

CHAPTER
TEN

A Century of Elision? Ethnic Shows in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, 1879–1914

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In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, exhibitions of “exotic” human beings for the Western European public were promoted as displays of “savage” or “primitive” people from other continents. According to some scholars, the popularity of exhibiting otherness was based on a tradition of exhibiting human deviations—“human monsters” and “freak shows” in mobile circuses, at local fairs, carnivals, and so on (Blanchard et al. 2008, 6; Böetsch 2011). Today, the various forms of live displays of non-European people of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are called ethnic shows, ethnographic shows, living ethnological exhibitions, anthropo-zoological exhibitions, native villages, colonial exhibitions, and *Völkerschauen/Völkerausstellungen*, among other terms. The term “human zoo”¹ is used today as a general term for this type of exhibition; however, its use is criticized for having a degrading tone that suggests discrimination and violence and for not taking into account the context of the events and indigenous agency (see e.g., Abbattista 2015; Sánchez-Gómez 2013; Thode-Arora in this volume).

The history of “exotic” human exhibitions in the United States and Western Europe has been studied extensively (e.g., Abbattista 2015; Adams 2010; Blanchard et al. 2008; Böetsch 2011; Corbey 1993; Poignant 2004; Qureshi 2011). The history and geography of touring ethnic exhibitions organized by Carl Hagenbeck in Western Europe have been especially well researched (e.g. Ames 2008; Thode-Arora 2008) and in Scandinavia

¹ In Russia, the term “human zoo” is used most frequently regarding live displays of “exotic” people in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mostly in Russian contemporary media and popular literature (e.g., *Chelovechesky zoopark—shokiruyushcheje razvlechenije evropejcev v 19 veke; Briemya belych* by Igor Eliseyev; *Tak vyglyadit Chelovechesky zoopark* by Varvara Lyutova; *Negry v zoosadah Evropy (Istoricheskie syuzhety)*). There is insufficient information on corresponding events in the Russian Empire and the research is in the early stage in Russian science.

(Andreassen 2015). In contrast, little is known about ethnic shows in Eastern Europe, including the Russian Empire. Recent research on this cultural phenomenon in the region compared to Western Europe has revealed noticeable differences and new contexts (e.g., Czarnecka 2018, 2020; Demski 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Herza 2016).²

We know that “exotic” human exhibitions occurred in several cities in the Russian Empire (e.g., Warsaw and Łódź within partitioned Poland, Riga, Vilnius, Helsinki, Odessa, Kiev, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg) as part of long-running European tours organized from the 1870s to the 1910s; yet Russian sources have provided limited information about a small number of performances in Saint Petersburg and Moscow.³ Some details of “black villages” (*negrityanskije derevni*) and Dahomey shows in Moscow and Riga have been published only recently, relying mainly on advertisements published in Russian newspapers of the time (Bogdanov 2014; Leskinen 2018; Novikova 2013; Savitsky 2018) and on Latvian-language newspapers (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020). It is known that Robert A. Cunningham’s “cannibals” toured Europe in 1886, when Australian Aborigines visited several cities of the Russian Empire, including Helsingfors (Helsinki) and Saint Petersburg (Arkadija⁴), and then performed in the Moscow zoo at the end of the summer season (Poignant 2004, 181–83).⁵

Recent Russian studies on entertainment and leisure in the urban Russian landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include mentions of similar living human exhibitions of *inorodtsy*—that is, indigenous non-Slavic peoples from the Russian North (e.g., Samoyeds/Nenets, Voguls/

² I am grateful to Professor Dagnosław Demski and Dr. Dominika Czarnecka for their comments on this chapter and for information on the latest publications related to ethnic shows in Eastern Europe.

³ Moscow was the capital of the Tsardom of Russia (1547–1712 and 1728–30). Saint Petersburg was the capital of the Russian Empire (1713–27 and 1732–1918).

⁴ Arkadija (the Arcadia Garden) (1886–1923), an amusement park with a restaurant of the same name, was at first intended for the wealthy public of Saint Petersburg (Alyansky 1996, 17–20). Cunningham’s Australian group visited Arkadija just after its opening.

⁵ I thank Professor Demski for the link regarding the “cannibals’ tour,” which visited Moscow in 1886 according to Poignant (2004). Unfortunately, I did not find any additional details on their performance or visit to the Moscow Anthropological Laboratory at the university, except for an advertising poster announcing a performance in the zoo: “Every day, twice daily on an open stage, will be shown . . . Australian Aborigines tattooed cannibals, the Man-Eaters [*Ludoedy*], hunters and boomerang throwers, men, women and children. Admission price is 30 kopecks. In case of rain, savages [*dikari*] will be shown in a closed theater” (*Moskovsky listok* [Moscow Sheet], August 12, 1901).

Mansi, Sami/Lapps,⁶ etc.) in Moscow and Saint Petersburg zoos (e.g., Bokova 2009; Denisenko 2003; Ruba and Kokorev 2005). Notes concerning these exhibitions, however, lack detail and verifiable information (such as exact dates or printed publications).

Ethnic shows in Russia were mentioned neither in pre-revolutionary nor in Soviet and post-Soviet historiography. Contemporary books and articles devoted to ethnic and racial perceptions and prejudices in Russian society during the imperial period do not consider these shows, either.

One might expect that the experiences of watching such ethnic shows would have been described in various personal memoirs (e.g., Gershenson-Chegodaeva 2000; Minchenkov 1980). However, such memoirs of eyewitnesses are sporadic, except for notes about the circus, *balagans*,⁷ and music performances with the participation of black people. A lack of documents describing individual experiences is striking considering there was significant interest among the general public in the appearance and lifestyle of people from different parts of Russia and the rest of the world. This interest was reflected in a popular and educational literature on geography and ethnography and in active attendance at scientific and art exhibitions during which ethnic and racial Others were the main subjects of the presentation—via paintings, photographs, mannequins, and reconstructions—and enjoyed notable attention from the press (Leskinen 2010, 98–130).

Russian literature of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century did not refer to any ethnic shows or living ethnographic expositions in Russia (I mean here the works of popular writers such as Leo Tolstoy, Nikolay Leskov, Pavel Melnikov [alias Andrey Pechersky], Anton Chekhov, Alexander Kuprin, Vladimir Mikhnevich, Vasily Nemirovich-Danchenko, Vladimir Gilyarovsky, etc.) except for a sin-

⁶ “Nenets” (or “Samodeic people”) is a contemporary ethnonym. During the period of the Russian Empire until the 1920s they were called Samoyeds. The Mansi was a Finno-Ugric ethnic group; in the Russian Empire they were known as Voguls. “Sami” is an ethnonym for the Finno-Ugric people (Lapps or Laplanders in European sources since the sixteenth century or Lopars in Russian sources since the Middle Ages). All these ethnic groups are the indigenous peoples of the Russian North and Siberia and belong to reindeer-herding cultures. The author uses the old and modern scientific ethnonyms as synonyms.

