

## DISPLAYING EXOTIC OTHERNESS: DOES THE SPACE MATTER?\*

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## ABSTRACT

At the turn of the 20th century, exotic shows as a form of displaying otherness gained wide popularity among various kinds of mass entertainment in Europe and the United States. Promoted professionally, the shows attracted public interest, combining the acquisition of knowledge with leisure. The freaks and people of non-European descent exhibited in different public spaces – zoos, parks, circus – not only demonstrated ‘nature’s errors’ and the diversity of human beings, but also the development of the human body and society within the framework of racial and evolutionary theories. The socio-economic and cultural context of each host country added that country’s own meaning to the messages of the shows. Exotic shows staged in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire inhabited by Latvians created a situation in which entertainment invented by modern colonialism took place in a territory directly affected by colonialism. Providing an insight into these shows, emphasizing exotic otherness mainly in Riga, the article seeks answers to the questions of who the audience was for these shows, and what kind of power relations, if any, between “living specimens” and spectators, and among spectators, one can deduce from the performance venue.

KEYWORDS: colonialism • exotic shows • freak shows • Latvia • live exhibitions • Riga • Russian Empire

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of Europe, the long 19th century is associated with progress, modernism, and many scientific inventions and discoveries that reached an ever-wider audience through the printed word and other communication channels. Among the media that, under the influence of colonialism (Blanchard et al. 2008; Abbatisa 2011) and the spirit of modernism (Bruckner 1999), satisfied the growing interest of European society, including Latvian-inhabited Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire, in Otherness (i.e. human racial differences and evolution), were the public lectures of scientists, includ-

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ing those with the participation of live specimens. Experiencing a certain cycle of development – starting with the possibility to just observe representatives of ‘different races’ or people with disabilities and proceeding to anthropological–zoological shows (a term invented by the German impresario Karl Hagenbeck; see Hagenbecks 1943: 41; Thode-Arora 2021: 61) and ‘native villages’ – after the First World War, exotic shows moved to circus arenas or disappeared, losing to competition with the cinema and tourism industries.

In the “pre–cinema era”, guiding by the motto “To see is to know” (Blanchard et al. 2008: 1), exotic shows (also known as the Human Zoo, Freak shows, Living Ethno-exhibitions, Live Exhibitions, Ethno-exhibitions, French *Tableaux Vivants*, German *Völkerschau*, etc.), exhibiting people from Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America, as well as of the northern Europe, and freaks blurred the boundaries between entertainment and gaining knowledge, and in the first part of the 19th century even between entertainment and science (Toulmin 2011: 265).

Modern colonialism was an important stratum for the development of the ethnographic show industry, both by offering colonies as places to recruit the troupes, and by using shows to justify and popularise colonial goals (Blanchard et al. 2008: 1). Live exhibitions with the participation of inhabitants from conquered territories had to prove the need for the acquisition of colonies first to the inhabitants of the colonial empires. Here the economic benefits, the expansion of knowledge and the introduction of progress and ‘light’ into the everyday lives of the ‘backward’ societies were stressed. Colonialism, defined as the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods (Loomba 2005: 8), clearly marked the superiority of the West, setting apart the conquerors (superior, modern and white) from the conquered (subjugated, pagans, barbarians, savages). Ethnographic exhibitions, the conditions of their events, made the division brighter, strengthening it in the perception of spectators. Furthermore, such public use of live ‘specimens’ belonging to other races took place in representations and rituals of political power (victories, coronations, parades and competitions), social power (festivals, celebrations, theatrical performances, processions, performances at fairs or markets) and cultural power (collections, cabinets of curiosities and wonders, scientific observation sites) (Abbatista and Labanca 2008: 341). However, this message promoting colonialism was not received everywhere as it was intended. As the ethnographic industry expanded, offering performances to audiences outside the centres of colonial empires in the largest cities of the modern Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia etc., colonialist propaganda began no longer to work, to be replaced by new meanings (see Demski and Czarnecka 2021).

The Russian Empire, which ruled the territory of modern Latvia until the First World War, was not a classical colonial empire,<sup>1</sup> although it did get involved in this entertainment business, exhibiting the inhabitants of the fringes of the empire, Nenets, Kalmyks, etc. (Czarnecka and Demski 2021: 11; Leskinen 2021: 296; Savitsky 2021), and offered stages to travelling exotic show troupes. The Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire, in particular Riga, which since the 18th century had functioned as a site of intellectual interface between Russia and Europe (Brennan and Frame 2000: ix) by accumulating the latest modern tendencies and innovations (Brüggemann 2012: 140), hosted these exotic shows. The close connection of the Baltic provinces with Western Europe, mainly the German lands, was determined by the links maintained by their highest social class – Baltic-German nobility – and the privileges granted to them by the Russian Empire dur-

ing the colonisation of these territories. The fixed privileges of the Baltic-German nobility strengthened the strict social and at the same time ethnic boundaries in local society, which was reflected in both the urban and rural landscape and affected environmental accessibility, including in sites for displaying Otherness.

The current research data shows the presence of at least 18 exotic shows in Riga during the long 19th century. Together with other modern Latvian cities where the same troupes visited, this number is higher. We were able to gain information about the performances held in Riga, Jelgava, Jurmala, Liepaja and other cities in the Baltic provinces inhabited by Latvians from the advertisements, articles and posters in the local German, Latvian and Russian press. Impressions of the exotic shows were also found in some contemporary diaries. These materials and the posters stored in the Collection of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia are the main sources for the article, which focuses on the practice of exhibiting Otherness in Latvia's largest city Riga, with special attention to the role of place in this process.

