Chapter One

Introduction: From Western to Peripheral Voices

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Ethnic/ethnographic shows (both terms are used within this book) are a cultural phenomenon that developed on a massive scale in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. This form of entertainment involved displaying members of non-European communities to the public of the Old Continent, which regarded these people as “exotic.” The popularity of shows with non-European people reached its peak between the 1880s and the outbreak of World War I, and many chapters in this volume pertain to this period. In practice, though, the evolution of the phenomenon was dynamic in nature and occurred over a much longer period of time. This fact has been reflected in the timeframe of the present study, which encompasses the years between 1850 and 1939.¹

This period was defined at the stage of preparing a research project on ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), from which this book arises. It was selected because the 1850s marked the start of an increase in the frequency of exhibitions involving non-European peoples in colonial countries. The Great Exhibition in London, where George Catlin’s Ojibwe and Iowa “Indians”² were put on display, took place in 1851. We did not know at the time (it was established in further research) that ethnic shows were only organized in CEE countries much later. Currently available data suggests that the first one took place in 1874 in the Budapest zoo. The closing

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¹ The same timeframe was used in the research project entitled Inscenizowana inność. Ludzkie odmienności w Europie Środkowej, 1850–1939 (Staged Otherness: Human Oddities in Central Europe, 1850–1939), funded by the National Science Centre Grant No. UMO-2015/19/B/HS3/02143. Work on the project started in 2016; the present publication constitutes its final result.

² The quotation marks are used deliberately. Aware of the negative connotations the term “Indians” carries today, we nonetheless decided not to forgo its use in order that we can indicate the phraseology employed in the discourse of the day.
date is 1939. The last performances of non-European people in CEE took place in the 1930s (with the exception of displays in Nazi Germany). World War II put a definitive halt on the further development of such enterprises in the region.

The study of ethnic shows in Western Europe and the United States has been systematically conducted for at least several decades (Schneider 1977; Thode-Arora 1989), resulting in a truly impressive number of relevant academic publications (e.g., Abbattista 2015; Ames 2004, 2008; Andreassen 2015; Bharathi Larsson 2016; Blanchard et al. 2008; Corbey 1993; Lindfors 1999; Qureshi 2011; Sánchez-Gómez 2013). Conversely, the research conducted in this field in Central and Eastern Europe is still at an early stage of development. With very few exceptions (e.g., Tomicki 1992), the works describing ethnic shows in the region were mostly written in the last few years (e.g., Boldāne-Zelenkova 2020; Czarnecka 2018, 2020; Czarnecka and Demski 2020; Demski 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020; Herza 2016; Kontler 2020; Leskinen 2018, 2019; Novikova 2013; Savitsky 2018). Scholars from CEE are now collecting and systematizing data, retracing routes, and constructing general frameworks that would allow the phenomenon to be analyzed in specific contexts. This process poses numerous challenges and problems.

Not the least of them is the fact that only a small portion of archival material (both visual and textual) pertaining to ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe has survived to the present day. For instance, the entire archive collection on the performances of “exotic” Others in the Warsaw zoo was lost in 1939 when a bomb fell on the Ethnographic Museum, where the documents were held. A similar fate befell the archives of the zoological gardens in Moscow and Saint Petersburg (see Leskinen in this volume). Furthermore, extant materials are scattered around Europe, which makes the task of locating them particularly difficult and time-consuming. Private journals, letters, or diaries containing mentions of ethnic shows are also very rare (e.g., on the Warsaw performances see Prus 1953–70; Galewski and Grzeniewski 1961). In this context, press reports prove a valuable and helpful source of information, which is why many scholars use them as the basis for their study of this phenomenon in the region.

It should be noted that in most Central and Eastern European cities that are of interest to the present study (i.e., those that hosted organized shows with non-European people in the latter half of the nineteenth cen-
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tury and the first half of the twentieth century), local periodicals were published in different languages and dedicated to different audiences. For instance, the ethnic shows taking place in Poznań (Ger. Posen; then a part of German territory) were commented on simultaneously in the Polish-language and German-language press (Demski 2020). In Riga, information regarding the performances of non-European people appeared in Russian-, German-, and Latvian-language periodicals (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020); in Upper Silesia in Polish- and German-language titles and in the regional Upper Silesian press (see Baraniecka-Olszewska in this volume); and in Slovene-inhabited lands of the Habsburg Empire in Slovene-, German-, and Italian-language newspapers (see Mesarič in this volume). In Banat and Transylvania, advertisements announcing the arrival of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show were printed in Romanian, Hungarian, and German newspapers (see Barabas in this volume). Although in many cases the same descriptions and announcements were reprinted in several different periodicals in an almost unchanged form, a careful study reveals the existence of numerous dissimilarities. Different papers put emphasis on different things. In periodicals published in languages used by national or ethnic minorities, descriptions of ethnic shows were often connected with attempts at expressing local political views and accentuating the circumstances in which these minorities were then living (e.g., in the part of Poland annexed by Prussia, where an intense Germanization policy had severely limited the freedom of speech, ethnic shows provided Poles with an opportunity to pronounce their arguments concerning defending the Polish language; Demski 2020). What is more, due to preventive censorship (in lands under German rule and the Russian Empire), certain messages could not be expressed directly. Consequently, to fully understand the meaning of the information disseminated with the help of the press, the readers of the day (and modern scholars) needed to be able to decipher and interpret linguistic, cultural, and social codes and know the context in which these descriptions were written and received.

In such circumstances, comparative studies aimed at reconstructing this cultural phenomenon on the basis of data from various sources become even more valuable. Analyzing the entire body of press materials is a multilevel process, often exceeding the competence of a single researcher. The fact that, at the present state of research, many scholars from the region base their
analyses solely on information found in periodicals published in one given language clearly indicates the need for further and continued study.