⁷ *Balagans* is a word that entered into Russian language probably from Tatar languages *balagan* (a shed, a tent) or from Farsi *baladana* (a balcony). They were temporary wooden buildings for theatrical and circus performances, which became widespread at fairs and folk festivals in Russia from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century in cities and towns. *Balagans* were also places (gardens or squares) where people celebrated holidays and where carnivals were held (at *Maslenitsa*, *Sviatki*, in the weeks after Easter, and so on).

gle work—Ivan Bunin’s story *The Idol* (1930) (see also Leskinen and Jablokov 2019). This is despite the popularity of stories describing circus performances and reports about all kinds of entertainment provided by writers and reporters of Moscow and Saint Petersburg during the period under consideration. Those stories usually included reflection and discussion of various moral aspects of urban leisure in the last third of the nineteenth century, which could have been relevant to ethnic shows. Can we define this lack of information as an elision? If yes, such an elision of the phenomenon in cultural and social history seems to be rather peculiar.

Before we look at this subject in more detail, I would like to collect and chronologically systematize information about these events and their circumstances. I have found some documented facts and a few vague mentions about ethnic shows of “savages” (*dikari, dikije*) in the zoos or (more rarely) in city gardens in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Thus, I will present and verify this information via original Russian-language sources, primarily newspaper and magazine advertisements and reviews published in the years 1901–11—in periodicals such as *Moskovsky listok* (*Moscow Sheet*), *Novosti dniya* (*News of the Day*), *Iskry* (*Sparks*), *Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya* (*World Illustration*), *Rampa i zhyzn'* (*The Limes and the Life*), *Illustriovannoje Pribavlenije k Moskovskomu Listku* (*Illustrated Supplement to the Moscow Sheet*), and *Stolica i usad'ba: Zhurnal krasivoy zhizni* (*Capital and Estate: A Magazine of a Wonderful Life*).

The main goal of this chapter is to present new facts regarding ethnic shows and exhibitions including representatives of both non-European and indigenous peoples of the Russian North in the cities of the Russian Empire in the years 1879–1914. Finally, I will try to answer the question of whether the elision of ethnic shows in Russian cultural and social history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was deliberate.

The Zoos in Saint Petersburg and Moscow as Places of Public Entertainment

Ethnic shows took place mostly in Russian zoological gardens and so-called amusement parks—namely, Luna Park in Saint Petersburg,⁸ Petrovsky Park,

8 Luna Park in Saint Petersburg, in Demidov Garden, at Oficerskaya street (1912–18), was situated far from the center of the city at that time. It was an amusement park, modeled on London’s Luna Park (1903), built by the English company at the expense of a Russian millionaire. There was a rollercoaster, new tech-

and the Manege in Moscow⁹ (Ryabova 2016, 44–110). These kinds of shows were a part of folk festival amusements and circus performances at which it was customary to see guest performers from overseas or actors pretending to be from faraway places. Therefore, when the city did not have a permanent circus or zoo, the imported ethnic exhibitions were often held precisely in public places where seasonal fairs, festivals, and traveling circuses were usually organized (for example, in Moscow it was at the Devichye pole¹⁰).

The oldest permanent zoos in the Russian Empire, the Moscow and Saint Petersburg zoos were established almost simultaneously (in 1864 and 1865, respectively). The Saint Petersburg zoo was located near the city center, on the territory of Aleksandrovsky Sad (Alexander's Garden, 1845) on the Neva riverfront opposite the Peter and Paul Fortress. At first, a couple called Gebhardt, who were German by origin, ran the place as a private menagerie. Ernest Rost (1842–1908, director of the zoo 1873–97), the second husband of the zoo's owner, Sofia Gebhardt, developed his zoo into a successful enterprise with a restaurant and two theaters (summer and winter) and organized public (including ethnic) shows there. Extravagant shows, vaudeville performances, and operettas were staged for visitors. “A more sophisticated audience could enjoy symphony concerts (including the organ)” (Maksimov 1917, 108). After Rost, at the beginning of the twentieth century, most residents of the Russian capital associated the zoo exclusively with one institution—a restaurant called (since 1889) the Zoological Garden (Alyansky 1996, 137–41). It had “a rather scandalous reputation” as even “gymnasium students were strictly forbidden from entering the garden in the evenings” (Piskarev and Urlab 2007, 160, 205). After 1880, Rost began to run ethnic shows in his zoo. The first documented performance was “Nubian caravan” from August 14 until September 1880 (Zefeld 1890, 39, 43). In 1898 Rost left Russia, the zoo fell into disrepair, and finally it was

nical attractions, a theater for operettas, and so on. It was extremely popular among Russian citizens. The Somali troupe performance took place there soon after its opening (Alyansky 1996, 197–98; see also Warsame in this volume).

⁹ The Moscow Manege (built in 1817) was an oblong building close to Red Square near the Kremlin. In the beginning it was used as a traditional riding school. Since 1831 it has been used as a place for exhibitions and performances, concerts, and entertainment events during the holidays.

¹⁰ Devichye pole was on the outskirts of Moscow before the 1880s. It was located between the Garden Ring and Novodevichy Convent. In the nineteenth century it was used for seasonal and holiday fairs and *balagans*.

closed in 1909. In 1911 a new owner, Semen Novikov, put it into order. In 1918 the capital's zoo was nationalized.

Unlike the privately operated Saint Petersburg zoo, the Moscow zoo was created in 1864 under the direction of the Imperial Russian Society for the Acclimatization of Animals and Plants, which sought to educate and enlighten the public. Anatoly Bogdanov¹¹ was the main initiator of its creation. The zoo was (and is) situated close to the Garden Ring (*Sadovoje Koltso*), near old ponds where in the past festivities and leisure activities were enjoyed by the public. The Moscow zoo was created as a scientific institution following a European model. However, from the very beginning the zoo was not able to cover its costs through visitor admissions and sponsorship, as had been planned initially. In 1874, the Society had to transfer operation of the zoo to a private entrepreneur for several years. As this did not solve the financial problems, the Society had to rent out part of its territory and buildings. The menagerie had been in the main (zoological) part of the zoo's site, while a cafe and a restaurant were located in the so-called botanical area, in which there were no aviaries or cages. Between May and September 1864, a pavilion was constructed for performances such as operettas, extravaganzas, colorful music shows, fireworks festivals, balloon rides, and so forth (Bokova 2009, 477). The troupe of touring artists performed in this part of the zoological garden after Christmas, Easter, and other seasonal festivities alongside other traditional entertainment held for the public. It should be taken into account that the Russian zoological gardens of the second half of the nineteenth century were usually a part of the urban gardens—an entertainment area and a place for having public festivities (see Ryabova 2016).

