main act (see above). However, reports from later in the century pay much closer attention to describing the physical characteristics of the performers, especially of Africans, including routine references to black men’s strong bodies and descriptions of black skin (cf. Qureshi 2011, 170). An article in the Gorizia-based newspaper *Soča* used the following words to describe the performance of the Zulu Kaffir troupe in 1880:

Last Monday the Zulu Kaffirs presented themselves in the local theater. Despite the bad weather, the space was bursting with people streaming in. But their curiosity was poorly rewarded. We saw, and unfortunately also heard, five savages [*divjaki*] with dark, almost black skin, completely naked apart from some sort of fur wrapped around their head, waist and under their knees. The men have a handsome full body with limbs of steel, but their heads are somehow clumsy. It is especially their thick protruding lips that disfigure their physical looks. They sang some sort of war songs, of course in the Zulu language comprehensible to no one, threw swords at a target and wrestled each other. It was all very savage and not very enticing for a cultured person. (*Soča*, February 27, 1880)15

This description demonstrates that although the Zulus were performing a show involving skills (singing, sword throwing, and wrestling), it was the performers’ physical appearance that was of primary interest to the audience. The news item contains another commonplace trope in newspaper reporting on ethnographic shows—the focus on African “savagery,” which was explicitly or implicitly opposed to (European) civilization and culture. A letter from a reader to *Slovenski narod* in response to the 1885 “Sudanese caravan” in Ljubljana highlights the role noise played in defining this “savagery”:

15 See also Zajc and Polajnar 2012, 79.
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Thank God, the wild Sudanese, who made a racket all day long and savagely screamed and disturbed the public peace on the square and of local inhabitants, have left . . . The black-brown Sudanese screamed like wild animals. I wonder how the city elite can allow such buffoonery on a public square among public school institutions and public imperial and royal finance offices. How it was possible to officiate among loud screaming, three-hour long drumming sessions and rattling, only God knows. (Slavenski narod, June 19, 1885)

Not only are the Sudanese contrasted with the civility of “imperial and royal” public life that should be allowed to proceed undisturbed, but the Sudanese performers are likened to animals, specifically through their production of noise. The association of the performers with animals would also have been strengthened through the advertising for the show, which clearly identified the troupe’s manager, Heinrich Möller, as an animal merchant (fig. 9.1).

A front-page article in the Catholic conservative newspaper Slovenec (June 16, 1885), commenting on the same Sudanese exhibit of “sixteen seminaked negroes,” denounced the displaying of people for profit on principle, “even if they are savages.” Signing the article simply as “Philanthropist”

Figure 9.1. Advertisement for the Sudanese caravan in Ljubljana. Slavenski narod, June 12, 1885.
(Človekoljub), the author disapproved of the audience’s mocking attitude to the performers, arguing that they deserved pity instead. He expressed dismay that such a thing was possible in “today’s nineteenth century of enlightenment, culture, and freedom.” The author’s choice of pen name and newspaper are revealing. Christian missionaries and philanthropists were often critical of the exploitation involved in human displays and of the neglect of the spiritual welfare of the performers (Qureshi 2011, 106, 139, 169; Qureshi 2012a, 189–90; Ames 2008, 91). As Amit Rai argues, missionary discourse used sympathy to reinforce racial and social difference. Sympathetic identification with racial Others—in this case the ethnographic show performers—enabled the construction of the Self as a moral being. However, this identification could never be full in order to maintain the boundaries between the white, male Self, and the racial Other (cited in Atkin 2015, 149). After all, the “Philanthropist” was not concerned only with the welfare of the Sudanese performers but also about the possibility that their performance might fool an uncritical audience into thinking there is credibility to “Darwin’s theory of man and ape” (Slovenec, June 16, 1885). Despite expressing compassion, the author nevertheless asserts racial hierarchies by framing the performers as reminiscent of animals.