One must also remember that the analysis of press materials pertaining to ethnic shows needs to be conducted with extreme care and caution. There is little doubt that many descriptions (especially press announcements) were written upon the instigation of entrepreneurs from the entertainment industry. They paid the newspapers for printing and distributing these texts, quite often deliberately misleading the audience. Examples include the practices employed by the Hagenbeck company (see Thode-Arora in this volume), the advertising campaign for Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (see Barabas in this volume; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020), or circuses (see Baraniecka-Olszewska in this volume). The principal aim of a successful advertising campaign was to engage the imagination and fantasies of potential spectators and to promote shows rather than provide a faithful description. Thus, any doubts regarding the informative value of such sources are highly justified. Although reports and comments written by local journalists are considered to belong to a slightly different category of press materials—aiming to present the reader with “truthful” information about the show—the fact-related value of such materials is also questionable for a number of reasons. For instance, in 1884 the German-language Posener Zeitung (Posen Newspaper) reported the death and burial of a Sioux chief: “Father Yellow Smoke, the old leader of the Sioux-Omaha tribe, has died in Posen and was buried by the members of his tribe, with large crowds in attendance, on foreign soil. He was taken by an internal illness” (April 27, 1884). Polish-language press from that time made no mention of the event. Interestingly, later in the tour, that same Native American troupe performed in Warsaw. Polish-language press in the city mentioned the chief a number of times, referring to him as a living member of the group: “One of such indigenous chiefs (Yellow Smoke) is among the individuals currently presenting themselves in Warsaw” (Kurier Warszawski [Warsaw Courier], May 15, 1884). Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain whether the information about the chief’s death was false, or perhaps some other member of the group started to play the chief for the purpose of the show. The latter seems probable, given the fact that, in the context of ethnic shows, individuals were much less important than the characters they portrayed. In any case, the example illustrates that a comparison of press descriptions published in different
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periodicals and different cities may reveal certain contradictions and call into question the credibility of some information.

In his analysis of the Samoyed shows in Vienna in 1882, Evgeny Savitsky in this volume points to yet another possible cause of inaccuracies in press descriptions and also to the immense influence the press had on the process of creating an image of reality. It has already been ascertained that the “names” of the Samoyeds in the troupe mentioned in the press were in fact terms defining their kinship relations and social status. In Europe, these words began to function as “stage names” due to a combination of different factors, such as the customs of the Northern peoples, the strategies employed by entrepreneurs, and the state of anthropological knowledge at the time.

In practice, the extant press materials provide information not as much about the “exotic” peoples and cultures performing in Europe, but about the local communities, their attitudes toward non-European people, and the roles ethnic shows played in specific political, cultural, and social contexts.

Researchers interested in ethnic shows in CEE countries sometimes face communication problems while conducting archival queries. In our search for sources in archives, museums, and other institutions in Poland, Latvia, and Ukraine, we used terms such as “ethnic shows,” “ethnographic shows,” Völkerschauen, or “human zoo” only to discover that, in many cases, the employees of these institutions did not understand what sorts of materials we were looking for. It was much easier to obtain relevant information by inquiring about circuses with ethnic programs, balagans, or freak shows. Consequently, the first queries—which included the terms mentioned above—usually yielded negative results; institutions claimed not to have any such materials in their collection or asked further questions to get a better idea of our search objectives. Only descriptive explanations of the factual nature of ethnic shows brought the desired result and made it possible to proceed. István Sántha (this volume) puts clear emphasis on these types of problems, which he encountered during his archival queries in Saint Petersburg.

In her chapter about ethnic shows in Moscow and Saint Petersburg in the years from 1879 to 1914, Maria Leskinen (this volume) asks the rhetorical question of whether the development of this phenomenon in Russia could be described as “a century of elision.” Wondering whether this is due
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to ignorance or perhaps the significant absence of the topic in the Russian context in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, Leskinen remarks that contemporary research on ethnic performances in Russia is still at a very early stage. To a greater or lesser extent, the analyses presented by both Leskinen and Sántha reveal very contemporary problems associated with the fact that scholars in a given place and time focus on or disregard certain issues. Consequently, it becomes clear that key aspects of understanding certain phenomena (in this case—ethnic shows) in different contexts lie not only in information found in archival material but also in the circumstances in which research is now conducted and in the scholars’ sensitivity to the nuances that surface in the course of their study.

The contributors to this book often started their research nearly “from scratch,” as the topic of ethnic shows had not yet been tackled in most countries in the region. This meant they had no relevant academic literature to fall back on to acquire even such basic information as the dates of visits made by “exotic” Others in a given city, or the names of impresarios. In these circumstances, the findings of American and Western European scholars proved truly invaluable. Becoming acquainted with these works was not only a choice motivated by the wish to explore academic publications pertaining to ethnic shows. In practice, it was a *sine qua non* condition for initiating research on the Central and Eastern European iteration of this cultural phenomenon. Apart from providing data on the routes through Europe taken by “exotic” troupes (which rarely mentioned lands east of the River Oder and Austria), the works of Western European and American scholars contain important information regarding the evolution of ethnic shows in colonial countries, describe the theoretical and methodological frameworks used by researchers representing different academic fields, and outline the context of the period in which this type of performance was invented. These findings contributed to the emergence of the basic framework of interpretation of the phenomenon, which has, in turn, shaped how scholars from Central and Eastern Europe thought about ethnic shows. However, after that first crucial stage, each author was faced with the challenge of verifying these known models of interpretation (on the basis of the source material acquired through their own study) and attempting to “move beyond” them. We leave it for the reader to judge whether such
attempts have indeed been made and to what extent they were successful at the present stage of research.

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Although many contemporary scholars believe us to have entered the era of “multiple modernities” (Sachsenmaier, Riedel, and Eisenstadt 2002), there can be no doubt that the first form of modernity emerged in Europe. The basic institutional constellations and the cultural program of modernity as it developed in the West were absorbed by all modernizing societies. The project of modernity, with its homogenic and homogenizing tendencies, reached all countries that underwent the same processes—urbanization; industrialization; the development of trade and tourism; the emergence of new institutions such as museums, galleries, and zoos; and many more. New visual sensations, participation in new types of events (e.g., world’s fairs), the migration of people from the countryside to urban centers, the development of new academic disciplines, and changes in lifestyles and social norms were experienced as much by residents of London, Paris, Rome, and Berlin as by people in Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw, Prague, and Saint Petersburg. In this sense, the transformations of the modern era created a certain general framework in which ethnic shows developed; they were only one of the many manifestations of the changes taking place at the time.