Ethnic Shows in Saint Petersburg Zoo

The history of the ethnic shows in the Saint Petersburg zoo is poorly documented. Ernest Rost became a long-term partner of Carl Hagenbeck (Denisenko 2003, 60–61). They actively collaborated in taking ethnographic

¹¹ Anatoly Bogdanov (1834–96), a professor at Moscow University and an outstanding Russian scientist (zoologist and founder of Russian anthropology), founded the scientific societies: the Committee on Acclimatization (1853) and the Imperial Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography (1863). He also organized several famous scientific exhibitions: such as an ethnographic (1867), an anthropological (1879), and a technical (1872) one.

tours to Saint Petersburg,¹² an activity which was described by the zoo's inspector, Alfred Zefeld. He mentioned four "exotic" tours in the 1880s and 1890s (Zefeld 1890, 39). For instance, in August 1880 the Nubians replicated scenes of hunting, war dances, and battles. Zefeld wrote:

Berabras (as the Nubians called themselves) camped in the arena, in front of the open stage. This camp can be depicted as a motley and highly interesting place. The Nubians reproduced their battles and hunts here. One can see them in their everyday mode of life. The greatest interest was attached to a significant number of African animals: black single-humped camels, old and young riding dromedaries, zebras, giraffes, wild buffaloes, Sanga bulls, Nubian riding bulls, goats, and white donkeys. The spectacular finale of the shows was the reproduction of the caravan procession, which always impressed the viewers. (Zefeld 1890, 40)

At the same time, one could see a "scientific" ethnographic collection (i.e., household items, jewelry, musical instruments, and so on) as well as zoological exhibits (animals and fish) in the zoo (Zefeld 1890, 40, 43).

From Zefeld (1890, 44–45) one can learn that besides the "Nubian caravan" in the Saint Petersburg zoo other exhibits were staged, including in summer 1881 a small group of Zulu Kaffirs, "a tribe of dwarfs living in the steppes of Kalahari (South Africa) between Lake Ngami and the Orange River"—probably the Bushmen from South Africa who came in summer 1886—and thirty-seven Sinhalese people from Ceylon who arrived "at the end of summer 1889" (fig. 10.1). Based on named performing groups and

¹² "Exotic" tours through Europe were possible thanks to an accelerated development of railway infrastructure in the second half of the nineteenth century. The main railway lines in the European part of the Russian Empire from the 1850s to the 1900s were the following, where the year indicates when railway traffic opened: Warsaw–Vienna (1848); Saint Petersburg–Tver–Moscow (1851); Saint Petersburg–Pskov–Dinaburg/Dvinsk (1860)–Vilnius/Vilno–Grodno–Bialystok–Warsaw (1862) with the branch Lentvaris–Virbalis/Wierzbow–Eydtkuhnen (1861); Kaunas/Kovno–Lentvaris (1861); Riga–Dinaburg/Dvinsk (1861)–Vitebsk (1866)–Orel (1868); Moscow–Vladimir–Nizhny Novgorod (1862); Moscow–Serpuchov–Tula–Kursk (1868); Moscow–Jaroslavl (1870); Odessa–Balta (1865)–Elizavetgrad (1869)–Kiev (1870); Moscow–Smolensk (1870)–Brest (1871); Libau–Minsk (1873)–Gomel (1873)–Romny (1874) with a branch from Radivilskisto Dinaburg/Dvinsk (1873); Moscow–Rzhev–Velikiye Luki–Jelgava/Mitau–Vindau (1901); Moscow–Bryansk (1899)–Kiev (1899)–Poltava (1901)–Kovel (1902). From the 1870s one could get to Berlin, Vienna, or Paris from Saint Petersburg (most often through Virbalis/Wierzbow or Lentvaris in Russia and then through Prussian Eydtkuhnen and Königsberg, Bromberg to Berlin, or through Grodno and Warsaw) by railway.



Figure 10.1. Sinhalese show in Saint Petersburg zoo, 1889. From Elena Denisenko, *Ot zverinca k zooparku. Iстория Ленинградского зоопарка* (Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo-Ptb, 2003), 71.

short descriptions of their shows in Zefeld's book, one may conclude that these shows were the same ones that Hagenbeck had staged and launched for tour in the European cities. Thus, thanks to Rost's zoo, Russians in Saint Petersburg got an opportunity to visit well-organized, high-quality ethnic performances.

African shows were extremely popular in the Russian capital. The season of these performances lasted in Saint Petersburg for three to four months, usually from May to September when more than 20,000 people

visited the zoo every day (Denisenko 2003, 72). Moreover, public interest in various African shows increased in the early 1900s. In May 1912, the "Somali village" was staged in Saint Petersburg (cf. Warsame in this volume). This is a well-known event in Russian historiography due to numerous remaining photographic images. However, the "Somali village" was organized at the Luna Park and not at the zoo. The Somali troupe's performance took place in Luna Park soon after its opening. The "exotic" group came from Riga and consisted of men and women with little children. Africans stayed in Saint Petersburg during the summer. Visitors to this "village" could view a carver, a baker, a gunsmith, a shoemaker, and other village dwellers, who settled down in separate booths to demonstrate their craft. The shows included dances, songs, and a demonstration of throwing spears at the target (Bekkin 2011; Savitsky 2018).

Black Amazons in Moscow

I found no information on whether Hagenbeck's ethnic shows ever took place in Moscow. But we know about Dahomey Amazon dance shows (per-

formed by an all-female cast and, later, by a larger group) in Moscow in the 1900s. According to Suzanne Preston Blier, the Dahomey tours of the British entrepreneur John Wood started at the European zoos in 1891, after the first Franco-Dahomean War (Blier 2008, 161), but the Amazons' shows took place earlier—for example, in Warsaw in 1889 (Czarnecka 2020). These shows were very attractive for European spectators and for the Russian public, who could watch “exotic” dances, military exercises, and the “authentic” life of African people.

So far the earliest information I have discovered about Dahomey shows in Moscow is from 1901. On April 4 (April 17), 1901,¹³ the Moscow newspaper *Novosti dniya* published an announcement of the impending arrival of the “group of Amazons . . . who will be acting in the Manege . . . The group performs fascinating dances.” The Moscow newspaper *Moskovsky listok* also published an advertisement of the Amazons’ show in the Moscow Manege in April 1901:

For the time of the Easter festivities, the Directorate of the Manege announced an Amazons squad from Africa, forty-eight women from the wild tribe of Dahomey under the leadership of the commanders-in-chief Princess Mormon and Zomba and tribe’s warlords Prince Alfa and Mani. They will perform the following: 1) sacred dances of fire worshippers, performed by Amazons Morey and Amara, 2) Amazons’ military evolution performed by twenty-six women, 3) BONDO—the prayer before the battle—MOMO, 4) military exercises and sword fights under the leadership of the commanders-in-chief Mani, 5) “African saber game” performed by Rodges, Frabel, Bondoboy, Suy, Makalli, Taffa and Piknet [?], 6) Amazon national dances performed by Zamba, Bok, Ticci, Zaffi, Zambo and Kuy, 7) the fencing tournament performed by twenty-six Amazons, 8) African Amazons’ militant songs, 9) fighting of two feuding tribes under the leadership of the commander-in-chief Prin-

¹³ The first date is given according to the Julian calendar (so-called Old Style date); the second date is according to the Gregorian calendar (New Style date). The Gregorian calendar had replaced the Julian calendar, which had been used in Catholic and Protestant Europe from 1582 until the end of the eighteenth century. Russia changed its state calendar in 1918, but in the nineteenth century both of these dating systems were used in documents, the press, and everyday notes (newspapers, letters, diaries, etc.). In the nineteenth century, the difference between the Old and New Style was thirteen days.

cess Mormon and tribe's warlord Alfa, 10) African pantomime "Night in Dahomey, or Attack on the Amazon camp and kidnapping of their princess" performed by all women and commanders-in-chief. (April 4, 1901)¹⁴

This troupe performance later moved to the zoo (*Moskovsky listok*, April 12, 1901). One can read a description of the Dahomeans in a sketch titled "Resettlement of Dahomey: Something African":

Almost forty people of strange and scary look, with dark bronze faces, with huge lips, curly, muscular, very noisy and warlike. There are men who look like women (*baby*), and women who look like men. Some are dressed in motley rags, others in European dress, but with bare feet. One is wrapped in a bright red blanket and screams the most . . . The Dahomeans and their warlike Amazons who finished their tour in the Manege are going to the zoo, where they were engaged for the summer. (*Moskovsky listok*, April 12, 1901)

After Easter, the newspaper *Novosti dniya* announced: "Yesterday, in the zoological garden Dahomeans launched their performances and will show their dances and military exercises three times a day during the weekdays, five times a day on weekends" (April 16, 1901).