Some of the quotations referenced above point to another feature used in newspaper reporting to mark African performers as “savages,” their purported nakedness (cf. Peacock 1999, 91–92). Dress played an important role in framing performers as “authentic,” and managers made sure costumes matched audience expectations (Qureshi 2011, 119–20; Scott 1997, 56–57; Strother 1999, 25–28). This included not only conforming to specific ethnic stereotypes but also the notion of the “savage” as (half-) naked. Clothing was used as a marker of human development (Qureshi 2011, 119–20) and performers’ costumes conveyed “coded messages about the inferiority of non-Europeans” (Atkin 2015, 136). After all, a lack of clothes connotes a lack of culture (Strother 1999, 7). Performers could be ascribed an inherent nakedness even when they appeared to be clothed in European fashion. Slovenski narod, for example, noted that the Shilluk “are prevented from displaying themselves to the audience in their original African nakedness by the police and even more so by our cold” (Slovenski narod, May 15, 1899). Although most strongly associated with Africans, nakedness could be used to mark the “savagery” of other Others as well. The Trieste newspaper Edinost (Unity), for example, reported...
that Buffalo Bill’s opening act brought together all of the show’s performers “from half-naked Indians decorated with feathers and painted with vivid colors to brilliantly uniformed cavalry men of the United States of America” (Edinost, May 16, 1906), suggesting a sartorial scale of civilization (fig. 9.2). Newspapers attributed greater skill to non-European circus performers than to African performers in ethnographic shows. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, and the praise afforded to the horsemanship of its performers, can be observed as a paradigmatic example of this tendency. Despite the emphasis on displaying skill and Buffalo Bill’s greater similarity to the circus than to classic ethnographic shows (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020), performers in this show were not spared the racializing lens of the press. Newspapers routinely referred to Native American performers as “redskins” (in Slovene rdečkožci, in German, Rothäute). While their supposed “savagery” was not emphasized to the same extent as Africans’, newspapers made sure to contrast Native American performers with European civilization. Parroting the shows’ advertising campaign that presented Native Americans as a people on the brink of extinction (Barabas in this volume), Slovenec urged its readership to go and see “real Indians” before they were finally tamed by civilization:

The redskins are the last representatives of native tribes of the north American land . . . All participants accompanying colonel Cody belong to nomadic tribes who live in tents and who will soon disappear from human society . . . It will show how simply they lived for so many centuries of fighting that now finally ended and made way for the increasing welfare of growing civilization and peace. (May 15, 1906) (figs. 9.3 and 9.4)
While a greater number of performers were men, some shows included women and children. Sometimes newspapers encouraged the audience to observe how men, women, and children compare to each other in their appearance. *Slovenski narod* noted of the Shilluk exhibit:

The women are as strong as men with solid figures, but their faces are considerably more appealing, less savage and they have smaller, thinner lips. Some of them are up for a laugh and stand out with their big black eyes. Especially adorable are the two children, who are cheerful and have really handsome faces. (May 15, 1899)
The ultimate “savages” were therefore not Africans in general but specifically African men.\(^{16}\) Another interesting aspect of the quotation is its description of the women as “up for a laugh,” suggesting a degree of interaction between performers and audience members. We get only glimpses of these interactions in newspaper accounts—for example, when Soča informs us that after the show, the Zulu Kaffirs “scattered throughout the theater so that everyone could see them up close and give them a feel” (February 27, 1880). Newspapers also mention the attention paid to female spectators by male performers. This press coverage is permeated with discourses on the threatening nature of African masculinity and “savage” sexuality. Ethnographic shows not only invited the audience to confirm its racial and civilizational superiority but also raised anxieties about sexual encounters between performers and audience members, particularly between black men and white women (Ames 2008, 94–102; Atkin 2015, 151–52; Ellis 2013, 204; Herza 2016, 98–102; Qureshi 2011, 143–46, 162–64). The \textit{Laibacher Zeitung} noted of the performers of the “Sudanese caravan”:

\begin{quote}
They are powerful figures . . . with features that are hardly surpassed in beauty by a white man. And Muhamed Nenir, the most beautiful and powerful of the men of the Hadendoa tribe, seems to be aware of this and is clearly seeking to impress the weaker sex of the palefaces, who, despite their natural shyness and fear of the “savages,” cannot get enough of the Nubian Apollo. (June 12, 1885)\(^ {17}\)
\end{quote}

According to Robin Ellis (2013, 204), “the very presence of the performers’ foreign bodies suggested the threat of interracial sex.” This posed a threat to social order and the racial purity of the nation and therefore fueled criticisms of ethnographic shows (Ames 2008, 94–102; Atkin 2015, 151–52; Ellis 2013, 204; Herza 2016, 98–102; Qureshi 2011, 162–64). The tone of the above article in the \textit{Laibacher Zeitung} seems to suggest that its author was taking pleasure in observing the interaction between Sudanese perform-

\(^{16}\) This does not mean African women were not portrayed as savage. The displaying of Sara Baartman in Britain and France in the early nineteenth century is a classic example (e.g., Strother 1999; Qureshi 2004). For an example temporally and spatially closer to our case, see Czarnecka’s (2020) work on Dahomey Amazon shows in 1890s Poland.

\(^{17}\) This is also a rare reference to a named individual as most performers remained unnamed in the press.
ers and local women. The same cannot be said of the person who penned a full-page article in *Slovenec* titled “Novi pripomoček k versko-nravni vzgoji, ka-li?” (“A New Tool in Religious-Moral Education, Is It?”; June 16, 1885). This article also noted the attention performers paid to female spectators, yet its author found the excitement this created in the “weaker and more sensitive sex” incomprehensible. Even worse, the author was shocked to find that a local school had breached Christian morals by bringing its female pupils to see the show: “Even more incomprehensibly incomprehensible [nerazumljivši nerazumljivo] is that our uncorrupted innocent delicately shy female school youth can withstand this without their cheeks blushing when watching half naked people clothed only in loin cloths, even if they are savages” (*Slovenec*, June 16, 1885).