Naturally, this general framework established in the West is impossible to avoid when analyzing ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe. Elements of Western colonial and imperial discourse, scientific rationality, faith in progress and in Western cultural superiority, and practices of discipline and classification were all absorbed by inhabitants of CEE cities as a way of experiencing and understanding the modern world. However, it should be remembered that this basic framework created the right conditions for the development of different types of ideological and institutional dynamics; for continuous competition between metropolises; and finally, for a clash of interdependent global and local (or universal and particular) forces. In this respect, the contexts in which ethnic shows functioned in various countries in CEE were neither identical across the region nor closely similar to those observable in large colonial empires. The fact that the countries of the region did not hold any dependent territories overseas and had
evolved in the course of different historical processes and reached different levels of international status were not the only factors responsible for these local particularities.

From a non-European point of view, the Europe of the modern era was a single unit, displaying a specific attitude toward peoples and cultures from other parts of the world—possessed of a kind of “continental identity.” However, regarded “from within”—that is, from a continental perspective—Europe was divided. In many aspects of life, the achievements of the modern era (such as technological innovations, certain cultural ideas, and new lifestyles) were only developed in Western countries. CEE countries adopted many of them, if not always immediately. This being said, some Western solutions were criticized in the East, especially in Russia. Significantly, however, CEE countries generally recognized the superior status of the West, while being treated by the colonial empires of the day as somewhat “peripheral cultures,” “small nations,” or “minor countries” (see Baár 2010). In a broader context, how various groups positioned and defined themselves in relation to one another was of key importance in the emergence of the dichotomy of domination and submission (cf. Barabas in this volume).

From the very beginning, the project of modernity was firmly rooted not only in the idea of progress or development of knowledge but also in power (conquests, exclusion, domination) and identity formation. Aside from theories of race and practices aimed at upholding racial hierarchies (as the new form of entertainment for the masses, ethnic shows fit this trend perfectly), the largest countries in Western Europe were building their new national identities on the basis of the colonial-imperial experience and constructed the “new imperial history.” Processes associated with the experience of modernity, including the emergence of new national identities, were also observable in Central and Eastern Europe. Although the countries in this region had no overseas colonies (with the exception of Germany—but these were acquired relatively late, between 1880 and 1900, and were ultimately lost in 1918 in the aftermath of World War I), the societies of Central and Eastern Europe, most of which became independent nations in 1918, adopted many racial theories (and prejudices) pertaining to non-European peoples and developed in colonial countries.

The empires that stretched across Central and Eastern Europe in the period analyzed here (Austria-Hungary, the Second German Reich, Russia)
were all multiethnic mosaics. Their metropolitan centers and dominant nations coexisted with ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities. Imperial policies and goals defined by central authorities were often at variance with the aims and consolidation processes of the nondominant groups. There was a multitude of “local voices”—some dominant, some lacking in power. As regards the phenomenon of ethnic shows, it is important that the status specific groups held in the internal hierarchies present within any given CEE country influenced these groups’ attitudes toward non-European people.

For instance, in Budapest, which aspired to become a great metropolis, ethnic shows were an instrument used by municipal leaders to achieve specific aims. Many liberal patriots in Hungary wished Budapest to eventually replace Vienna as the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The ambitions of the urban establishment and the continuous competition between metropolises made it necessary to participate in the changing world—to be included in trading networks, to be open to cultural exchange, to engage in geographic exploration, and so forth. In order for Budapest not to “fall behind” in this competition, which was strictly related to the emergence of local metropolitan identity, the city needed to organize ethnic shows. They became an indispensable element of the urban landscape, as did the zoological garden in which they were staged (designed as an emulation of the Viennese zoological garden in Schönbrunn; see Kontler 2020). Moreover, ethnic shows involving Finno-Ugric people (due to their linguistic kinship with Hungarian) played a part in the development of the national consciousness in Hungary. This is all the more significant given that, in contrast with most scholars from colonial countries—who were using the performances of “exotic” Others to illustrate the assumptions of an “imperial science” (where the issue of race was of key importance)—Hungarian researchers focused on matters connected to national identity, thereby, presenting an alternative mode of interpretation (Kontler 2020).

In the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia), the situation was different. The Czech- and German-speaking nationalists in that part of the Habsburg Empire were engaged in a continuous rivalry, in which language had a central role. In addition, members of both groups succumbed to varied and numerous “colonial fantasies” (see Křižová in this volume). The ambition to equal the most dominant European nations prompted Czechs not to
reject colonial ideas and accept the tenets of the inferior status of non-European people, the need to carry out the civilizing mission, and their own superiority to “exotic” Others. Since the discourse of Czech-speaking nationalists revolved around the persecution they were experiencing from the Austrian state—and the persecution of the entire Slavic race at the hands of the German Empire—they showed more compassion than German-speaking nationalists did in their attitude toward non-European people. Nevertheless, their aim was not to reject colonial ideas but only to accentuate that Czech people in their colonies (that is, if they had any) would conduct themselves in a much more civilized manner than the colonial powers of the day.

The Slovene-inhabited lands of the Habsburg Empire (the regions of Carniola, the Austrian Littoral, and Lower Styria) presented yet another outlook on the issue of race. Andreja Mesarič (in this volume) refers to these regions as a “double periphery”—the borderlands of Europe and a geopolitical and linguistic periphery within the Habsburg Empire. This example clearly illustrates that ethnic shows were an instrument for colonial authorities to distribute their ideas and projects in territories that Western empires regarded as peripheral. In this case, the inhabitants of the southwestern periphery of the Habsburg Empire accepted the assumption that non-European people were somehow inferior. However, from the local perspective, given the dominant position of German and Italian nationalists, ethnic shows reaffirmed the Slovene speakers of their cultural and racial “Europeanness” without requiring them to replace their language and culture with that of Germany or Italy.