#### EXOTIC SHOWS IN RIGA (1835–1914)

In the second half of the 19th century, Riga was one of the fastest growing cities in the Russian Empire. The advantageous geographical location of the present-day capital of Latvia and the developed traffic infrastructure – a port, highways, and railway lines – ensured the availability of Riga stages to cultural events recognizable on the scale of the Russian Empire, Europe, and the world, including exotic shows. The troupes involved in the live exhibitions arrived in Riga travelling on the Berlin–St. Petersburg route, or vice versa (Thode-Arora 2020: 241). Their presence in Riga was also related to the World Expo<sup>2</sup> in one of the European capitals, where a large number of representatives of ethnic groups belonging to the colonies had gathered. This is especially true concerning the exhibition held in Paris in 1889, which brought together a large number from troupes of various European, African and Asian nations against a background of their household and ethnographic objects.

From 1835, when the first case of exhibiting members of other nations was recorded in Riga, until 1915, at least 18 exotic shows took place here (see Annex 1).<sup>3</sup> Four of them were freak shows: the Woman Ape Julia Pastrana (1859), the Siamese twins Chang and Eng Bunker (1870), giant siblings Flora and Rosa (1871), and the giant lady Elсли (1873). The rest were exotic shows that demonstrated the ethnic diversity of humanity. Representatives of Africa (1835, 1889, 1895, 1901), Asia (1865, 1888, 1889), Polynesia (1896/1897), North America (1897/1898) and northern European nations (1889, 1914/1915) visited Riga. Latvian cities Jelgava, Jurmala and Liepaja also hosted exotic shows, although most of these troupes had been seen in Riga before. This is true of a group of Ashanti led by British entrepreneur John Hood (Wood), who moved to the resort town Jurmala<sup>4</sup> (*Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, July 27, 1889: 6) in 1889 after performances in Riga in the first weeks of July (*Mājas Viesis*, July 22, 1889: 4) as it was more profitable at that time in the season.

The presence of the output of modern colonialism, i.e. the exotic shows, in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire inhabited by Latvians created an unusual situation. The performances exhibiting colonised peoples were consumed both by Latvians experiencing double subjugation (as the local power belonged to the German nobility, and

state power to the Russian Tsar), and by Baltic-Germans, who were administratively dependent on the Russian Empire. The absence of live exhibition statistics showing the ethnic or social identity of visitors makes it difficult to determine the profile of the local audiences and encourages examination of other gauges of public interest. In general, scholars investigating the Human Zoos to measure public interest use the following parameters: sales of postcards with pictures of the performers, intensity of publications in the local press, and number of visitors (Blanchard et al. 2008: 12). Unfortunately, very little of these statistics is reflected in the Latvian material. With great excitement, the local press published the number of visitors at the Riga anniversary events, where the Bird Meadow (German *Vogelwiese*, Latvian *Putnu pļava*, Russian *Ptichiy lug*) with a Dahomey village attracted the attention of up to 303,548 spectators (*Dienas lapa*, September 17, 1901: 5; *Rizhskii Vestnik*, July 2, 1901: 1). Generally, the audience's interest in live exhibitions was reflected in only a few lines in the press, such as, for example, in reference to the Negro caravan brought by the Swiss entrepreneur Albert Urbach and exhibited in Riga in 1895: "The performances always attract many visitors and are received with great approval" (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, October 6, 1895: 3).

Postcards and small information leaflets (for example Urbach 1901) were an important addition to the income of both the troupe impresario and the actors involved. On one side of the postcard was a picture of an actor or the troupe, on the other side (though not always) a description or legend about the person or group shown in the picture (see Mitchell 1979; Thode-Arora 2021: 60–61). The review of collections conducted in Latvia's largest museums so far has not led to a discovery of even one copy of such postcards, although there is ample evidence of their presence as supplementing shows in the publications of researchers from other countries describing the ethnographic groups that visited Latvia, for example, on the Sinhalese and the Ashanti (Czarnecka and Demski 2021: 30, 32–33; Leskinen 2021: 302) or the conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker<sup>5</sup> (Martin 2011: 374) and Julia Pastrana (Kopania 2019: 48). Similar information can be found in local newspapers. The most visible example is the story of the Dahomey Amazon troupe, brought by Urbach, mentioned above, with their village located in the city centre as one of the sights in the framework of Riga's 700th Anniversary Exhibition. An eyewitness wrote in *Dienas Lapa* (*The Daily Page*):

Yesterday, out of the extremely large number of visitors to the Bird Meadow exhibition very few left without attending the black guest, the African pagan, the Dahomey sage. Most of the visitors however admitted that these guests were being obnoxious. Thus, four of the black women offered the public booklets with a description of their troupe and also their group pictures. Those who did not want to buy their offerings were not left alone, and as soon as one woman was gone, the second, third, fourth came again, obtrusively hovering around the spectators. If someone did not want to buy any souvenir, they did not leave him in peace during the entire visit; and if someone made a purchase and was entitled to change, it was difficult to get it all back. (*Dienas Lapa*, June 4, 1901: 6)

Although there is no shortage of postcards from Riga's 700th anniversary, the collections found both in the virtual exhibition dedicated to the anniversary (Acadlib 2001) and in a history of Riga in postcards by historian Andris Caune (2017: 224–235), postcards with Dahomey Amazons or "a very fat child", which were on display in one of the huts in the Bird Meadow as part of the Riga anniversary events, are missing.

The lack of visual material regarding the exotic exhibitions can also be observed in the Latvian press. The historian Vita Zelče gives technical reasons, such as inadequate equipment of printing houses. If a visual matrix was submitted to the editorial office, it was printed. Thus, created by the lithographer Adolf Friedlander, the advertisement of the Sinhalese troupe with a Sinhalese sitting on an elephant was reprinted by German, Polish and other countries' press (Kopania 2021: 355), and appeared in newspapers of the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire (*Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, September 11, 1888: 4).