The author seems to have found this so unfathomable that a single “incomprehensible” could not have conveyed the sentiment fully enough. It is also worth noting the string of adjectives employed by the author to construct young (white) women’s innocence, which at the same time contains a vulnerability to corruption through contact with black male bodies, even if only visual. Furthermore, the author found it particularly concerning that the school in question was a teacher-training college, an institution that educates future teachers of “our Christian Slovene people” (*Slovenec*, June 16, 1885), once again linking issues of interracial sexual contact to questions of national concern.

School visits to ethnographic shows would have probably been quite common. Advertising often promised reduced entrance fees for children and additional discounts for school groups (cf. Qureshi 2011, 156; Qureshi 2012b, 33; Czarnecka 2020, 293; Demski 2020, 214, 227). This can be interpreted as a reflection of the supposed educational nature of ethnographic shows, linked in turn to the purported authenticity of the performers and the customs they performed. Ethnographic shows aimed to both entertain and educate (Atkin 2015, 145; Balme 2007, 34–43; Mathur 2001, 492; Purkayastha 2019, 4; Welch 2011, 344–45). Show managers drew on scientific language, particularly that of ethnography and anthropology, to increase their credibility. They played a crucial role in providing audiences with tools and knowledge, through promotional materials, lectures, and visual cues such as costumes and props, which helped audiences interpret performances in specific, racialized ways (Ames 2008, 7, 65–70; Ellis 2013, 195–96; Qureshi
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On the southwestern periphery of the Habsburg Empire, the educational and ethnographic value of the shows was stressed by both the German- and Slovene-language press, which often relied on information provided in advertising materials and press releases. *Slovenski narod*, for example, described Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show not as a circus, but as “factual . . . an ethnological exhibition of various peoples where their authenticity awakens a keen interest in what they do as riders and as exemplars of a courageous life of a warrior and nomad” (May 14, 1906). When it came to African performers, advertising and press coverage sometimes stressed how freshly arrived from Africa they were as a way of strengthening their claims to authenticity. In the case of the “Sudanese caravan” in 1885 and the “Shilluk village” in 1899, newspaper coverage emphasized that after Trieste, Ljubljana was only the second city in Europe they had visited (e.g., *Slovenski narod*, June 9, 1885; *Laibacher Zeitung*, June 9, 1885, and June 3, 1899). Some newspapers made a similar claim for the Nubian group in 1911, which apparently performed only in Gorizia before their show in Ljubljana (*Laibacher Zeitung*, May 19, 2011, 101–25; Qureshi 2012b; Poignant 2004, 14; Lindfors 1999b, 64–65; Strother 1999, 24–31).

Figure 9.5. Photographs from a newspaper article about the 1911 Sudanese performance in Ljubljana. *Ilustrovani tednik*, June 2, 1911.
However, Gorizia newspaper Soča mentions in its announcement of their performance that the group had performed in “almost all European cities, zoos and exhibitions” (May 6, 1911) (fig. 9.5).

This highlights the flipside of the emphasis on ethnographic accuracy—namely, suspicions about performers’ authenticity. It was not uncommon for performers to embody characters whose ethnic origin did not match their own. The same group could tour under different names, consist of members of various origins, and include European- or American-born members (Ames 2008, 103–40; Ellis 2013, 198; Herza 2016, 96; Vinson and Edgar 2007, 47–48; cf. Warsame in this volume). Even when touring under their own name, performers were still portraying a character. Ethnographic show performances were choreographed by managers. The authenticity of ethnographic shows was always a performed authenticity that responded to audience expectations shaped by news reporting, travel literature, scientific discourses, and promotional material informed by those sources (Ames 2008, 74–76; Atkin 2015, 137–38; Ellis 2013, 192, 196; Novikova 2013; Poignant 2004, 1–14; Qureshi 2011, 6; Strother 1999, 25).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, ethnographic show performers were increasingly professional entertainers (Ames 2008; Poignant 2004; Qureshi 2011, 135–37), becoming “living signs of themselves” (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, cited in Mathur 2001, 492). This points to a “tension between authenticity and performance inherent in all Völkerschau exhibitions” (Ellis 2013, 195). Nonetheless, audiences felt duped if the ethnographic masque slipped. For example, an article in Laibacher Tagblatt (Ljubljana Daily) entitled “Zulu Swindle” (Zuluschwindel, February 26, 1880) expressed suspicion that the people on stage might have been “ordinary negroes” (gewöhnliche Neger) rather than actual Zulu Kaffirs, a sentiment echoed in Slovenec (February 26, 1880). A quarter of a century later, Slovenec ran an article stating that they had received news from Zagreb that the Cossacks performing as part of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show had been exposed as Russian Jews from the United States, having been given away by their fluent “Jewish German” (Slovenec, May 25, 1906). This threw suspicion on the authenticity of the show’s other performers, who had wowed the local audience just a few days earlier.