In Latvia, which was then a part of the Russian Empire, shows featuring “exotic” Others were involved in the development of Latvian national consciousness. According to Ilze Boldāne-Zeļenkova (2020), aware of the dominant position of Baltic Germans and Russians, Latvians as a nondominant nation expressed compassion toward non-European peoples, as they partially identified with their situation. Although Latvians were convinced of their own civilizational superiority to non-European peoples, due to internal threats the Latvian-speaking population was facing and the fact that it harbored no colonial ambitions, the role ethnic shows played was mostly associated with identity formation.

Relations of the European colonial powers with Russia developed differently than their relations with the rest of the countries of Central and
Eastern Europe. Western empires could not reduce the Russian Empire to the status of a “peripheral culture” or a “minor country,” even though it lay in the East and did not possess overseas colonies. Importantly, Russia implemented its own policy of colonial conquest—only in this case, the conquest was directed toward Asia. As a result, the Russians created “their own Others” (e.g., the Arctic peoples of the Russian Empire). Various dominant and nondominant nations functioned within this multiethnic and multi-confessional state. In this complex configuration, the approach to non-European peoples was not homogeneous; it depended on the position a particular group occupied in the framework of relations in the empire.

Russia accepted many European ideas and technological innovations that emerged in the modern era, but as a rule it did not aim to imitate Western states, often condemning them or even developing alternative visions, including pan-Russian nationalism or Russian Orientalism (see Tangad 2019). The fact that the development of Russian identity was influenced by the country’s position between Europe and Asia was a significant factor in this context. Russia’s conquests in the East resulted in the Russian experiences being different from those of Western countries. Ultimately, however, Russia adopted many Western perceptions and world constructions, including those that pertained to the issues of race, ethnocentrism, and the subordinate position of non-European peoples: “The European concept of race arrived in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. However, its dimension turned out peculiar in relation to Asia, due to historical and territorial ties between Russians and Asians” (Bukh 2014, 178). The fashion for ethnic shows reached Russia, where it turned out that Russian scholars and entrepreneurs were by no means insensitive to the development of this cultural phenomenon. The Russians, too, began to export their own Others (who were not only members of the Northern peoples, such as the Samoyed, but also members of the Tatar, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Kalmyk communities) to the West. Interestingly, while in Western and Central and Eastern Europe those groups aroused great interest among the public because they were “exotic,” in Russia their performances were not considered special. The Russian public was impressed by shows given by non-European peoples from overseas colonies, especially those from Africa, who were considered “exotic.”

Changes brought about by the revolution of 1917 and the construction of the Soviet state resulted in a strong condemnation of ideas developed in the
Western world; criticism of “Western science,” including the issues of race (see Sántha in this volume), was connected with the development of anti-colonialist rhetoric. As Alexander Bukh (2014, 194) put it: “The Russian nation was created as the opposite of Europe and as a collective individual, formed by primordial factors and characterized by the enigmatic ‘Russian soul’ through the deployment of dichotomies such as rational/emotional, materialistic/spiritual, and individual/communal.” Francine Hirsch (2005, 187) described the shift that occurred at that time as a “shift from an ‘exotizing’ to a ‘modernizing’ discourse.”

In conclusion, it is impossible not to notice that performances given by “exotic” Others in the latter half of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century represented a very particular phase of Europeans’ contact with otherness. Being an instrument of imperial-colonial power—which, while generating new divisions, at the same time sanctioned the new world order—this contact was based on creating hierarchies, exclusions, and the dichotomy of domination and submission. A key role in this context was played by racial theories of the day and by effective civilizing and nationalizing instruments, including the “Western-looking regimes” (Griffiths 2002, xxviii), which were adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, by all the societies of Europe then undergoing modernization. Yet within these general frameworks there existed certain local particularities based on variations in the experience of certain groups (relevant examples of which are presented in the chapters of this book). This, of course, had an impact on the ways in which ethnic shows were perceived, understood, and consumed.

Performed Others

The development of ethnic shows was inextricably connected to the evolution of nineteenth-century visual culture (see Schwartz and Przybylski 2004) and to the system of entertainment “that took the form of complex conglomerates of sights broadly referred to as ‘shows’ or ‘spectacles’” (Biskupski 2013, 78). The modernizing cities of Europe offered an increasingly varied array of visual experiences, which not only affected the shape of visual imagination but also contributed to the “discovery” of historically located observers (Schwartz and Przybylski 2004, xxii). The new model of
spectating, in which the audience itself became a part of the show (Bennett 2004), was a form of talking about the world as well as transforming reality into “collective imagery” (see Demski in this volume). The crucial factors affecting the developing society of spectacles (cf. MacAlloon 1984) that offered a wide spectrum of protocinematic attractions were gaze, imagination, and context.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the development of a type of perception Anne Friedberg (1993, 2) described as “a mobilized ‘virtual’ gaze”—virtual because it was mediated through representation and mobilized because it was “rooted in other cultural activities that involve walking and travel.” In the context of ethnic shows, this type of gaze is exemplified by the way European city dwellers looked at “native villages.” According to Friedberg (1993, 37), even in the case of a temporary immobility of the spectator, this immobility was “rewarded by the imaginary mobilities that such fixity provided.” In this understanding of the term, gaze denoted not only the physical act of looking but also the “instrument” used to engage the spectators’ imagination. Preconceptions (some of which strayed into the realm of fantasy) were based on meaningful images that reminded people of a wider world and reality. In the case of ethnic shows, it was “exotic” Others that constituted the principal subject/object of these images. The audiences’ perception of non-European peoples was constructed, among other things, on the basis of paintings, travel literature, press descriptions, photographs, and exhibitions presenting life groups and material items from faraway lands; thus, mental images had begun to be shaped long before the development of the forms of direct contact with “exotic” Others that became widespread in the nineteenth century. In practice, it was the mental image of non-European people that fueled the mass consumer interest in forms of direct live contact and created the framework for their reception. Individual mental concepts intertwined with and fed collective imagery, which, in turn, constituted a part of a cultural complex (Kurz 2015, 3). As far as ethnic shows are concerned, the process of intertwining had at least two major consequences. Firstly, the Other (a living person) as a performed character was associated with images that functioned in the imagination of local communities—and therefore also with stereotypes or idealized representational types. Secondly, due to the fact that the different societies of nineteenth-century Europe developed different versions of collective imagery (even if
some were more universal or transcultural in nature), the reception of ethnic shows could also vary, as did the attitude toward non-European people harbored in a given country or even a given city. As noted by Dana Weber (2016, 164), “any community confronted with an alien element transforms it and makes it functional according to its own cultural logic.” Thus, although the collective imagery pertaining to non-European people that was constructed and perpetuated in colonial countries did reach Central and Eastern Europe and was adopted (to a greater or lesser degree) by the different societies in the region, it also coexisted and was interwoven with local preconceptions. There is reason to believe that this was an important factor affecting the differences in how ethnic shows were received in various Central and Eastern European countries (as compared to one another and to Western Europe). It should also be remembered that displays of non-European people belonged to an era in which Europeans believed in a world order that placed them at the very center. In each case, non-European peoples were positioned within existing hierarchies created on the Old Continent.