The arrival of the Amazons from Dahomey attracted many visitors, including children, to the zoo. Researchers who study the perceptions of Africans in the Russian Empire (Novikova 2013, 580; Bogdanov 2014, 114) frequently cite a fragment from Boris Pasternak's novel *Safe Conduct* (1930), in which a poet describes his child's impression of the Amazons in Moscow:

A military corps of Dahomey Amazons was shown in the zoo in the spring of 1901. [I remember] how the first sensation of womanhood interconnected with the feeling of naked women in array, of suffering in close order, a tropical parade accompanied with a drum . . . I became a slave of forms because I saw the uniform of enslaved women too early. (Pasternak 1989, 4)

¹⁴ Announcements about the Amazons' shows were published in this newspaper from April 4 to April 8, 1901.

However, it is still difficult to say for sure whether the Moscow performances were part of the same tour or if some similar troupes existed “independently” and imitated Amazons for the naive Russian public. Similar groups became “professional Dahomeans” almost immediately, and only anthropologists could identify the ethnic background of the participants (Blanchard et al. 2008, 14). We do not know whether the African group that visited Moscow in April 1901 was exactly from Dahomey.

Evgeny Pasternak, in his father’s biography, commented on the excerpt above, stating: “Those Amazons were probably actresses” (Pasternak 1997, 42). His doubts were justified, as extravaganzas and performances in “Dahomean style” were very fashionable in Russia at that time due to the popularity of the Dahomey ethnic performances. Moreover, Galina Ul’yanova, a researcher of leisure and entertainment in Russian cities of that time, has no doubt that participants of the show in Manege were “actors in African style makeup” (Ul’yanova 2011, 468). Manege and circus performances in which wrestlers with black skin makeup portrayed representatives of African peoples were widely known (Razin 1963, 54).

Thus a Russian spectator could not often understand whether he or she was seeing an “exotic” performance presented by real “savages” from Africa (“professional savages”) or a show put on by local artists. An illustration of one such confusing experience is a note in the memoir of circus artist Dmitry Al’perov, who mentioned a “performance of the Dahomey troupe” in Kasimov (a small town in Ryazan Governorate¹⁵) in the summer of 1912:

They demonstrated the everyday life of “wild” black tribes. They walked nearly naked along streets. They had only straw skirts. The women had many beads. In my opinion, their appearance attracted crowds, and the show made a good profit. They performed a military dance, walked barefoot through broken glass, and drank hot tin. (Al’perov 1936, 324)

This description has nothing to do with the usual programs of Dahomey shows, but it is very typical for circus performances (especially physically extreme ones).

¹⁵ The railway connection between Moscow and Ryazan was established in the 1870s.



Figure 10.2. “In memory of Princess Gumma’s troupe,” 1909. Private collection of Russian postcards of Antonina Leskinen.

rior-queen Gumma” was arranged by Hagenbeck in 1893, and later many different copycat groups performed as “fearsome Dahomey women-warriors” (Ciarlo 2011, 95) (fig. 10.2).

In the same year, the Russian anthropologist Arkady Elkind¹⁷ made “detailed anthropological measurements” of the Dahomey dancers in Moscow zoo, and he published his article in *Russkiy Antropologicheskiy Zhurnal* (*Russian Anthropological Magazine*) in 1912. He did not express any doubts concerning the anthropological and ethnic background of show participants, identifying their “anthropological type as Sudanese Negros”:

A small number of representatives of Sudanese Negros, namely, those of them who were known as Dahomeans and speak *ewe*, could be seen in 1909 in Moscow, in the Zoological Garden, where during the second half

¹⁶ Yasnaya Polyana Garden was situated in the Petrovsky Park in the northwest of Moscow (1827). In the 1880s to 1900s, one part of this park became a very popular place among rich Moscow merchants, artists, and writers who frequented restaurants with Roma dancers and singers and daily live entertainment (e.g., Yar, Strel’na, Mauritania, Eldorado, etc.).

¹⁷ Arkady Elkind (1869–1920) was a doctor, Russian anthropologist, and specialist in the anthropology of Poles and Jews.

of summer a show was run by the group of thirty persons—natives of Dahomey and its neighboring areas. (Elkind 2004, 436)¹⁸

In addition, we know that a painting made by the Moscow artist Nikolay Kasatkin depicted a scene at the Moscow zoological garden during the stay of the Dahomeans. We first learned of this from the description given by another painter, Yakov Minchenkov, a member of the group known as the Wanderers (see Novikova 2013; Bogdanov 2014):

He [Nikolay Kasatkin] painted the picture *At the Zoo*. Negroes were brought and exhibited like animals. A lady [*dama*] with a child came up to the fence behind which negroes were placed. A negro woman saw the child and reached out to kiss him. (Minchenkov 1980, 228)

The memoirist added that the picture Kasatkin painted was supposed to be presented as a gift to the American president.¹⁹ Genrietta Burova made notes for Minchenkov's publication and indicated that Kasatkin's painting was exhibited in 1903, and its location was "a private collection in Kiev" at the time of publication (Minchenkov 1980, 450). My attempts to find a reproduction of this canvas were unsuccessful for a long time, because this picture was not listed in any of Kasatkin's catalogs, biographies, or inventories of his artworks. Finally, I managed to find a black-and-white reproduction only in the catalog of a Wanderers exhibition held in Moscow (*Illustrirovannyj katalog* 1903, N 14). It indicates that the small canvas (36 x 40 centimeters) was called *Women of Dahomey in the Zoological Garden*. The reproduction depicts the

¹⁸ The name "Sudan" in Elkind's text has nothing to do with the state of Sudan. In the introduction to his article he presents the history of the region and a review of the ethnic groups and languages of Dahomey. In particular he writes: "The negroes, living between . . . the Senegal and Niger rivers split into two large branches: Sudanese negroes, inhabiting the Sudan and the coast of Upper Guinea, and Bantu negroes, living in sub-equatorial and southern Africa. The basis for this division is the difference in languages" (Elkind 2004, 435–36). He also mentions some of their anthropological (physical) features. Peoples speaking the language *ewe*, as he writes, lived between the Kufo River and Mono River and also on the plateau Abomey and to the north of Abomey. Elkind describes twenty-two men and three women from Dahomey towns (in French: Ouidah, Porto-Novo, Abomey, Cotonou, Grand Popo) who spoke the language *ewe*. Nevertheless, all French colonial territories in West Africa (Upper and Middle Niger and Senegal rivers) were called, collectively, "French Sudan" in Russia in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹⁹ Kasatkin was probably planning to take part in the Russian art exhibition at the world's fair in St. Louis, Missouri, which was held the next year (1904).