The way performers were framed depended more on what resonated with media representations of current events than with who they were. Sadiah
Qureshi convincingly argues that ethnographic shows were designed to be relevant to political and military events and that their topicality was a crucial element in their commercial success—the people on display became exemplars of political activity (Qureshi 2012a). In the case of the Zulu Kaffir group, who performed in Gorizia and Ljubljana in 1880, it was the Anglo-Zulu war that provided the context that made the group interesting to the audience. The relevance of political press coverage for the reception of ethnographic show performances is revealed by the same Laibacher Tagblatt article that expressed skepticism about the Zulu Kaffir’s authenticity. The reporter opined that the troupe manager’s description of conditions in Zululand that introduced the performance did not correspond to what was being reported in “English newspapers” (Laibacher Tagblatt, February 26, 1880), a further reason to suspect the performers as inauthentic.

While the Laibacher Tagblatt reporter found the manager’s talk unconvincing, the fact that the performance was framed by the manager’s introductory talk nevertheless highlights the importance of managers and promoters in influencing how audiences understood what they saw on stage. The very name Zulu Kaffir was popularized by the ethnographic show manager Charles Henry Caldecott, who brought a group of performers to London in 1853 at the height of the Kaffir (Xhosa) wars. Although Zulus and Xhosa were known to be distinct peoples, Caldecott conflated the two in order to capitalize on the popular interest in the South African military conflict (Qureshi 2011, 171; Qureshi 2012a, 184–86). Zulu Kaffir groups once again gained political relevance later in the nineteenth century during the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 (Qureshi 2012a; Vinson and Edgar 2007, 45–46), as demonstrated by the Zulu Kaffir show in Ljubljana and Gorizia in 1880. Both German- and Slovene-language newspapers reported on the developments of the Anglo-Zulu war in considerable detail the year before the Zulu Kaffirs’ visit, and Zulu Kaffir warriors would have been familiar characters to local audiences. That is why the Soča reporter could conclude the review of the performance in Gorizia with the following words: “Now we know what the Zulu, who last year killed the French prince Lulu, are like” (February 27, 1880), referring to the death of prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in the South African military conflict (Morris 1994, 529–30). Linguistically domesticated as culukafri, the Zulu Kaffirs captured the popular imagination (Zajc and Polajnar 2012, 74–84). An article about an intruder at a car-
nival party in Ljubljana, for example, informs us that he was “escorted out by four Zulu Kaffirs and a few harlequins” (Edinost, March 3, 1880), suggesting that by 1880 Zulu Kaffirs had become such a familiar character that they appeared as a carnival costume.18

A number of colonial conflicts served as context for the reception of other ethnographic show performances. Franco-Dahomean Wars (1889–90 and 1892–94) and the British occupation of the Ashanti Empire (1895–96) contributed to the popularity of Dahomean and Ashanti ethnographic shows across Europe (Herza 2016, 97). Samoan troupes became popular in Germany after the country colonized the islands in 1900 (Akeli 2015; Balme 2007). Taking it a step further, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show promised to reenact the conquest of the American West (Rydell and Kroes 2012; Welch 2011). Another imperialist conflict in Africa served as the context for the arrival of the “Sudanese caravan” to Ljubljana in 1885. The Sudanese performers were billed as warriors from Mahdi’s rebel army (e.g., Slovenski narod, June 9, 1885; Laibacher Zeitung, June 9, 1885), who resisted Ottoman-Egyptian and later British forces (Searcy 2011). Performing “warrior dances,” something that formed part of the repertoire of these and later African shows, had the dual role of portraying African men as fighting “savages” and offering a glimpse into what Europeans encountered on African battlefields. These ethnographic shows therefore promised not only an opportunity to observe “authentically” performed customs, dances, and songs but also to see a news story firsthand (Qureshi 2012a).