At the turn of the 19th century, it would not be unbiased to compare the intensity of press publications, taking into account that at the beginning of the century, the Latvian-language press lagged significantly behind the German one in terms of the number of titles, and there were not many local Russian publications during the reference period. However, it must be admitted that the local press of the Baltic provinces quite generously covered the exotic shows in such German cities as Berlin, Hamburg, as well as in Warsaw, Vilnius, and other places. It was one of the advertising strategies of the ethnographic industry, that is, before the arrival of a troupe, to report about its approach and success in the local press and in the local language, thus, arousing the interest of potential viewers. The strategy was also used in the case of freak shows. For example, in the second half of the 19th century, stories of the Siamese twins Chang and Eng Bunker's personal life and health and the emphasis on their Chinese origin are only occasionally found in the local press (*Libausche Zeitung*, January 12, 1861: 4; August 14, 1865: 3; *Zeitung für Stadt un Land*, October 12, 1868: 2), but, with their guest performance in Riga approaching, the number of articles and the amount of information heightening public interest increased too. Thus, several newspapers reported that the purpose of the brothers' visit to Europe was to perform a separation operation, though the information was disclaimed by doctors (*Rigasche Zeitung*, December 14, 1868: 2; February 7, 1869: 2; *Libausche Zeitung*, March 13, 1869: 3). Describing their daily life on tour, where they were accompanied by their two sons, one could learn from the press that their morning in Berlin started at 9, and they ate a typical American breakfast, drank coffee with cognac, communicated in Siamese or English, and no one except famous doctors was allowed to see them outside of the show (*Rigasche Zeitung*, February 21, 1870: 2). It is of note that whereas the Latvian press advertises the fact that the brothers would be on display (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, April 2, 1870: 2; *Mājas Viesis*, April 6, 1870: 3; *Latviešu Avīzes*, April 15, 1870: 2) in Riga, only one of the editions makes a mention of the address of the venue.

A similar technique was also used to prepare the audience for the guest show of the Ashanti troupe in Riga:

a caravan of African negroes will soon arrive and show itself to the public here. Hopefully, these black sons of Africa will gain the sympathy of the public, as did the brown Sinhalese last year. The latter made some good Rigans jealous when they saw those savages favoured by the best ladies here. The said negro troupe will probably be the 19 Ashantis who (men and women) are now showing to the Vilnius public in their national clothes (i.e. almost naked). (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, June 3, 1889: 3)

The examples discussed above demonstrate how certain details of the show – an upcoming separation operation, half-naked people, the involvement of elephants, etc. – are highlighted in order to attract the audience, to make the show stand out and distinguish it from other exotic shows. Along with the use of clichés prevailing in society and creat-

ing the illusion of authenticity, which historian Anna Dreesbach (2012: 2) mentions as an important component of the show's success.

In the second half of the 19th century, in the Baltic provinces, there was a high number of literate people, which is confirmed both by the statistics available at the time (see Bērziņš 2000: 285; Volfarte 2009: 269) and the increasing number of press publications and books of secular content (Zelče 2009). The non-German audience also had the opportunity to obtain information about peoples, races, cultures and traditions of the world, initially from local German translations, and later through translations mainly from German made by Latvians themselves. Missionaries' stories, popular scientific descriptions, and reports from the World Expo formed ideas and background knowledge. Additionally, it was not only textually obtained information that created a sense of recognition in live exhibitions. The actions performed by exotic actors, and especially in the context of "native villages", such as, for example, feeding livestock, looking after children, spinning or weaving, they themselves were recognizable, and against this background, further knowledge about tools or working methods used elsewhere was gained. Thus, the Latvian press mentions singing as one of the recognisable practices, though, admittedly, to the Latvian ear Ashanti singing, for example, sounds like shouting or howling (*Mājas Viesis*, July 22, 1889: 4).

In ethnographic shows authenticity was mainly evidenced not only by loud advertising slogans about the opportunity to see, for example, real Aztecs (*Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze*, January 1, 1898: 4), but also by the environment and objects that surrounded the exhibited human or group, whether they are clothing and weapons as in the African Cambora performance (*Mājas Viesis*, August 14, 1871: 2), settlement as in the Dahomey village (*Dienas Lapa*, June 4, 1901: 6), or performance, such as, for example, Ashanti traditional war songs and dances (*Mājas Viesis*, July 22, 1889: 4). Credibility was augmented by the animals brought along. So, in Riga, the Samoyeds were accompanied by reindeer (*Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze*, February 11, 1889: 4) and dogs (*Jaunākās zinas*, January 24, 1915: 4), the Sinhalese by elephants and zebu (*Mājas Viesis*, September 24, 1888: 1).

Likewise, the actors of exotic troupes had to look like those they represented. Newspapers used to question the authenticity of some exotic groups. The author of the review published in the newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnesis* (*Baltic Tribune*) questioned the authenticity of the exhibited Samoyed family, recognising only two of the three members of the group as "authentic". The third one, although dressed in Samoyed clothing, was identified as the "shopkeeper" or impresario of the mother and son who come from the Arkhangelsk Gubernia. (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, February 8, 1889: 3)

The exhibitions held in Riga were generally separate events, only one, the Dahomey village, was included in the program of events for the 700th anniversary of Riga celebrated in 1901, and, thus, it can be considered part of a local event. In this area and context, the talk can be only about exhibiting otherness from the positions of social and cultural superiority.

Negroes or even mermaids (often poor imitations of the real actors, such as, for example, the "grey-stained Jew" in Bauska market, see *Latviešu Avīzes*, October 27, 1893: 3; or self-painted moor in Dižmāras fair in Talsi, see *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, August 23, 1894: 2), exhibited in circuses (*balagāns*<sup>6</sup>) during the fairs in major cities and towns outside Riga, testifies to a wider scale of recognition of this form of entertainment and the public interest in it, the interest undoubtedly promoted by the information provided by the press. Further is an insight into how the press covered typologically different exotic

shows, specifically, a static performance in a closed room (1835), the Sinhalese and Ashanti shows (1888 and 1889), as well as the Dahomey village (1901).