Figure 10.3. Painting by Nikolay Kasatkin, *Women of Dahomey in the Zoological Garden* (1903). In the center of the picture, a young dark-skinned woman (Dahomeyan?) is leaning over the fence to kiss a laughing child in the arms of the female spectator, and this move is accepted. Dark-skinned participants are shown in bright sunlight and dressed in light-colored clothes, while white spectators are depicted in dark clothes and in the shade—in this way the straightforward opposition between black and white is neutralized both in color and in symbolic meanings. *Illyustrirovannyj catalog XXXI Vystavki Tovarishchestva peredvizhnyh hudozhestvennyh vystavok*, fig. N 14.

scene, in which visitors and “exhibits” were separated by a low hedge, not a fence (as Minchenkov wrote), which allows, as shown in the picture, an African woman to kiss a child in the hands of a visiting lady; both women were smiling and seemed quite friendly. Most likely, Kasatkin painted this picture in 1901–2, as the Wanderers’ exhibitions were held annually and the artists showed only recent works (fig. 10.3).

Were representatives of exotic tour groups exhibited near the animal cages when they stay in zoos? This is a difficult question to answer. The archives of the zoological gardens in Moscow and Saint Petersburg from this time have not survived.²⁰ Visual evidence (e.g., photos and postcards) of ethnic exhibitions before the 1900s has not been preserved. The only documented exception, apart from Kasatkin’s painting, is a very important and rare photograph of Leo Tolstoy.

Leo Tolstoy and the Dahomeans

In 2014, a photograph appeared on several websites and blogs,²¹ yet with different captions: *Leo Tolstoy near Africans’ huts*; *Leo Tolstoy at the Moscow Zoo*; *Leo Tolstoy at Devichye pole balagans in Moscow*, and so forth. The date given was the same for all versions posted online—1892—and Ilya Tolstoy, the son of the writer, was credited as the author of the photo (fig. 10.4).

²⁰ The former burned down during the uprising in 1905; the latter was completely destroyed in 1940.

²¹ For example: Lev Tolstoy i begemoty 2014; Mitrofanov 2018.



Figure 10.4. Leo Tolstoy in the zoological garden near African huts. A dark-skinned woman (Dahomeyan?) to the left of Tolstoy leans against the fence in a relaxed posture. It seems like there is no barrier between them to inhibit communication. Photo by Ilya Tolstoy, 1892. Leo Tolstoy State Museum, Moscow.

The original photograph was taken from the archive of the Leo Tolstoy State Literary Museum on Prechistenka Street in Moscow. It shows the writer examining the inhabitants of a “black village” through a fence. The museum captions the image “Leo Tolstoy in the Zoological Garden in Moscow near African huts, 1892.” According to the museum’s curator, Marina Loginova (personal communication), the photo was made by the writer’s son, Ilya Tolstoy. Information about the shot came from the typewritten list of the photo collection of Pavel Sergejenko, with a different caption: “In the Moscow zoological garden. Leo Tolstoy looks at the savages [*dikije*]. Photo by Ilya Tolstoy, 1892” (Tolstoy 1892). In the 1903 and 1908 editions of Sergejenko’s book *Kak zhivet i rabotajet L.N. Tolstoy* (*How Leo Tolstoy Lives and Works*), this picture was published with the caption “Leo Tolstoy at people’s holidays in Moscow” (Sergejenko 1903, 67; Sergejenko 1908, 67). In the first edition of the book this photograph is absent (Sergejenko 1898). It is notable that the photo’s caption changed between the archive inventory, the printed publications, and the museum’s photo posted online.

The photograph clearly shows the round shape of dwellings and cone-shaped roofs covered with reeds that extend almost to the ground. No fences are present: we see only a low plank hedge. In the background to the right, one can see a black man standing with a smile on his face and with a pelt across his chest. The writer is near one of the huts, looking at a notebook or a book; close to him, a black woman stands on the other side of the hedge.

The place and the date need to be verified, but the building in the background seems to be one of the zoo's pavilions of that time. What kind of "savages" (the word used in the caption that was replaced for publication with "African huts") did Leo Tolstoy see at the Moscow zoo and when exactly was the photo taken? The "black village" or Amazons show at the Moscow zoo were not mentioned in Tolstoy's published works, in his diaries, or in the diaries of his wife Sofya (Tolstaya 2000) and son Ilya (Tolstoy 2000). Tolstoy's biographers (Opul'skaya 1979, 1998; Gusev 1960) do not mention any visits by the writer to the Moscow zoo or even the existence of ethnic exhibitions of black people at that time anywhere in Moscow.

The clothing depicted in the photo reveals that it was a warm season. In 1892, Tolstoy lived in his Moscow house in Khamovniki until January 23 (Opul'skaya 1979, 247; Gusev 1960, 59–64). The winter of that year was very cold, and therefore the writer would have been dressed in heavier clothing than is shown in the photo. In addition, meeting Africans at the Devichye pole (if we take into account this option) was permitted only on holidays before (*Maslenitsa*²²) and after a week of Lent. *Maslenitsa* that year fell in the last seven days of February. The writer was no longer in Moscow during those months. At the same time, I have not yet found any references to African exhibitions or Dahomey shows either at the zoo or at the Devichye pole in Moscow newspapers and illustrated magazines published in spring 1892. There is one more piece of evidence, albeit indirect, confirming that we should abandon the current dating of this image. It is entirely appropriate to assume that this

²² *Maslenitsa* is an Eastern Slavic religious and folk holiday, celebrated during the last week before Lent, eighth week before Eastern Orthodox Pascha (Easter). A strictly kept Lent excludes parties, secular music, dancing, and other distractions from spiritual life. Thus *Maslenitsa* and the post-Easter weeks in Russian cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, before the revolution, included theatergoing, circus entertainment, dances, and amusement rides. Special festival/carnival places were organized for those seasons with a lot of food vendors, merchandise vendors, games of chance and skill, thrill acts, animal acts, and so forth. *Balagans* were important elements of the cities' carnivals.

information was “omitted” because it had not been taken yet. The appearance of the photograph suggests that it might have been taken during the period between 1898 and 1903. We know about Dahomeans in that Moscow zoo in April 1901 and about Tolstoy’s staying in Moscow in April 1901. He was sick and emotionally involved with public reaction—from condemnation to delight and demonstration of support by his admirers—to his excommunication from the church on February 24 (Gusev 1960, 376–79). However, it can be assumed that Tolstoy could visit the zoo, in which the Dahomeans were performing in the spring of that year. It could have happened between April 12 and May 8, when he left for his estate Yasnaya Polyana (Gusev 1960). Regardless of the actual date of the photo, we have in our possession important documentary evidence of two facts: the living exhibition of the Africans took place in the Moscow zoo, and Leo Tolstoy attended the exhibition without leaving any written description of the visit.