Press coverage, including satirical publications, and souvenir photographs ensured that types embodied by ethnographic show performers became familiar to a much greater number of people than those that attended a show (Qureshi 2011, 112, 155; Toulmin 2011, 266). Ethnographic shows did not necessarily have to perform in an area to reach its public. Scattered mentions of ethnographic shows that did not take place locally can be found in newspaper sources. The reading of newspapers published elsewhere in the Empire,

18 The proximity of this date to the Zulu Kaffir group’s arrival in Ljubljana also raises the question whether their performance might have influenced the choice of carnival costume. Various forms of blackface in the context of carnival celebrations are still a relatively common, largely unchallenged practice across much of Central and Eastern Europe today. This report is therefore a particularly valuable insight into how these practices first developed and the role ethnographic shows might have played in informing them.
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particularly Vienna, by bilingual elites (see Verdinella 2009) would have also served as an important avenue for “ethnographic types,” along with racializing language, to find their way into local media and popular discourse. This is how the Ashanti (Ašanti) became another familiar character in the Slovene popular imagination. Although Ashanti troupes never performed in Slovene-inhabited lands, the Viennese Ashanti exhibits of 1897 and 1898 (Scott 1997; Kim 2005) became known well beyond Vienna. An 1897 issue of Slovenec denounced the rioting of Viennese parliamentarians by comparing their behavior to that of “Ashanti-negroes” (Zajc and Polajnar 2012, 21). The memory of the Ashanti was still alive and well in 1906 when the satirical newspaper Osa (Wasp) mocked the bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič, for considering dancing a sinful path to temptation. The newspaper speculated that he might consider the Ashanti to be of higher morals, as they do not dance in pairs (Zajc and Polajnar 2012, 80) and accompanied the piece with a profoundly racializing satirical illustration (fig. 9.6).

Even more common than references to Zulu Kaffirs or the Ashanti in Slovene media discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centu-

Figure 9.6. Satirical illustration of the bishop of Ljubljana dancing with the Ashanti. Osa, February 10, 1906.
ries was the use of the term *zamorec* (pl. *zamorci*). It literally means “someone coming from beyond the sea” (see also Baker 2018, 119) and was used as a translation for the German word “Neger.” The term was used as a catch-all for people of African descent and formed part of racializing discourse about Africans.\(^{19}\) It was often used to refer to African performers in ethnographic shows. As demonstrated by Marko Zajc and Janez Polajnar (2012, 74–84), the word also took on a life of its own outside of direct reference to Africans. Politicians denounced their opponents as “negroes” or “zamorci” and the press referred to futile endeavors as “the washing of negroes” (*umivanje/pranje zamorčev*) (cf. Lyons 1975), highlighting how racial categories came to permeate public discourse at the turn of the twentieth century.

**Contextual Meanings of Racialized Performance**

The above discussion demonstrates that press coverage of ethnographic shows on the southwestern periphery of the Habsburg Empire shared many characteristics with their reception in Western imperial metropoles. Yet racialized displays of otherness did acquire specific meanings and purposes on the periphery. I argue that the Slovene case is peripheral in two ways. Firstly, Slovene-inhabited lands represented a geopolitical and economic periphery within the Habsburg monarchy. With the notable exception of Trieste, the Empire’s largest port, urban settlements in Slovene-inhabited crownlands of the Empire were small provincial towns with only nascent industries. They were not major destinations of ethnographic shows but merely short stops along the way. Especially when bigger shows and circuses whose reputations preceded them came to town, it gave these peripheral places an opportunity to feel they were a part of something “bigger and better.” News reports would list the cities in which shows had made a name for themselves, such as Paris, London, New York, and Vienna. Barnum and Bailey sent a press release emphasizing that they would not leave out any part of their usual program in their Ljubljana performance (*Slovenski narod*, May 20, 1901), alleviating concerns that smaller places would get a smaller show. When Buffalo Bill came to Ljubljana, *Lattermansallee* “felt as lively as Prater” (*Slovenec*...)

\(^{19}\) It was also part of earlier missionary discourse and appears in *Zgodnja Danica* in the form *zamurec* and the diminutive *zamurčik* or *zamurček*. The word *zamorec* is still used as a racial slur in modern Slovene.
May 19, 1906), giving Ljubljana a taste of Viennese life. Newspapers also informed readers of the numbers of people attending the show who were not local residents (*Slovenec*, May 16 and 17, 1906), turning Ljubljana into a destination rather than merely a stop on the way.

The Habsburg state was an empire that did not possess overseas colonies. In contrast with ethnographic shows in British, French, and to some extent German contexts, which introduced audiences to their colonial subjects, living displays of foreign peoples in the Habsburg context provided an opportunity for local audiences to indulge in “imperial fantasies” (cf. Křížová in this volume). Ethnographic shows served as a way of producing knowledge about the Other. They provided an opportunity for ordinary people to not only observe but also to “know” the Other (Welch 2011; Purkayastha 2019, 3; Qureshi 2011, 10). In the sources I surveyed, the press coverage of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show emphasized this particularly strongly. Newspapers stressed the necessity of learning about peoples whose lifestyles were about to be erased by the progress of modern civilization almost as a duty (see also Cvirn 1994). This gave the reporting an air of “salvage ethnography” (Gruber 1970) and an air of imperial conquest of the wider world and knowledge about it. According to *Slovenski narod*, “Buffalo Bill’s exhibit shows us representatives of all tribes known for their riding art and offers us a once in a lifetime chance to travel around the world” (May 15, 1906). *Slovenec* chimed in by calling the show “a treasure for anthropology” and by telling readers that the show was “indispensably necessary to know various tribes” (May 14, 1906). Local audiences could participate in the possessing of knowledge about Others as a form of vicarious imperialism.