The newspaper *Tas latviešu ļaužu draugs* (*Friend of the Latvian People*) published in Latvian by Baltic-German pastors informed its readers about the opportunity to see people belonging to five different “sorts” in Riga. In the live exhibition, which an unnamed Englishman brought to Riga, the Indian from Madras, the native from Rhode island (North America), the native from Antigua island (Lesser Antilles, South America), the African, and the Australian from New Guinea could be viewed. The description in the newspaper also mentions that all the participants in the show were dressed in their national clothes, sang and danced to the accompaniment of their music, and demonstrated their martial arts and weapons (*Tas Latviešu ļaužu draugs*, December 5, 1835: 1).

The description of Sinhalese guest performances in Riga in September 1888, published in the Latvian press, was imbued with deep sympathy, expressing admiration for these inhabitants of the British colony of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for their forbearance in the autumn climatic conditions of Latvia, their kindness and unobtrusiveness (*Mājas Viesis*, September 24, 1888: 1). Mutual understanding and empathy might have been fostered by the ability of some members of the Sinhalese troupe to communicate in English and, in particular, German, which was well known or at least understood by Latvians. A more critical note is voiced in the descriptions of the Samoyeds (Nenets) and the Ashanti group during their guest performances in Riga in 1889.

Describing the Dahomey Amazon village, Latvian, the Russian and German press present different assessment of this show in the context of the Riga anniversary events. If Latvian (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, June 8, 1901: 1) and Russian press (*Rizhskii Vestnik*, July 2, 1901: 1) offer critical, even snobbish appraisal of this event, German publications rather attempt to promote it, as can be seen in the following example:

A real battle develops against the poignant picture, because with deafening weapons and terrible roars, the wild women of Dahomey, the African Amazons united with their men, rush over one another and fight real battles, in which one can become fearful and anxious. Wild dances with terrible music are also performed, the black eyes shine like burning candles and the bared white teeth stand out dazzlingly against the black features. But there are also beauties among these women who, when they smile, want to say to Karmen: “Be careful!” (*Düna Zeitung*, June 6, 1901: 3)

The descriptions of live exhibitions published in the Latvian press, refer only to some of the events of more than 18 exotic shows held in Riga. More attention has been paid to this type of recreation and world cognition in the German-language press published in the territory of Latvia, and the number of advertisements therein concerning these events is significantly ahead of those in the Latvian and Russian press.

Looking at the content of the few texts in Latvian describing exotic exhibitions (see Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020) as well as the foreign ones with experience in such entertainments, there are imposed categories that separate “us, whites” from them, blacks or browns (*Balss*, October 18, 1900: 1–2), us, Christians, from pagans (*Mājas Viesis*, October 20, 1873: 334), us, the civilised, from them, savages. Latvian press articles on this topic are governed by empathy for those exhibited people, attempting to understand their thoughts about viewers and the European countries they are visiting, as well as their physical sensations and emotional experiences arising in unusual climatic conditions

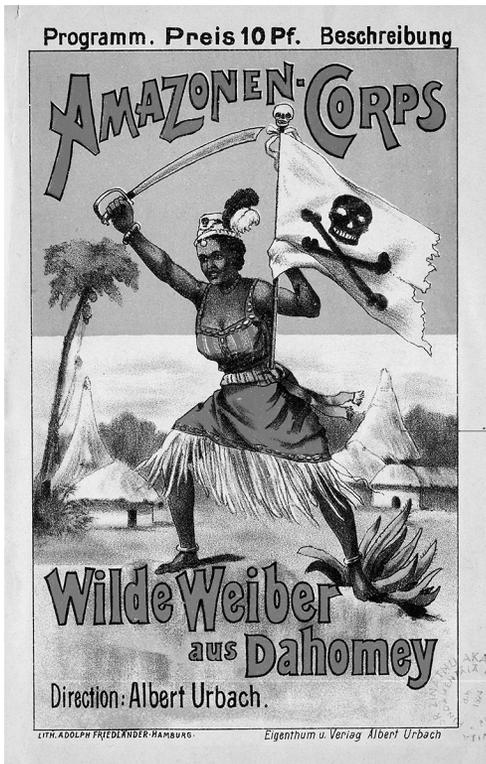


Figure 1. Poster of Dahomey Amazons in Riga (1901). The Collection of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia.

and far away from their homes and families. As far as we may judge on the basis of few articles, the mood is rather reflective on the fate of Latvians themselves. So, soon, in 1896, within the framework of the 10th All-Russian Archaeological Congress, Latvians organised their own ethnographic exhibition<sup>7</sup> comprising anthropological types and traditional clothing, buildings, etc. (Stinkule 2016)

In the circumstances of Baltic-German society actively discussing questions of identity, the idea of the past of the Baltic region and their cornerstone role, which also found its expression in the concern for the preservation of cultural heritage (Jõekalda 2014; Mintauris 2016), their view on living specimens displayed in exotic exhibitions had a more pronounced sense of superiority and was more inclined to scientific explanation. Regarding the Russian viewers, we have to agree with Maria Leskinen's (2021: 320–321) view that from the modern perspective, we can see the presence of the “racial gaze”, though strong claims still lack proof.

#### VENUES AND AVAILABILITY

Historians, ethnologists and representatives of other scientific fields in various discourses exploring live exhibitions in the long 19th century found the Zoo to be the most frequently used venue for live exhibitions (Baglo 2015: 64; Demski 2020: 204). This practice also gave the name to the event itself – “human zoos” – confirming the animalisation of live exhibits, a clear demonstration of superiority on the part of the audience (Blanchard et al. 2008; Abbatista and Labanca 2008). However, not all researchers support this vision<sup>8</sup> and, similarly, the author of the article avoids using the term ‘human zoos’ in relation to the shows held in Riga.