Significantly, individual and collective preconceptions about “exotic” Others were not fixed but evolved over time and were shaped by new experiences and changes taking place in the world. The changes in perception observable in Europe after World War I were described by James Clifford (1988, 120):

Unlike the exoticism of the 19th century, which departed from a more-or-less confident cultural order in search of a temporary frisson, a circumscribed experience of the bizarre, modern surrealism and ethnography3 began with a reality deeply in question. Others appeared now as serious human alternatives; modern cultural relativism became possible. As artists and writers set about after the war putting the pieces of culture together in new ways, their field of selection expanded dramatically. The “primitive” societies of the planet were increasingly available as aesthetic, cosmological, and scientific resources.

3 The term “ethnography” as used by Clifford differs from the empirical research technique of humanist sciences and denotes a more general cultural predisposition. The “ethnographic” label implies “a characteristic attitude of participant observation among the artifacts of a defamiliarized cultural reality” (Clifford 1988, 121).
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The gradual changes in the collective imagination of Europeans that were taking place after the end of World War I manifested themselves in a number of ways. For instance, objects brought from outside Europe began to be exhibited in European museums not only as items of “primitive” material cultures but also as works of art displayed because of their formal and aesthetic features. In the context of live shows, “exotic” Others entered European stages with increasing confidence, this time not only as members of a “primitive” culture but also as speaking subjects (e.g., the New Woman, exemplified by Josephine Baker). This, however, did not preclude their objectification or commodification.

As far as ethnic shows are concerned, the significance of the physical presence of non-European people is impossible to miss. It was crucial in creating what Walter Benjamin dubbed the “aura” generated by the “here and now” of the place or object, where “here and now” stands for the immediate, embodied presence of the object or place typical to the era of pre-image (Benjamin 1968). The “aura” was an unintended effect of the presence of the authentic Others (in this case, the Other took the place of Benjamin’s “object”).

The third significant factor influencing the evolution of ethnic shows was their context (or circumstances). In each case, non-European people gave their live performances in a different cultural context. The original framework would cease to matter. This change of context also transformed the meaning of the restored behaviors. The new context defined the situation as a show (and not as, for instance, a ritual).

The consensus among modern scholars is that “performance” entails putting an event/image outside its typical context or “frame” (e.g., Carlson 2015). In this case, the “frame” comprises the social actions defined by the context. According to Erving Goffman (1986), context is what causes, or generates, events and transforms actions into forms that are conventional or recognizable (or not) in a given culture. If communication occurs above and beyond its referential content (Bauman 1986, 3), as was the case with ethnic shows, it is regarded as a type of performance even if it involves an on-stage execution of forms occurring in real life. Ethnic shows did not aim to present the perspective of “exotic” Others or to make them understandable. Neither did the shows try to achieve complete detachment from reality, characteristic, for example, of circuses, in which greater significance was given to illusion.
These shows belong in the category of performances (understood as actions made by a participant in the interaction, aimed at influencing Others in a certain way); the restored behaviors presented by Others were continuously transformed by the changing context (travels in different European cities). The essence of this phenomenon lay in the so-called binocular-vision reality or, rather, a double relationship to the subject matter. As Marvin Carlson (2015, 53–54) argues, performance involves a process of moving from reality to regarding it as a signifying image. The “frame” functions as an image yet does not completely remove the awareness that a given object is a part of the real world. This means that audiences do not join in an illusion but in a certain kind of stage reality.

Thus, it may be argued that when “exotic” Others reenacted specific behaviors in a new context (or, to be more precise, in many different local contexts) that began to define them, the process of transforming them into performed Others was initiated.

Entrepreneurs of the entertainment industry wished to transform the behaviors performed on stage by non-European people into forms that Europeans would recognize—that is, ones that were accordant with their preconceptions. As a rule, onstage performances featured certain embodied abstract types (rather than individuals with distinctive features) placed in a setting that was ahistorical and thus different from the (historical) reality of the audience. Organizers of ethnic shows strived to portray otherness but did not aspire to transcend their own cultural contexts. The point was rather to evoke “images of recognizable exoticism.” These images could be different depending on whether the group “on stage” hailed from Africa, Asia, or the Far North. The performing Others generally followed and adapted to these “scripts,” which became more suited to the local contexts as time passed and ethnic shows developed further. Non-European people often played the role of active agents, joining the organizers in their efforts to replicate images that fit the collective imagination of local communities. This means that they not only had to learn to recognize these images but also started to use them as a means of achieving their own goals (see Warsame in this volume).