Furthermore, for Slovene-speaking audiences, these encounters with otherness served as an opportunity to reassure themselves of their cultural and racial “Europeanness” in the face of German—and, in the context of the Littoral, also Italian—discourses that highlighted their Slavic inferiority. German nationalists in the Habsburg Empire saw the German nation and culture as synonymous with progress, education, and development. While they allowed for the option of national conversion—that is, for someone to become German via cultural assimilation—they understood “Slavic culture” to be inferior to “German culture” and considered Slavic nationalisms to contradict the very liberal values they considered synonymous with “Germanness” (Judson 2016; Okey 2007; Rampley 2017). In the late nine-
teenth century, differences between the Empire’s peoples were increasingly becoming viewed in terms of different levels of civilization and modernity (Judson 2016, 239–41; Telesko 2015; Ash and Surman 2012). Robin Okey notes that the ethnicization of progress was not specific to German liberalism. It was characteristic of European liberalism as a whole. Nevertheless, in contrast to the British, French, and Dutch, who used these developmental notions to justify racial dominance in their overseas empires, in the Habsburg context this ethnicization of progress “occurred inside Europe itself, in the encounter of German-speaking bourgeois with their own Slav neighbors” (Okey 2007, 82). Differences between Germans and Slavs were usually framed in terms of distinct cultures; however, differences between the Empire’s peoples could also be framed in (biologically) racial terms (Bartulin 2013, 44–70). In her work on the 1897 Ashanti exhibition in Vienna, Marilyn Scott (1997, 59) argues that we should understand the Ashantis as “ciphers of racialist thinking.” They not only represented themselves or even Africans as a whole but rather stood in for all “lower races,” including the Empire’s own Slavs and Jews.

This context gives new resonance to Slovene-language press reporting that positioned ethnographic-show performers as “savage” and “uncivilized” in contradistinction to the audience and the newspapers’ Slovene readership. Positioning Slovene-speaking audiences as the “cultured” and “civilized” viewer of the “savagery” on display, implicitly, puts them on equal terms with German-speaking audiences without requiring their conversion to German culture, language, or nationhood. A statement in relation to the Nubian exhibit in 1911 found in Slovenski narod is revealing: “Anyone who sees these people can judge for themselves whether they please us Europeans” (Slovenski narod, May 24, 1911). This subsumed the newspaper’s Slovene-speaking readership under a unified European label not marked specifically by “Germanness.”

There is other material that suggests that local receptions of ethnographic shows were refracted through political discourses on German, Italian, and Slavic or Slovene culture and the civilizing mission that accompanied them. For example, an author in Slovenec was displeased that the Zulu Kaffir group who visited Ljubljana in 1880 held its performance in the German-language provincial theater: “It is indeed strange that the Ljubljana Theater is now spreading German culture via savages from Africa or wherever they
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The author wonders how it was that “African savages” made it into the provincial theater, an institution that was meant to enlighten the populace with “superior” German culture. What seems to bother the author more than the fact that Africans are performing in the provincial theater, and in their own language, is that Slovenes are not.

Another relevant example is Italian objection to the printing of Slovene-language posters to advertise the appearance of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show in Trieste (Edinost, May 6, 1906; see also Ličen 2018, 11; Cvirn 1994, 2). It is likely that the use of Slovene on public posters would have caused a similar reaction regardless of the type of event being advertised. However, the content of the event nevertheless adds another dimension. By being directly addressed as an audience of racialized otherness, Slovenes become subjects invited to view objectified Others on display, on a par with Italian and German audiences.

I want to highlight another example, not directly related to ethnographic shows, in support of my interpretation. In 1901, Franc Bratuša, a wine grower from Lower Styria, was tried and convicted of murder and cannibalism of his daughter at the provincial court in Maribor (Studen 2016; Bischoff 2011, 169–71). Evidence against him included a book found at his home that described cannibalism in Australia (Studen 2016, 135–36). Although he was later released when his daughter was found alive, the story is of interest because of the newspaper debate that developed in its wake. Styrian German-language newspapers including the Marburger Zeitung, Pettauer Zeitung (Ptuj Newspaper), Deutsche Wacht (German Watch), and Grazer Tagblatt (Graz Daily) published a series of articles that ascribed Bratuša’s inclination for cannibalism to Slovene “savagery” (Studen 2016, 140). Cannibalism was the ultimate mark of the Other (Poignant 2004, 10–11). In German-language news reporting, Bratuša was framed not as a deviant individual but as an example of generalized Slovene “savagery,” serving as the Other to German civilization and culture.