Samoyeds/Nenets in Saint Petersburg and Moscow

According to some researchers, representatives of peoples from North Russia (Samoyeds/Nenets, Sami/Lapps, Voguls/Mansi, etc.) were also a part of ethnic exhibitions in the zoological gardens (Bokova 2009, 477; Denisenko 2003, 72; Ruga and Kokorev 2005, 208–9) at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. However, such general statements were made without references to any sources; I have not managed yet to find any mentions of such entertainment in Moscow newspapers from these years that could back up those statements.²³

Information about these exhibits partly goes back to publications about Russian zoos’ history from the 1930s. The following record was published in *The Diary of the Moscow Zoo in Reports of the Zoological and Anthropological Societies in Moscow*. Under note 19, dated July 3, 1879, was written: “Samoyeds arrived. 6 people” (*Dnevnik Zoologicheskogo sada* 1880, 247). Pavel Manteyfel²⁴ mentioned this record in a book of historical stories

²³ See Leskinen 2019 on the history of Samoyeds/Nenets in Saint Petersburg and Moscow from the end of the eighteenth century until 1914.

²⁴ Pavel Manteyfel (1892–1960) was one of the Moscow zoo managers, a famous zoologist and naturalist, and the author of popular books for children about animals.

of the Moscow zoo of 1937. One story described the zoo before the revolution and the customs of tsarist Russia. He provided a detailed comment on the note from the zoo's diary:

These four words vividly depict the condition of the northern ethnic minorities under the tsarist regime. Powerless, deliberately doomed to extinction, they were not even considered human beings. In the zoo, the Samoyeds, that is, the Nenets, were sent as exhibits. They were settled in a *chum* (a raw-hide tent made of reindeer pelts) at one of the squares of the garden and showed for a fee, like strange beasts. In winter, the Nenets lived in the same chum in the middle of a frozen pond and were obliged to entertain the Master visitors by riding on reindeer. Many Nenets caught cold and became sick; some died. (Manteyfel 1937, 156)

I did not find any references or evidence to support his story. Moreover—and this should be emphasized—this story was not published in the numerous subsequent editions of the book; this story was included in only the first edition of 1937.

Manteyfel wrote about the Samoyeds' stay confidently—he knew exactly where and how the Nenets/Samoyeds (he used both ethnonyms) had been placed and knew that they were shown for money. His moral disapproval regarding “showing people for fee” among the animals is beyond doubt. As the text of the footnote was not dated, it remains unclear whether his comments refer to the zoo diary's date or to the repeated presence of the Nenets in other years as well. The information is presented in such a manner as if it was received from eyewitnesses. Perhaps they were former employees of the zoo who heard the story from their predecessors (almost sixty years had passed since 1879, and it was hardly possible to find eyewitnesses among active employees). Or did Manteyfel mean a similar reindeer-riding attraction of a later time, although still “under the tsarist regime”?

In 1940, the director of the Moscow zoo, Lev Ostrovsky, published an article that made reference to the earlier exhibitions of Samoyeds/Nenets. Ostrovsky tried to prove that cruel treatment of animals in zoos before the revolution was ordinary. At the same time, scientific activities were not carried out. He stated:

In the pre-revolutionary years, the zoo was not a scientific, but an entertainment institution . . . along with animals in the Garden, people were shown for a special fee . . . The old personnel, who have taken care of animals for forty years, told me that Samoyeds were exhibited at the Zoo in 1907. (Ostrovsky 1940, 13)

The date was different, but could the source of information used earlier by Manteyfel have been the same?

How could Samoyeds end up at the Moscow zoo in the summer of 1879? Were they there in 1907 as well? I have managed to obtain information that may explain the circumstances of their stay in 1879 with a high degree of certainty.

In 1879, the first scientific anthropological exhibition organized by the Imperial Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography took place in Moscow. The exhibition was open from April 3 to September 8 with a total of 100,000 visitors attending it (Antropologicheskaya vystavka 1879). From July 22 to August 6, the Anthropological Science Congress was held; world-famous European anthropologists such as Rudolf Virchow, Paul Broca, Gustave Le Bon, Paul Topinard, Johannes Ranke, and Felix Kanitz were invited. The Russian Empire, inhabited by more than a hundred different nations and groups, as the organizers stressed, had rich resources for anthropological research of the representatives of various physical types, and thus offered an exhibition that provided “an opportunity for anthropologists to see living representatives of some Russian peoples” (Antropologicheskaya vystavka 1879, 229). Some European guests expressed a desire to get acquainted with these peoples. The organizers paid close attention to the request and decided to show Roma people and Karaimes (of those who lived in Moscow) and to invite *inorodtsy* (“reindeer people”) from the Russian North, Lyuli,²⁵ and representatives of “peoples from Turkestan”²⁶ to the exhibition.

²⁵ Lyuli or Jughi is an ethnic group living in Central Asia, primarily Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan (at the end of the nineteenth century these regions were in the Russian Empire). They speak a Tajik dialect and practice Islam.

²⁶ Turkestan is an area in Central Asia between Siberia to the north and Iran, Afghanistan, and Tibet to the south. The land that became Russian Turkestan (in the 1860s–70s) is now divided between Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan across the center, Kyrgyzstan in the east, Tajikistan in the southeast, and Turkmenistan in the southwest. The ethnic groups of this region are Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmens, and others.

Detailed information about the Nenets' participation could be found in correspondence concerning the organization of the anthropological exhibition. Since a decision on the delivery of the Samoyeds had been made in the spring, certain difficulties arose. Most Samoyeds had already migrated to the tundra toward their summer camps. "The family of Samoyeds from the Kaninsky tundra" agreed to come to the exhibition: "Vasily Kanyukov, sixty-five years old, with his wife and son (about three years old), and Bobrikov, twenty-one years, with his wife of twenty years and his daughter of a year and a half" (Antropologicheskaya vystavka 1879, 232).

Thus, in total, six Samoyeds arrived at the exhibition (cf. Savitsky in this volume). The letter by Prince Leonid Ukhtomsky to the organizing committee indicated that the participants "have with them some household belongings, a summer *chum* and a winter one, spears and poles . . . for setting the tent . . . and for laying the floor . . . Unfortunately, the Samoyeds remaining in Arkhangelsk during summertime did not have reindeers" (Antropologicheskaya vystavka 1879, 232).

Another important issue was that members of the Society and volunteers supporting the exhibition offered to host Samoyeds at their own houses in Moscow. Samoyeds, however, did not want to live in houses and asked organizers to build their *chum* as their regular living quarters. "Samoyeds insisted on staying in the open air," and for this very reason they "were placed in the zoological garden" (Antropologicheskaya vystavka 1879, 232).

Apparently, the guests of the anthropological exhibition who arrived from Arkhangelsk at the invitation of its organizing committee were those "six Samoyeds" noted in the zoo diary of July 3, 1879, which were later mentioned by Manteyfel. However, the zoo was chosen as their place of residence, as we see, neither for commercial reasons, nor out of disrespect, nor in order to "demonstrate them" at the zoo. The explanation was much more straightforward. The Imperial Russian Society for the Acclimatization of Animals and Plants, which had established the Moscow zoo, had close connections with the Imperial Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography. Members of the organizing committee of the anthropological exhibition (such as Anatoly Bogdanov and Nikolay Zograf) were active members and heads of divisions in both societies. The choice to arrange the Samoyeds' *chums* at the zoo was also due to its relative proximity to the Moscow Manege, where the exhibition and congress took place.