The practice of showing ethnographic groups in zoos was familiar in the Russian Empire, for example, in Moscow or St. Petersburg (Leskinen 2021: 298–302). Zoos were places where it was possible to see something outside of the viewers’ usual geographical environment. Zoos were also chosen as the venue due to the business connections of the impresarios. Some entrepreneurs involved in the ethnographic industry, including German businessman Karl Hagenbeck (1844–1913), well-known in the Baltic provinces, started their businesses as suppliers of exotic animals to menageries and zoos (Thode-Arora 2021: 48–49). The connections gained in this business were useful for organising both troupe and guest performances.

In Riga, the zoo was opened relatively late, in 1912, and even then the opening was accompanied by extensive discussions on whether local society was ready for such entertainment (Caune 2009: 185). Riga Zoo is still located in Mežaparks on the shore of Lake Ķīšezers (at that time Ķeizarmežs or Keiserwald), within a 30-minute tram ride of the city centre. Here we can mention only one live exhibition, created by a group of Samoyeds (Nenets) with their reindeer and dogs. Their visit took place at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915, at the time when the First World War started in Europe but had not yet reached the territory of Latvia. A special highlight of this exhibition was the offer for children to ride in a dog sled.

The zoo was not the only place where exotic shows were held. According to the size of the troupe, venues were chosen or arranged elsewhere in Riga's urban environment. Unless they were part of a circus program, the number of actors in freak shows was relatively small, from one to five people. Similarly to the actors in small ethnographic shows, freaks were also exhibited in closed rooms or in circuses located in parks. Starting with the first known exotic show in Riga in 1835 with the performance of five people belonging to different races, such shows took place in Old Riga, called *Innenstadt*, 'Innere Stadt', at the time (Lux 2004: 73; Caune 2018: 18). Until 1863, Old Riga was surrounded by a fortification wall that physically separated its inhabitants from the outside world. Some demarcation also took place inside the walls. For example, in Old Riga, the most frequent venue for exotic shows was the Small Guild House, located at Amatu Street 8. That building belonged to the city's fraternity of craftsmen (1352–1936), which was a closed social group.

In the hall of the Small Guild, Riga residents and guests of the city had the opportunity to observe the conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker (1870),<sup>9</sup> already mentioned in the article, as well as admire the mysterious "Ape Woman" suffering from hypertrichosis Julia Pastrana (1859).<sup>10</sup> Pastrana was able to charm the audience with her external appearance much dissonant to her personality. With great self-respect, she walked through the hall at the start of the performance and increased the sympathy of the audience with a performance specially prepared for the place, for example, an Irish dance for Irish audience or the *krakowiak* for audiences in Poland (see Kopania 2019). One more fact is waiting for confirmation – after her death, Pastrana may have visited Riga as a taxidermied body.

However, more often in Riga freaks were exhibited in special booths placed in large gathering places such as parks, city and market squares. One of the favourite places of travelling circuses was Vērmanģārzs Park, and it is no coincidence that Alberts Solomonskis (1839–1913) chose the site for the construction of the circus building in the immediate vicinity of this park (Pāvula 2021). The circus building has been standing there since 1888. Circus programs were happy to include acts with exotic-looking or non-European actors. In this context, the Samoan troupe may be mentioned as a star of Riga circus programs at the end of 1896 and beginning of 1897.<sup>11</sup> After the First World War, with exotic shows losing their popularity, this practice became more and more common.

The collection of posters at the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books in the Academic Library of the University of Latvia shows that tents and temporary constructions were erected in Vērmanģārzs Park<sup>12</sup> or in its immediate vicinity for the purpose of organising various shows, exhibitions, concerts, circus performances and other entertainment events.



Figure 2. Poster of Chinese Sam-Ang and Arr-Zang in Riga (1865). The Collection of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia.

Further, in VērmanĀrzs Park and its closest vicinity the public could observe *Ethnologische Völker-Kabinett* (1857),<sup>13</sup> performances by Chinese Sam-Ang and Arr-Zang (1865),<sup>14</sup> *Anatomische Museum Präuscher* (1867),<sup>15</sup> the giant siblings Flora and Rosa (1871),<sup>16</sup> the giant lady from Switzerland Elslie (1873).<sup>17</sup> In May–June 1871, Baltic-German artist Julius Döring (Dērings 2019: 172) wrote in his diary about the giant siblings Flora and Rosa seen in VērmanĀrzs Park, saying that he had gone

to the hut in VērmanĀrzs Park to see the giants, sisters Flora and Rosa from Cologne, together with the giant Ricotto from Marseilles and the dwarf Tompusu (26 years old, one arshin and two vershok high and 28 pounds in weight). These women were not only tall, but also fat, real fat slobs.

If VērmanĀrzs Park was more associated with freaks, cabinets of curiosities and circus actors, then the oldest Riga park, laid out in the first half 18th century, Ķeizardārzs Park (now Viesturdārzs,

‘Song Festival Park’)<sup>18</sup> was known for companies of ethnographic performers. Posters and advertisements in the press show that it was the venue where the Singhalese (1888,<sup>19</sup> 1889<sup>20</sup>), Samoyed (1889),<sup>21</sup> Cunnigham Negertruppe (1895),<sup>22</sup> and the Kru people (1895)<sup>23</sup> performed. Like other parks in Old Riga and its vicinity, this was also a place of entertainment for the wealthy public, where electric lights were lit and a brass band played at night. This park had a special entrance card, which did not work during ethnographic shows (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, August 12, 1889: 4). The vastness of Ķeizardārzs Park and its status as a popular entertainment venue at the time came in handy for large troupes. There were moments when guest appearances overlapped. For example, in 1889, one can read in the press about the cancellation of the Ashanti show in Ķeizardārzs Park, and its transfer to Torņkalns Park (founded in 1885), located on the opposite side of the Daugava River. As the turn of the century approached, more and more entertainment events were concentrated in parks closer to the city centre. Thus were the events of the 700th anniversary of the current capital of Latvia; accordingly, the exhibition of industrial and craft achievements was located in the Esplanade, with smaller events held in Strēlnieku garden, but larger-scale events, including the Dahomey village, took place in Bird Meadow or Vogelwiese, in the immediate vicinity of Old Riga (Caune 2017: 234).