20 This relates to suspicions about the troupe’s authenticity discussed above.
21 Franz Bratuscha, in German-language sources.
22 The book in question, titled Australia and Its Islands (Australija in nje otoki), was written by Ivan Vrhovec and published in Klagenfurt (in Slovene, Celovec) in 1899 by the Hermagoras Society (in Slovene, Mohorjeva družba; in German, Hermagoras Verein), a publishing house specializing in Slovene-language publications (Studen 2016, 135–136). Books such as this, which framed indigenous people as savages, were another avenue for popularizing Western racial discourses among a Slovene reading public.
A sense of *Kulturmission* was a central feature of German liberalism in regions with Slovene-speaking populations, which is evidenced by regular denunciations of *Kulturträger* or “bringers of culture” in the Slovene-language press (Oven 2016). These denunciations were commonplace throughout the period under study. What is particularly interesting is that they occasionally appear in relation to European endeavors in Africa. *Slovenski narod*, for example, wrote about the attacks of the Abyssinian army on “Italian culture bringers” (June 27, 1896). In 1896, the newspaper also published a two-part article under the title “Nemška kultura v Afriki” (“German Culture in Africa”) about the arrest of a plantation owner in German East Africa for brutality toward his black workers (*Slovenski narod*, July 27 and 29, 1896). In a twist of perspective, it was the Germans who lacked European civility and culture, not Slavs (cf. Herza 2016). It is no coincidence that *Slovenski narod* targeted German and Italian imperial endeavors, rather than the more influential British or French, as it was German and Italian nationalisms that competed with Slovene nationalism and sought to civilize Slovenes.

**Conclusion**

Exploring the forms and reception of ethnographic shows on European peripheries, we find both similarities and points of departure with the incarnations of living human displays in the centers of Western imperial power. As many of the shows that toured Central and Eastern Europe were organized by the same promoters as those that visited the West, the shows came equipped with the same racializing language that relied on the scholarly authority of anthropology and the excitement of travel literature. Performances were framed as a mix of education and entertainment and were tinged with political relevance parading a series of colonial battlefields before European audiences. Other common themes are the focus on performers’ physical appearance and supposed “savagery,” and the anxieties around sexual mixing and racial purity. It is this very framing of racialized difference established by ethnographic shows that served as an important avenue for popularizing Western discourses on race and racial stereotypes in the Slovene-speaking Habsburg periphery and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Czarnecka and Demski 2020).
The ways ethnographic shows that took place on the southwestern periphery of the Habsburg Empire were reported in Slovene- and German-language newspapers were remarkably similar and often read as if copied from promotional material and press releases. Even when we can discern an authorial voice, the view of ethnographic-show performers expressed in Slovene and German sources did not seem to differ considerably (cf. Demski 2020). What differed somewhat was how those perceptions figured in how German- and Slovene-speaking audiences saw themselves. The reception of ethnographic shows needs to be considered not only in the context of European imperial expansion but also in the context of late nineteenth-century nationalist projects (cf. Czarnecka and Demski 2020; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020; Kontler 2020) and attendant discourses about specific national cultures, which often positioned them hierarchically. It is this internal othering that I found to be specific to the case I considered and other Central and Eastern European contexts (e.g., see Novikova 2013). While Slovene engagement with ethnographic shows was no doubt underwritten by racialist ideas, the classic interpretation that these performances reinforced the supposed racial superiority of white Europeans and legitimized imperial expansion acquires a slight inflection. I argue that it allowed Slovene audiences to partake in a similar feeling of superiority, while deflecting German and Italian nationalist discourses that positioned them as the uncivilized Other. It is primarily this that distinguishes the impact of ethnographic shows on the Habsburg periphery from that in London or Paris and perhaps even the Habsburg metropole.