Figure 10.5. Samoyeds in the zoological garden, Moscow. Photograph by Alexey Saveljev, *Iskry*, 1911, no. 3: 22.

In addition, the program for foreign guests included a visit to the zoo on July 31. But we do not know whether Virchow or other European anthropologists saw these Samoyeds.

We also have information about Samoyeds riding reindeers in the Moscow zoo in the early twentieth century (Ruga and Kokorev 2005, 208–9; Bokova 2009, 477). Lev Ostrovsky (1940, 13) mentions Samoyeds staying at the Moscow zoo in 1907. Indeed, Samoyeds were giving reindeer sleigh rides around the frozen pond for a fee—one can find photo reports in illustrated magazines from 1907 and 1911 (Leskinen 2019). Illustrated periodicals from these years published a photo report about the stay of the Samoyeds at the zoo in winter—*chums*, reindeer sleigh, and *narta* (dog sleigh) rides on the pond (*Illustrirovannoje Pribavlenije k Moskovskomu Listku*, February 25, 1907). Several photographs with similar content can be found in the illustrated *Iskry* magazine (during *Maslenitsa* in 1911). The zoo's pond was situated between the menagerie area and the botanical area with the garden. There is no mention or visual evidence of barriers or fences in place even in those documents (fig. 10.5).

Natalia Gershenson-Chegodaeva (born in 1907) remembered her childhood impression of the Moscow zoo:

On another lot, we saw a big *Yurta* with a Samoyed (now they are known as Nenets) family in it—father, mother, and their children. They were put on public display along with beasts. I understood everything in a moment and appreciated it as I should have. I will never forget the hateful and gloomy faces of these people. (Gershenson-Chegodaeva 2000, 82)

The memoirist did not mention any details referencing the date of the event. Nevertheless, Vladimir Ruga and Andrey Kokorev argued (without supporting data) that her visit to the zoo dated to 1914. Researchers reported



Samoyeds (Nenets) and Zyryans (Komi) “touring” Moscow that year (Ruga and Kokorev 2005, 209). Yet I did not find any information about their visit in the Moscow newspapers or in illustrated magazines such as *Iskry*, *Ogoniok* (*Twinkle*), *Niva* (*Cornfield*), or *Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya* for 1914.

As for the Samoyeds in Saint Petersburg, there is much evidence to confirm their visits from Arkhangelsk province to give public rides in reindeer sleighs during the winter holidays (*Sviatki*²⁷) in the Russian capital since the time of Catherine II’s rule (1762–96) and until the 1910s (Leskinen 2019). Thus, this kind of entertainment and the Samoyeds’ appearance and their everyday life were not particularly exotic for Saint Petersburg—more precisely, this was “well-known exotic,” like, for example, the Finnish *Veiki*.²⁸ Again, Samoyeds in the Russian capital were not located at the zoo. They always placed their dwellings on the Neva River ice, near the central bridges.

The *Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya* newspaper often published materials about the Samoyeds’ (or Lapps’) giving *narta* rides to volunteers along the Neva for a small fee. This kind of entertainment was especially popular in the Russian capital during *Maslenitsa*. In the March issue of 1870, a short article was posted under the heading “Samoyeds on the Neva in Saint Petersburg,” with an illustration captioned:

Samoyeds come to Saint Petersburg each year for *Maslenitsa* with reindeers, sleighs, and tents, have their camp on the Neva ice, and attract a lot of interest that brings them a considerable income. Our drawing represents a sleigh with three reindeers. The driver is a Samoyed, and the passengers are curious Petersburg citizens. (*Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya*, March 14, 1870)

In the same journal, an illustration of Samoyeds, drawn by Arnold Carl Baldinger, was published seven years later (*Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya*, March 12, 1877), accompanied by an extensive commentary: “Petersburg scenes and types. Samoyeds’ *Yurt* and reindeers on the Neva” (figs. 10.6 and 10.7). The piece began with an explanation that the drawing “represented a

²⁷ *Sviatki* (“sacred days, holy days,” the Twelve Days of Christmas, winter saints) is a folk holiday series in winter, consisting of the twelve days from Christmas to the Baptism of the Lord.

²⁸ *Veiki* are Finns who flocked to Saint Petersburg from suburban villages on *Maslenitsa* to work as horse teamsters for a fee; the name comes from the Finnish word *veikko* (friend) and it was used only in the Saint Petersburg region.



Figure 10.6. Samuel Edmund Waller and C. Roberts, “Laplanders Encampment on the Neva in Saint Petersburg.” *The Graphic*, February 14, 1874.

snapshot of the scene well known to every Saint Petersburg resident.” Three reindeers with a sleigh were ridden by a Russian “peasant from Arkhangelsk” in Samoyed clothes.

The tent of the Samoyeds was built right there, it resembled Kyrgyz *yurts*²⁹ and is called *chum*. Wild inhabitants of the *chum* were hidden from the curious eyes of the public inside the dwelling; those who wished to look at them and talk to them can satisfy their desire for a small fee.

Similar descriptions from both the 1860s and the 1890s were found in memoirs (*Stolica i usad’ba: Zhurnal krasivoy zhizni*, March 15, 1916).

The famous Saint Petersburg essayist and satirist Nikolay Leikin wrote a short story, *Samoyeds* (1879, 250–54). This narrative consisted of comments made by a crowd that had gathered to look at the Samoyeds in their *chums* and to ride in a reindeer sleigh. Leikin considered this kind of ogling and

²⁹ An explanation of the appearance of a *chum* by comparing it with a Kyrgyz *yurt* did not mean that the Kyrgyz could be viewed at ethnic shows in Russia. For readers from Saint Petersburg, *yurts* and Kyrgyz might be more familiar than a *chum* and their inhabitants.



Figure 10.7. Arnold Carl Baldinger, “Saint-Petersburg: On the Neva River in Winter.” Lithograph after a painting. *Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya*, March 12, 1877.

commenting quite calmly. No moral aspects were raised.

I have not found any evidence to support the statement that representatives of peoples from the Russian North were shown at ethnic exhibitions in Russian zoos just as African and Asian inhabitants from the overseas colonies were exhibited in European countries at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, residents of both capitals had an opportunity to observe and examine the appearance

and everyday routines of the reindeer herders for a fee during various winter holidays, *Maslenitsa*, and *balagans*. However, I did not find any evidence of any exhibition organized for demonstration of *inorodtsy* beyond the type of entertainment mentioned above, although information about their presence in the territory of the Moscow zoo is quite reliable. A representation of several Nenets was definitely organized during the All-Russia Industrial and Art Exhibition at Nizhny Novgorod in 1896 (see Savitsky 2017). Yet the forms of exhibiting remain unclear, especially from the point of view of the relationship between the audience and the “exhibits.” Riding on reindeer on the frozen pond at the zoo and even the installation of *chums* by ethnic representatives for general viewing and for their appearance at the anthropological exhibition in 1879 do not equate to living exhibition.