Why is the location of exotic exhibitions in Riga’s urban environment important? Since the 13th century, the territory, environment and society of Latvia had developed

under colonial conditions, which locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers in the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history (Loomba 2005: 8). The superiority of the Baltic-Germans was also visible in the landscape of Latvia – whether it is an urban or a rural environment, a clear distinction can be made between the centre (a manor or a city centre), which was predominantly inhabited by German nobility, and the periphery where the rest of the population resided. Evaluating this aspect can indicate the availability of exotic shows and whether the venue affected the social and ethnic structure of the audience.

Under the influence of the reforms implemented in the Russian Empire in the 19th century, the population of Riga grew rapidly, with the proportion of Baltic-Germans significantly decreasing from 42.8% to 13.5%, while the proportion of Latvians among Rigans increased from 23.5% to 41.3% (Oberlenders 2004: 26). Despite this, the city administration was still in the hands of the local Germans, who did not want to give up ground. In the second half of the 19th century, the struggle for influence in the region also meant the separation of the cultural life of the Baltic-German, Russian and Latvian communities, each striving to justify the “advantages” of their cultural identity in relation to the competing ethnic group, whose representatives acted in the same way (von Hirschhausen 2006: 273–367). Thus, there were parallel social communities that maintained mutual contact, but at the same time differed in language, ethnic self-awareness and understanding of history (Mintaus 2016: 33). This was also reflected in the urban environment of Riga, which allows historians to talk about the existence of two Rigas, the “exemplary” Riga including Inner Riga (Old Riga), and the southwestern part of the St. Petersburg suburb, which was “comfortable” and “civic” and “dirty” (Oberlenders 2004: 22). The reason for the huge difference between these two parts of the city and the living conditions of their inhabitants was associated not only with the incompetent collection and administration of taxes, but also with the political will of the city administration (Ozoliņa 1976: 262; Henriksson 1986: 191–192). In the context of the article, one example should be mentioned: the workers’ access to Vērmanģārzs Park, which did not satisfy civil society and encouraged the city council to establish a restaurant in Kojusalu Park (Moscow suburb) in 1868 and make this more attractive to workers (Lux 2004: 78).

The ‘exemplary’ centre of the city, where, as mentioned above, most of the live exhibitions in Riga were held, was an area of German cultural influence until the First World War. Latvians preferred to organise entertainment events and dancing parties in the parks and gardens established in Outer Riga – Katrīnas dambis, Andrejsala, Sarkan-daugava, Grīziņkalns, and Torņakalns Park (Bērziņš 2009: 57).

Along with the availability of the environment, event prices are also an important aspect in defining the structure of visitors to exotic shows and whether in Riga they were entertainment only for the wealthy layer of society. Recent research on the subject of live exhibitions in Central and Eastern Europe shows that these events were widely available to all levels and groups of society (Thode-Arora 1989; 2006: 308; Czarnačka 2020: 288–289) thanks to relatively low entrance fees, as well as to anthropologists, ethnographers, geographers, anatomists, physicians, and workers. It is to be clarified whether this finding can also be applied to the exotic shows that took place in the territory of Latvia.

Posters calling for live exhibitions and advertisements on the last pages of local newspapers show that during the less than a century under review (1835–1915) the

price range was quite diverse – from one rouble or 50 kopecks for the most convenient places with the best visibility to 10 kopecks for a place at the back of the hall. A note that the payment is to be made in silver kopecks can be found in advertisements concerning two events: a live exhibition with people belonging to five different “sorts” (1835) and the *Ethnologische Völker-Kabinett* (1857). The above-mentioned events highlight two social categories, children and servants, for whom a reduced entrance fee was set, in the first case 30, and in the second case 10, silver kopecks. After 1857, servants were no longer singled out as a separate section of the audience entitled to a reduced entrance fee. The price category for children remained stable throughout the whole period considered. The cost of their entrance card was about half the price of second and third category tickets. For attendance of the events, several entrance fee options were offered, which differed according to which segment of the venue the ticket gave access. The most expensive ones (1 rouble–40 kopecks) were for seats closer to the stage, followed by second category seats (60–20 kopecks), and at the back of the venue, third category seats (30–20 kopecks). Significantly, this was not a universal scheme, it differed depending on the layout of the venue. Regarding the prices, it is noteworthy that advertisements inviting visitors to events in the usual entertainment areas were often followed by information about changes in the usual admission charge practices. For example, Salamonski Circus increased the entrance fee on days when the Samoan troupe performed (*Düna Zeitung*, December 23, 1896: 3), and Riga Zoo added an extra 15 kopecks to the regular price when the Samoyeds were present (*Lidums*, December 28, 1914: 3).

The ticket prices and the way they increased meant the cost was not small for a person from the ‘dirty’ part of Riga. Obviously, in the 1860s and 1870s the chances that a farmer or worker, i.e. the majority of Latvians, could see the Ape Woman or the Siamese twins in the Small Guild was almost negligible. However, the level of prosperity in the working environment rose slowly. Historians agree that until the First World War, more than two-thirds of income in the families of workers in the Baltic provinces was used to cover food and apartment rent, with the surplus going to meet other needs such as clothing, hygiene, education, medicine, culture, transport (Bērziņš 1997: 107). Young unmarried workers were in a better situation as they could afford a ticket to an exotic show. However, it is worth emphasising that among Latvians there was also a certain proportion of professionals and wealthy people; in addition, what could not be seen in person could be found in Latvian- and German-language newspaper columns.

## CONCLUSIONS

Riga, as one of the fastest developing cities in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire, was also a centre of cultural life offering a stage for many Europe-wide cultural events, including exotic shows. During the long 19th century, the live exhibitions – freak shows and ethnic shows created by modern colonialism – offered a new form of entertainment and knowledge acquisition to the numerically increasing society of Riga (which also had an increasing proportion of ethnic Latvians). However, the internal structure of society determined by colonialism, which was reflected both in the Latvian countryside and urban environment with clear marking of physical and symbolic boundaries, could not help but affect the availability of exotic shows, especially in the first half and middle of the 19th century.