In her work on the Viennese Ashanti exhibit in 1897, Marilyn Scott argues that ethnographic shows provided a means for the city’s increasingly multi-ethnic population to overcome their differences and achieve a common identity defined against the radical difference on display at the zoo (Scott 1997, 51). Scott is not alone in her reasoning. The literature offers similar interpretations of the role of ethnographic shows in forging a common American identity out of a multitude of immigrant groups in the United States (Vaughan 1996, 231). However, I find Irina Novikova’s interpretation of the role of ethnographic shows in Riga, part of the Russian Empire but dominated by a German elite, most relevant to my case. Novikova argues that viewing racialized African performers allowed Latvians to position themselves within “the meta-frame of Europeanness” and provided them with “a generic model of racial identity” (Novikova 2013, 588). My material led me to a similar con-
clusion. Whiteness does not merely refer to the color of one’s skin but is intimately connected with the idea of Europe as a space of civilization and modernity, defined against the savagery and barbarism that surrounds it and requires its intervention (Mills 1997; Baker 2018). An important role of ethnographic shows was that it allowed Slovene audiences, themselves perceived as lacking in terms of civilizational progress, to position themselves as civilized Europeans, through a supra-identity of Europeanness as whiteness, which did not require a “national conversion” to “Germanness.” The staging of ethnographic shows contributed not only to racializing the performers as black or brown, or indeed “red,” but also to specific ways in which audiences adopted an unmarked identity of whiteness. While a Slovene or Slavic identity could be marked by cultural, as well as sometimes racial, inferiority, this supposedly neutral identity of white Europeaneness was not.

My contribution only begins to unpack the history of living human displays, racial thinking, and colonial entanglements on the Habsburg peripheries partly inhabited by Slovenes. The newspapers I relied on as my primary source did not merely operate in a context of nationalism but were themselves promulgators of nationalism. Therefore, not all Slovene- and German-speaking audiences would have necessarily shared the views of Slovene and German newspapers. This is particularly pertinent given recent historiographical work that has demonstrated the relatively slow pace of the spread of nationalism among the general population in the Habsburg Empire and the persistence of national indifference (Judson 2016; Stergar 2012; Zahra 2008). Much of the audience of ethnographic shows that we discuss would have been multilingual and might have shifted national allegiances or perhaps avoided them completely. Moreover, the analytical focus on the role that a universalized notion of German culture played in othering Slovenes and in shaping Slovene engagement with ethnographic shows neglects the perspectives of other audiences who shared the same geographical space, particularly Roma and Jews, themselves subject to intense racialization during this period. I was also unable to consider Italian-language sources, which would have added another perspective and additional valuable data on Trieste and Gorizia.

Furthermore, relying on newspaper coverage comes with a number of limitations. Given the nature of the sources, we capture moments in the life of ethnographic shows and might even learn about their final destination, but it is difficult to reconstruct entire routes, unless we are dealing
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with well-researched, large outfits such as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. Reconstructing routes would be an important next step in understanding how groups moved between different parts of Europe and what guided those trajectories. The most glaring omission in relying on newspaper sources is a lack of the performers’ perspectives on their task of performing otherness and on their view of audiences (cf. Atkin 2015, 152; Qureshi 2011, 9). We cannot recover a complete picture of how audiences engaged with ethnographic shows from newspaper coverage, nor do we find out much about audiences themselves. We know shows were attended by men, women, and children, including school groups, but we cannot know much about who they were. Apart from the occasional comment on the pleasure female audience members took in attracting the attention of male performers, most mentions of the audience are limited to estimating the number of visitors and the shows’ drawing in visitors from outside the city.

An interesting future topic of research would be exploring the involvement of locals with the shows. In 1906, for example, Slovenski narod (May 17, 1906) and Slovenski narod (May 17, 1906) both reported the disappearance of local soldier Andrej Vičič. He was suspected of leaving Ljubljana with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show on account of being seen talking to Buffalo Bill’s Native American performers and because he had previously worked for Barnum and Bailey. Another fruitful research avenue would be exploring resistance to attending ethnographic shows and circus performances. In this article, we touched on the criticism directed at exhibiting people by Catholic conservative circles, but there seems to have been a broader resistance to the frivolous spending of money on such forms of entertainment that was captured in both the conservative and liberal press particularly in relation to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (e.g., Slovenec, May 30, 1906; Slovenski narod, May 19, 1906; cf. Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020). Particularly important work would be to compare the phenomenon of ethnographic shows in Central and Eastern Europe as the geopolitical periphery of Europe and the peripheries within Western Europe itself. This could elucidate which aspects of ethnographic show reception were specific to Central and Eastern Europe and which were characteristic of peripheries and provincial regions more broadly.

The study of ethnographic shows and racialized circus acts is worthwhile not only because it is an under-researched area of Central and Eastern European history but also because it can expand our understanding of how
ideas of race became popularized among non-academic publics. The analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates how racialized performances of otherness through popular entertainment forms contributed to the popularization of racial discourses in a specific provincial location within the Habsburg Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. The framing of these performances taught audiences to recognize the difference between themselves and the performers in racialized ways. This simultaneously solidified the association of non-Europeans with various degrees of “savagery” and enabled audiences to recognize themselves as white, not only through skin color but also through association with Europeanness, civilization, and modernity, the legacies of which are still with us today.

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