Performed Others could also affect the audience through activating collective images rooted in European minds. Elements taken from other cultural frameworks certainly played a crucial role in new contexts. Local con-
texts imbued them with new meanings and functions. Many ideas and collective preconceptions regarding “exotic” Others were “exported” to Central and Eastern Europe from Western European countries. However, since these elements intermingled with local perspectives, the resulting voices and images differed slightly from the iterations known in colonial countries. Consequently, the same groups of Others or ideas underlying the performances presented during ethnic shows could elicit very different reactions, depending on the region. One of the aims of the present volume is to show these differences and draw attention to certain subtle nuances we regard as significant and instrumental in understanding the phenomenon of ethnic shows in CEE.

**On the Trail of “Exotic” Peoples**

Retracing the routes through Central and Eastern Europe taken by various non-European peoples in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century is a long, painstakingly difficult process that requires the cooperation of scholars across many countries. The data collected in the last four years by researchers from Poland, Germany, Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and Latvia (who began their collaboration under the supervision of Dagnoslaw Demski from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw⁴) prompted us to present the first reconstruction of the main itineraries of “exotic” performance troupes in Central and Eastern Europe. We are fully aware that the image presented in this work is incomplete, riddled with questions and blank spaces. Although the data we have at our disposal is fragmentary, we are gradually systematizing and synthesizing it into a more complete picture. We are still uncertain where many of the “exotic” troupes came from and where they were headed after completing their performance run in a given locality. Consequently, in many cases, even knowing where some group of non-European people stayed at a given point in time, we are unable to situate it within a broader network. It is, however, very apparent that at this stage of research we do not have access

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⁴ It should be emphasized that the data used to retrace the specific routes presented on the map (fig. 1.1) goes beyond the information provided in the chapters of this publication.
to all relevant sources that would provide comprehensive data, particularly pertaining to smaller towns.

For the sake of clarity, it must also be emphasized that the reconstruction of itineraries for specific ethnic groups does not mean retracing the steps of a single troupe that traveled through Europe. In many cases the same regions were toured at the same time by many groups of “exotic” performers originating from the same part of the non-European world. Consequently, the reconstructed itineraries are based on mentions (corroborated by sources) of visits made by members of a given ethnic group in a given place, with the general reservation that—in practice—these mentions could have pertained to different groups of “ethnographic actors.” Thus, this first attempt at retracing the routes of “exotic” troupes in Central and Eastern Europe serves to delineate the framework, which will hopefully be used as the basis for future research. Instead of “reinventing the wheel,” future scholars will be able to concentrate on gradually filling in the gaps on the “map” and working toward a fuller understanding of the analyzed phenomenon in the region. The pages that follow also contain a summary of the data presented in the subsequent chapters of the publication, which ultimately served to establish a more large-scale travel map of non-European troupes in the region (see fig. 1.1).

The known routes were retraced by compiling information regarding “exotic” groups originating from nine non-European regions, which traveled through Central and Eastern Europe with the highest frequency between the 1870s and the end of 1920s and whose performances were widely commented on by local communities. These were (1) Nubians (1876–1914), (2) Zulus (1879–85), (3) Samoyeds (1879–1914), (4) Sioux “Indians” (1884–90), (5) Mahdi warriors (1885–1914), (6) Somalis (1885–1928), (7) Sinhalese (1884–1928), (8) Ashanti (1888–99), and (9) Dahomeans (1889–1909). It should also be noted that the same groups of “exotic” Others could sometimes perform under different names—for example, troupes from Sudan could be labeled as Mahdi warriors, Sudanese people, or tribes of the Nile Valley, and Somali troupes as Somalis, Abyssinians, or Ethiopians (see also Warsame in this volume).

5 The dates in brackets represent the period between the first and the last performance of a given group of non-European people in Central and Eastern Europe (according to our research). Many groups visited the region more than once.
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We deliberately chose not to include the 1906 route of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, which has already been retraced and analyzed in detail. We also decided not to mark the stay of many “exotic” groups that toured Central and Eastern Europe (as corroborated by source material) but whose itineraries largely remain a mystery. These include (1) Kalmuks (1883–84, 1897), (2) Australians (1886), (3) Papuans (1882), (4) Bushmen (1886), (5) Bedouins (1890–91, 1904, 1908, 1912), (6) Arabs (1888, 1891, 1928), (7) Wakamba (1890–91), (8) Suaheli (1891–93), (9) Shilluk (1899), (10) natives of Guinea (1895), (11) people from Senegal (1896), (12) people from Ghana (1896), (13) people from Togo (1901), (14) Malabar people (1900), (15) Kyrgyz and Tatars (1898), (16) Sami people (1874, 1878, 1888, 1894, 1913), (17) Dinka (1892, 1894), (18) Samoans (1895–97, 1900, 1901, 1910, 1911), (19) Chinese people (1896), (20) Bella Coola “Indians” (1886), (21) the Aztecs (1897–98), and (22) the Ostyak group (1913). A Neger Karawane (this was the only term of reference used in the local press; see also Demski 2019) appeared in 1893 in Toruń (Ger. Thorn) and Gdańsk (Ger. Danzig) and in 1895 in Riga. This was not the only instance of a troupe being mentioned in the press that did not specify which ethnic groups were expected to appear on the stage (other examples include the 1930 East Africa Show in Wroclaw [Ger. Breslau]) (figs. 1.2–1.5).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, members of non-European groups recruited by the dynamically developing entertainment business were transported to Europe and back by boat (with very few exceptions, such as the Samoyeds). Port towns such as Trieste, Marseille, Le Havre, Rotterdam, and Hamburg thus played a significant role in the history of ethnic shows. They marked the starting point (and the conclusion) of European tours that lasted months or even years. Numerous press comments describing attempts at communicating in various European languages made by non-European people provide important clues that indirectly testify to prolonged stays of “exotic” groups in different countries. Periodicals in Poznań, for instance, noted the following in connection with the stay of Mahdi warriors in 1899 and the Sinhalese in 1928:

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Figure 1.2. Hagenbecks’ Malabar people in Prague, 1900. In the foreground, non-European people of the Malabar Coast in India and their impresario. Particularly noteworthy are the bamboo-pole artists. European spectators of the show are visible in the background, behind a fence. The reconstructed village (huts and a replica of a Hindu temple) stands among European plant life in late fall or winter. Clemens Radauer’s collection.