Most of the 18 currently identified exotic shows held in Riga between 1835 and 1915 took place in the city centre in Inner/Old Riga or in the adjacent Ķeizardārzs and Vērmanģdārzs Parks. In 1863, the demolition of the walls of Inner Riga, which had been under German rule for centuries and was still under the influence of the German nobility, physically connected it to Outer Riga. The influence of German culture now extended to the southwestern part of the city, St. Petersburg suburb, and along with Inner Riga shaped the exemplary centre where people from other parts of the city, the so-called 'dirty' part, were not welcome. Another important factor in the availability of exotic shows to Riga city dwellers, especially the lower strata of society, was the entrance fee.

The absence of statistical data on live exhibition audiences, as well as the reliance on some data on the socio-economic shape of society affected by colonialism, lead to the conclusion that exotic shows in Riga, especially until the last decades of the 19th century, were the entertainment of wealthy Rigans, mainly Baltic-Germans. Their close cultural ties and business connections with compatriots in German lands, and later in the German Empire, must be taken into account as arguments for the opinion expressed. Given that Germany was a colonial country (Ciarlo 2011: 4) and was among the countries where live exhibitions or *Völkerschauen* were very common (Demski 2020: 209), and given that many of the impresarios staging these shows (Thode-Arora 2006) were German, the interest of Riga Germans is understandable.

Rare references in the press and fiction<sup>24</sup> indicate the awareness of a wider Latvian public of the course of such events and the opportunity to earn money at fairs by imitating them. The purpose of these announcements, placed in the Latvian press since the 1880s, had to be attracting a Latvian audience. However, the question of the position that exotic shows had in the list of Latvian recreations in the long 19th century remains unanswered.

Exotic exhibitions in Riga were not organised in the context of any political developments; theoretically, they correspond to the format of expression of social and cultural power. The various messages recorded in local newspapers in the context of live exhibitions indicate the 'racial gaze' of Germans towards living examples. Whereas Latvians, although they were well aware of which side of the divide – white/black, Christian/pagan, civilised/savage – they stood on, empathically compared their situation with those on the stage, finding some similarities in both fates.

The answer to the question of whether the space played a role in the availability of exotic shows for all Rigans is in the affirmative. Among other factors, place as a result of relationships between the people living in it, as an environment created from a power position, marking the city's inhabitants as belonging and non-belonging, would have had an impact on both the composition of the audience at live exhibitions, and on power relations between 'live specimens' and the audience.

As time moved on, and different people, at different times for different reasons, created new narratives (Ashworth and Graham 2005: 3), the sense of place changed. The Second World War, the Nazi, and Soviet, occupation powers essentially changed the ethnic structure of the Latvian population, significantly influencing the numerical and qualitative composition of the German minority. That probably could be one of the reasons why there are no stories in Latvia, and consequently, no discussions, about live exhibitions in the cultural environment of Riga and other cities in contemporary Latvia.

**Annex 1. Exotic shows in Riga, 1835–1915.**

Year	Date	Event	Venue
1835	November 23–December (?)	The Indian from Madras, the native from Rhode island (North Amerika), the native from Antigua island (Lesser Antilles, South Amerika), the African, the Australian from New Guinea	The former Delsner house opposite the <i>Commerzbank</i> , Audēju street, <b>Old Riga</b>
1857	April 24–August 10 (?)	Ethnologische Völker-Kabinet	Specially built booth opposite <b>Vērmanĉārzs Park</b> , Riga
1859	March 21–26	Julia Pastrana (Woman Ape)	St. John's or Small Guild (Mazā Ģilde), <b>Old Riga</b>
1865	September 11–21	Chinese Sam-Ang & Arr-Zang	"Park neben dem circus" – <b>Vērmanĉārzs Park</b> (?), Riga
1867	June 4–July 7 (?)	Anatomische Museum <i>Präuscher</i>	Lüttgens'schen Theater, nearby <b>Vērmanĉārzs Park</b> , Riga
1870	April 6–10	Chang Bunker and Eng Bunker ("Siamese twins")	St. John's or Small Guild (Mazā Ģilde), <b>Old Riga</b>
1871	May 27–July 3	Huge siblings Flora and Rose, giant and "the smallest man in the world"	<b>Vērmanĉārzs Park</b> , Riga
1873	August 18	Elsli (giant lady from Switzerland)	Circus, <b>Vērmanĉārzs Park</b> , Riga
1888	September 11–28	Singhalese ("Children of Asia", "Singhalesen carawane")	<b>Ķeizardārzs Park</b> , Riga
1889	February 5–26	Nenets (Samoyeds)	<b>Ķeizardārzs Park</b> , Riga
1889	July 16–26	Ashanti / Asanti ("Caravan of African black people")	<b>Torņakalns Park</b> , Riga
1889	August 9–22	Singhalese ("Singhalesen carawane")	<b>Ķeizardārzs Park</b> , Riga
1895	May 21–28	Representatives of African people (" <i>Cunnigham=Neger Gesellschaft</i> ", " <i>Cunnigham=Negertruppe</i> ")	<b>Ķeizardārzs Park</b> , Riga
1895	September 28–October 13	Kru people ("Urbach=Negercarawane", "Nana Kroo people")	<b>Ķeizardārzs Park</b> , Riga
1896	December 25–	Samoa ("Creole people ballet")	Salamonski circus, near
1897	January 3		<b>Vērmanĉārzs Park</b> , Riga
1897	December 18–	Aztecs (" <i>Original Azteken</i> ")	Audēju Street 12,
1898	January 4		<b>Old Riga</b>
1901	June 5–July?	Fon people ("Amazons from Dahomey", "Dahomey village")	<i>Vogelwiese</i> , <i>Bird Meadow</i> , <b>Old Riga</b>
1914	December 24–May 26	Nenets (Samoyeds)	<b>ZOO</b> , Riga
1915			