Conclusion

Studies of stereotypes of Poles, Finns, and Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia within Russian society in the second half of the nineteenth century have

revealed a universal mechanism of their formation and means of distribution (Leskinen 2010). Such ethnic stereotypes and images were created and disseminated via personal experiences (communications and travel), visual sources (exhibitions, illustrations in magazines and books, photographs, paintings, posters, advertising, and caricatures), and scientific and educational literature. Interestingly, ethnic shows left almost no trace in the sources mentioned above, even though one might expect such shows to be an important part of the ethnocultural legacy.

Research on ethnic shows in the Russian Empire is in its early stage, especially when compared to other European countries. Thus, the goal of this chapter has been to compile and analyze available publications and to bring to light new facts regarding imported ethnic shows and ethnic exhibitions of indigenous peoples of the Russian North in Saint Petersburg and Moscow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I am not ready yet to reconstruct the whole picture of the phenomenon, but differences between ethnic shows in Russia and those in Western Europe already seem notable with regard to the availability of historical and historiographical sources, especially when it comes to the Russian audience's reaction or attitude to participants of ethnic shows and "exotic" exhibitions. The comparison reveals the elision of the phenomenon in the Russian case.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the urban inhabitants of the cities of the Russian Empire were familiar with ethnic shows with participants from non-European continents—similarly to contemporary shows in Western and Eastern Europe. According to Russian sources, acquaintance with blackness was made mainly in theatrical (musical, dance, and circus) forms in the years 1890–1911. Less is known about ethnic exhibitions such as "Negro villages," which did not include an artistic performance as part of their program. There are only few visual pieces of evidence of such exhibitions available to researchers—for example, Nikolay Kasatkin's painting and the photo of Leo Tolstoy in Moscow.

Moreover, available publications (mostly posters and announcements in newspapers) did not provide definitions of the "genre" or detailed descriptions of these events. The terms "exhibition," "performance," and "show" were not used, only the names of ethnic groups—for example, "Amazon squad," "Dahomeans," "negroes," "blacks," "cannibals"—which, in the absence of additional materials, complicates the identification of the content of these

events. At the same time, numerous sources from literature and newspapers include some evidence of fraudulent practices, with Russian actors performing under the guise of “real” Dahomey Amazons, “African princesses,” or “Somalis.” Russians dressed up and wearing makeup like those persons gave successful performances mostly with traveling circuses and *balagans* touring in the Russian provinces (see Novikova 2013; Leskinen 2018; Savitsky 2018). Subjects for future research include who the performers in the ethnic shows were, especially in the Russian provinces, and whether their identities mattered for analyzing the audience’s perceptions and attitudes.

While ethnic shows were greeted with the same level of public enthusiasm in Russia as in other European countries, only a few isolated cases occurred of publication in the media and elsewhere about such events in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and these references totally lacked any comments, observations, and reflections. It is still difficult to reach a conclusion as to the probable cause for such elision.

It remains a question whether ethnic exhibitions of reindeer herders from the Russian North were held at all (despite the confidence on this matter expressed by several researchers) and whether those displays were similar to the imported displays with representatives from other continents. Reindeer rides on the pond at the Moscow zoo, the installation of *chums* by ethnic representatives for general viewing, and their appearance at the anthropological exhibition in 1879 do not equate to the Western ethnic show/exhibition model. Furthermore, the materials discussed above indicate that public perceptions of the Lapps and Samoyeds differed in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, since these peoples were known and familiar in the capital but not in Moscow (Leskinen 2019). Thus, further analysis of data about public perceptions and attitudes should take into consideration the significance of the place where exhibitions were organized.

From today’s point of view, various kinds of ethnic shows in the Russian cities could be interpreted from the perspective of a “racialized gaze.” Yet we need to take into account how contemporaries perceived and reflected them. Four accounts from memoirs published much later (in the 1930s) are quoted above. So far I have managed to find only one emotional reaction from an actual eyewitness (see Gershenson-Chegodaeva’s childhood memories). Neither Leo Tolstoy nor his son, who took pictures, left any notes about visiting the “African village” in Moscow. Anton Chekhov, who iron-

ically described (in 1878–80) the behavior of the visitors at the Moscow zoo and criticized the conditions of the animals did not say a word about the presence of the Samoyeds. Nikolay Leikin directed his satire against the cultural “wildness” and “backwardness” of onlookers gazing at Samoyeds in Saint Petersburg, but the entertainment setting *per se* did not surprise him.

Russian scientists—anthropologists and ethnographers, the organizers of the anthropological exhibition—also did not consider it offensive to invite representatives of various peoples of the Russian Empire to participate in the exhibition as “exhibits” for conducting anthropometric research. Elkind did not deal with the ethical aspects of organizing the Dahomey shows in Moscow in his scientific research. However, it is too early to make conclusions about the comparative elision and the reasons for it within Russian public reflections of that time regarding “exotic” ethnic shows or exhibitions.

It can be assumed that the historical realities of such a multiethnic and multiconfessional state as the Russian Empire affected public perceptions regarding “exotic” entertainment differently than in other European countries. Various Others coexisted in Russia across ethnocultural borders—both in European Russia (especially in the Volga region) and in Siberia. The appearance, cultural practices, and traditions of diverse ethnic/racial groups were not exotic within the Russian environment. Representatives of different ethnicities in their traditional costumes and dwellings and with objects of their culture were seen during fairs and holidays, during long trips around the country. The exhibits were especially popular among the educated public of that time (for example, along the Volga to Astrakhan or later to the Caucasus region). Yet to accurately understand public attitudes toward representatives of non-Russian peoples within the Empire during ethnic shows/exhibitions, it is necessary to continue this research, paying special attention to the Russian context.

Even though I did not find any documented instances of ethnic shows of Russians’ “own Others” (Arctic peoples of the Russian Empire), Russians’ attitudes and stereotypes concerning *inorodtsy* (beyond the ethnic exhibitions) have been described in more detail in other publications (e.g., Slezkine 1994; Leskinen 2019).

In general, future research on ethnic shows in Russia should take into consideration several aspects, especially when it comes to public perceptions. Modern Russian, Western European, and American historians of the

Russian Empire's national policy and Russian ethnical identity have revealed a number of specific features regarding the perception of Others (ethnic, racial, confessional) in Russian society over the period under review (Werth, Kabytov, and Miller 2005). First, we need to avoid generalizations while interpreting the perception of ethnic or national characteristics in the case of Russians or the Russian Empire. This kind of experience cannot be applied to the inhabitants of the Empire as a whole—in each case, the assessment should be differentiated, as ethnocultural interaction with ethnic neighbors had been ongoing for centuries by the period considered here. Second, it is also known that the Russian upper class tended to perceive peasants as ethnocultural Others until the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Audiences' attitudes toward the participants of ethnic shows in Moscow and Saint Petersburg reveal to a greater extent the perception among urban dwellers, whose class and educational level were very heterogeneous during this period, after the reforms of the 1860s and 1870s (see Piskarev and Urlab 2007, 151). In this case, the viewers in cities could understand the "exotic" Others as representatives of other social (rather than ethnic) groups. One way or another, there is no doubt that in the Russian Empire the interpretation of exoticism, viewers' perception of ethnic shows, and attitudes toward spectacles of this kind might be different from those of the viewers in other parts of Europe. Could this difference explain the elision of the phenomenon? We will learn by continuing this research.

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