Figure 1.3. Suaheli caravan in Vienna, 1891–92. The group performed in Eastern Europe, yet the photo was taken in a Viennese atelier. Clemens Radauer’s collection.
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Figure 1.4. A *Neger Karawane* from the Nile Valley in Lviv, July–August 1893. The photograph, conventional in terms of composition, contains information on the persons depicted. They were marked with handwritten lowercase letters “a” to “f.” The image is captioned: “The caravan of Negros from Africa by the source of the Nile performed in Lviv in late July and early August 1893 in the garden by the Kisielka pond, a. chief, b. his first wife Alina (he has 4, and between 1 and 4 children by each of them), he is 28, his first wife 22, they have been together for 11 years, c. (woman), d. man playing harp, married couple, musicians, e. the heaviest and ugliest Negro with protruding [illegible] lips, e. his wife.” Archive of Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.

It appears they have been traveling through Europe for a long time now, as some of them understand a little Russian and German. They are gentle in spirit, approach the visiting white guests with cordiality and express their amiability as best as they can. (*Wielkopolanin [Resident of Greater Poland]*, June 4, 1899)

Two sorcerers clamor to announce wonders in a strange mixture of German and English. (*Dziennik Poznański [Poznań Daily]*, July 21, 1928)

Since the organizers of ethnic shows brought to Europe not only members of non-European groups but also items of foreign material cultures and animal species typical of a given region, acclimatization centers started to appear near some ports. One such facility for exotic animals operated in the
Brijuni Islands7 (14 islands in present-day Croatia) on the way to Trieste. Non-European people were often employed to care for these animals, as they were much more familiar with their needs than any local—Andreja Mesarič (this volume) mentions “negro keepers” \([\textit{Negerwärten}]\); István Sántha writes of “animal caregivers,” who tended to the exotic animals kept by the Russian tsar in Saint Petersburg (fig. 1.6).

7 In 1815 the islands became part of the Austrian Empire (from 1867, the Austro-Hungarian Empire). After the end of World War I they were incorporated into the Italian state. In 1893, the Brijuni Islands, which had for many years been struggling with a high incidence of malaria, were bought by a private entrepreneur from Vienna named Paul Kupelwieser (1843–1919), for 70,000 gold forints. Inviting Robert Koch to the islands helped curb the problem of disease; Kupelwieser later transformed them into one of the most fashionable holiday and spa resorts for the upper classes. The first guests arrived in Veliki Brijun in 1896, but their numbers started to grow rapidly after 1903—that is, only after malaria was completely eradicated on the islands. Aside from hotels, pools, and parks, local attractions included an ostrich farm and elephants, brought to the island in 1900. In 1911, Carl Hagenbeck opened a zoo on the site of an old quarry. After consulting Kupelwieser, he also decided to construct an acclimatization station for animals transported from Africa. The Brijuni Islands had excellent connections to Pula and other ports on the Adriatic Sea. The outbreak of World War I put an end to tourist traffic; Veliki Brijun was transformed into a military fortress (Fatović-Ferenčić 2006; https://www.np-brijuni.hr/en/brijuni/cultural-and-historical-heritage/quarries).
As far as ethnic shows organized in Central and Eastern Europe are concerned, the two most important ports were Trieste and Hamburg. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Trieste had already become the largest port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and one of the biggest transport hubs between Europe and Africa. The Southern Railway, completed in 1857, provided a direct connection to Vienna. Trieste was, for instance, the starting point of the journey to Hamburg made by Hagenbeck’s first “Nubian caravan” in 1876 (Gleiss 1967, 34). In February 1880 a group of Zulus set out from Trieste, passed through Gorizia and Ljubljana, and arrived in Vienna (see Mesarić in this volume). Interestingly, ethnic shows were probably not organized in Trieste itself. The “exotic” Others arriving in the seaport traveled north toward Vienna and other European cities.

In contrast with Trieste, the residents of Hamburg, the other port that proved hugely important to the story of ethnic shows in Europe, had many opportunities to see a performance of non-European people. In 1874, six
Sami people were brought to the city to take part in the first ethnic show organized by Carl Hagenbeck. The tour of the Sami troupe was of groundbreaking significance to the development of such shows in Central and Eastern Europe (which will be discussed later). Hamburg was also the destination of many transports of wild animals that Hagenbeck company would later sell to zoos and circuses across the continent (such as the Warsaw zoo). Hamburg’s role increased to new heights after Hagenbeck’s Tierpark, a private zoo in Stellingen, opened in 1907. However, by then Hagenbeck had already (for almost twenty years) been following the practice of sending non-European people back to their homelands and placing exotic animals “for safekeeping” in his animal park in Neuer Pferdemarkt in Hamburg (Ames 2008, 84).

After the ships carrying people and animals from all over the world docked in Hamburg, the troupes of “exotic” Others traveled west, east, north, and south. As regards ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe, it is the eastward and southward routes leading to Vienna that are of particular interest. Since non-European people usually traveled through Europe by train, most of their tour routes followed major railway lines. There can be no doubt that the technological progress witnessed in the modern period was of paramount importance in the development of ethnic shows (for more on the first railway connections in present-day Poland, see Demski 2020; for those in Russia, see Leskinen in this volume).