Price (kopeks)				
VIP <sup>1</sup>	2nd category tickets	3rd category tickets	Children	Servants
60 (silver)	40 (silver)	–	30 (silver)	30 (silver)
20 (silver)			10 (silver)	10 (silver)
50	25			
100	60–40	20		
25				
100	50	25		
50	30	15	½ price on VIP and 2nd category tickets	
40	20		½ price	
50	30		15	
25			10	
50	30		15	
50	30			
70	50	30	15	
50	35		15	
Increased price				
50	30	20		
10				
15			10	

## NOTES

1 A frequent question in historiography is “If Russia is a colonizing state, where does Russia end and its colonies begin? Such perennial questions entertain no concise answers.” (Brennan and Frame 2000: viii)

2 World fairs or EXPO were among popular events that displayed Otherness from the colonies. Here the latest scientific achievements – steam engines, telephones, etc. – were exhibited at the same venue as the benefits gained from the colonies and the peoples living there, along with the artefacts of their culture. At the same time, the World Expo also showed the direction of social evolution (Abbattista and Iannuzzi 2016: 1) from the huts and primitive tools of colonial peoples to the highest technological achievements of the time. Such a shocking, breath-taking view was fully in line with the prevailing spirit of modernism in the period under consideration.

3 At the disposal of the author is more data on displaying Otherness in Riga, in particular freak shows. They are not included in the table because their exact dates still need to be identified.

4 The performances took place in Dubbeln (Dubulti), today part of Jurmala.

5 The author had an opportunity to see the photos of the Siamese twins in the Southern Historical Collection in the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as in the collection of the recognised freak photographer Charles Eisenmann (1855–1927) at the Syracuse Library.

6 *Balaḡāns* (Russian *balagan*): 1. a light temporary structure for performances (for example in a market square); the troupe performing in it; the show that takes place in it; 2. a low-quality unartistic performance, a show with cheap special effects (Baldunčiks 1999: 91).

7 This is not a unique practice either. In parallel to the exhibitions of colonial villages, in many parts of Europe there were also exhibitions of local villages with motivation drawn from an interest in ethnographic conservation and promotion of the “land” and “regional heritage” (Blanchard et al. 2008: 21).

8 The German historian Hilke Thode-Arora (2021: 45–46, 51–52) lists several reasons why the term ‘ethnic shows’ is more appropriate than ‘human zoos’: ethnic shows demonstrate cultural rather than human physical differences; there were no asymmetric power relations between the impresario and the actors, with the latter having agency and a signed contract defining mutual obligations and rights.

9 Advertisements for the performance of the Siamese twins can be found in the newspaper *Rigasche Zeitung*, April 6–9, 1870; brief information without mention of the date or venue was included in *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, April 2, 1870: 2.

10 Announcements about the opportunity to meet Pastrana can be found in the newspaper *Rigasche Zeitung*, March 20–25, 1859.

11 Advertisements for a Samoa performance in Salamonski circus found in *Düna Zeitung*, December 23, 1896 – January 3, 1897; *Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze...*, December 24, 1896 – January 3, 1897.

12 Vērmaņdārzs Park is two blocks away from Inner Riga; today it is surrounded by Tērbatas, Elizabetes, Krišjāņa Barona, and Merķeļa streets.

13 See *Rigasche Zeitung*, April 22 – August 10, 1857.

14 Advertisements in *Rigasche Zeitung*, September 11–21, 1865.

15 See *Rigasche Zeitung*, June 3 – July 7, 1867; *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, June 22, 1867: 191.

16 Advertisements to see giant siblings Rosa and Flora from Köln, giant Riccoto from Marseille and the smallest man Thompuss in *Rigasche Zeitung*, May 27 – July 3, 1871; *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, May 25 – June 9, 1871; *Rizhskii Vestnik*, May 29, 1871: 4; June 3, 1871: 4.

17 See *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, August 18, 1873: 4.

18 Ķeizardārzs Park lies between Eksporta, Hanzas, and Rūpniecības streets, a 10–15 minute walk from Old Riga.

19 See advertisements in *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, September 11, 1888: 4; *Düna Zeitung*, September 13, 1888: 4; description in *Mājas Viesis*, September 24, 1888: 1.

20 See advertisements in *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, Augusts 6–21, 1889; *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, August 6–22, 1889; *Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze...*, August 8–22, 1889.

21 See *Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze...*, February 4–25, 1889.

22 See *Rigasche Rundschau*, May 23, 1895: 4; *Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze...*, May 21, 1895: 4; May 28, 1895: 4.

23 *Rigasche Rundschau*, September 26, 1895: 4; *Düna Zeitung*, September 29, 1895: 4.

24 They generally refer to clumsy imitations of freak shows at Latvian city fairs (for example Virza 1936: 82–86).

## SOURCES

*Balss* (1878–1927)

*Baltijas Vēstnesis* (1868–1920)

*Düna Zeitung* (1887–1917)

*Dienas Lapa* (1886–1918)

*Jaunākās Ziņas* (1911–1940)

*Latviešu Avīzes* (1822–1915)

*Libausche Zeitung* (1858–1939)

*Līdums* (1913–1944)

*Mājas Viesis* (1856–1910)

*Rigasche Rundschau* (1895–1939)

*Rigasche Stadtblätter* (1810–1907)

*Rigasche Zeitung* (1802–1919)

*Rizhskii Vestnik* (1869–1917)

*Rīgas Pilsētas Policijas Avīze* = *Vedomosti Rizhskoi Gorodskoi Policii* = *Zeitung den Rigaschen Stadtpolizei* (1889–1902)

*Tas Latviešu ļaužu draugs* (1832–1837)

*Zeitung für Stadt und Land* (1866–1894)

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