Eastern routes often led from Berlin to cities under German rule which are now within Polish territory. It should also be remembered that some urban centers that belonged to Germany in the period under analysis are currently a part of Poland (e.g., Wrocław). A direct railway connection between Berlin and Wrocław was completed in 1846; the one between Wrocław and Poznań, in 1856. Some eastward routes ran along the Warsaw–Bydgoszcz Railway (1862), in practice leading from Berlin (Bydgoszcz was a stop both on the Warsaw–Bydgoszcz Railway and the Prussian Eastern Railway), Bydgoszcz, and Toruń to Warsaw (then under Russian rule). From there, “exotic” troupes could continue northeast, to visit such cities as Vilnius, Riga, Saint Petersburg, and Moscow (trains from Warsaw to Saint Petersburg through Vilnius started to run in 1862) or south, for example to Łódź (then under Russian rule) and other towns and cities along the Warsaw–Vienna Railway (1848).
Another transport hub in the travels of non-European people was Vienna. Owing to the well-developed railway network, it was possible to set out from Vienna in practically every direction. Consequently, there was hardly a troupe that did not visit that city.

The following section presents data pertaining to selected “exotic” groups, touring Central and Eastern Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. This was our basis for retracing travel routes marked on the map (fig. 1.1). The tours will be discussed in chronological order, to show the evolution of the phenomenon in successive decades and the level of interest in performances observed in the region. It should be noted that, according to our current knowledge, the first ethnic show in Central and Eastern Europe took place in Budapest in 1874 (Kontler 2020, 189). Its audience watched a performance by the Sami, organized by Carl Hagenbeck. The event marked the beginning of the story of modern ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe. However, due to the amount of available information, we ultimately decided against including the routes of Sami people on the map.

As far as the selected “exotic” groups are concerned, the first to arrive in Central and Eastern Europe were Nubians. Since ethnic shows were virtually unknown in this part of the continent at the time, local audiences reacted to performances by African people with considerable enthusiasm. Thus, “Nubian caravans” were organized in succession in 1876, 1878, and 1879. Each of them performed at the zoological garden in Wrocław (Czarnecka 2018, 189). The Nubians’ spectacular procession through that city in the year 1876 was described in Carl Hagenbeck’s memoirs (quoted in Solski and Strehlow 2015, 32). As noted above, the first caravan arrived in the port of Trieste and headed north to the Hamburg zoo (Gleiss 1967, 34). In 1877 Nubians staged performances in Vienna, giving rise to a “Nubian craze” among the spectators. The following year, the African troupe appeared in the Budapest zoo (between June 28 and July 7, 1878; Kontler 2020) and then in Prague (see Křížová in this volume). After performing in Berlin and Munich late in 1878 and early in 1879 (Thode-Arora 1989, 169), the Nubians came to Poznań. The local press wrote of a performance in the Poznań zoo on August 14–15, 1879 (Demski 2018a, 203). One year later, the Nubians entertained spectators in the Saint Petersburg zoo (see chapters by Leskinen and Sántha in this volume). There is also evidence that they performed in Prague in February
In 1911, a Sudanese group billed as Nubian came to Ljubljana. Their shows were staged between May 22 and June 5. The Africans traveled there from Gorizia, where they had performed between May 7 and 14 (see Mesarič in this volume). Further clues as to their itinerary were found in materials dated 1914 and pertaining to performances by peoples of the Nile Valley.

The next group to arrive was the Zulus. Their stay in Central and Eastern Europe was noted in the press between 1879 and 1885. It is a relatively well-known fact that Guillermo Antonio Farini’s Zulu group was presented to the audience in London in early 1879 (Peacock 1999, 89). Although their exact itinerary remains a mystery, it has been established that the Zulus arrived in Saint Petersburg in 1879 (see Sántha in this volume). In February 1880, a five-member Zulu Kaffir troupe came to Ljubljana from Gorizia. Having staged a few performances there, they set off to Vienna (see Mesarič in this volume). In the summer of 1881, the Zulu group performed in the Saint Petersburg zoo (see Leskinen in this volume). The next trace of their presence is dated 1885 (May 12–17), when a “Zulu caravan” performed in the zoo in Poznań (Demski 2018a, 203).

The tours by Nubian and Zulu troupes were associated with the first phase of development of such shows in the region. To audiences in Central and Eastern Europe, these performers exuded an air of “exoticism”; very often fascination with the troupes resulted from the fact that they were the first Africans with which the audience had come into contact.

In contrast to the above examples, the itineraries of Samoyed troupes progressed westward from the East. The popularity of ethnic shows observable in the latter half of the nineteenth century prompted Russian entrepreneurs to seek opportunities for making profit. They recruited members of ethnic groups inhabiting the fringes of the Russian Empire, including Siberia. While residents of Russian cities did not perceive the Samoyeds as anything “exotic”—in Saint Petersburg, for instance, Northern peoples and their reindeer could be seen almost every winter (see Leskinen in this volume)—for spectators from Western and Central and Eastern Europe they were an exciting novelty. It has been established that a Samoyed group was shown at the
Anthropological Congress in Moscow in 1879 (see chapters by Leskinen and Savitsky in this volume). They traversed Europe numerous times; one of the longer tours took place in 1882–83 (see Savitsky in this volume). Between January and April 1882, the Samoyeds performed in Warsaw, where they had arrived from Saint Petersburg. Afterwards, the troupe headed for Kraków and Vienna for shows staged from April 9 to 26. In June 1882, the troupe began performing in the Budapest zoo (see Kontler 2020), and by August, in Prague. Data discovered so far indicates that in 1883 the “caravan” traveled through Germany (stopping in Poznań), Switzerland, and France, only to return to German cities in winter (e.g., to Wrocław).

In February 1889, the Samoyeds were again performing in Riga (see Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020). Ildikó Sz. Kristóf (personal communication) established that the troupe performed in the Budapest zoo in 1896. In 1914, they performed in the zoo in Moscow (see Leskinen in this volume).

A new wave of interest in ethnic shows could be observed in the 1880s, prompted by the arrival of a succession of non-European groups. Materials studied to date suggest that Sioux “Indians” first delighted audiences in the towns of Central and Eastern Europe in 1884 (see Tomicki 1992). Their journey began in Hamburg. In February 1884, the troupe was performing in Castan’s Panopticon in Berlin (Weber 2016, 316). It has been established that performances by Sioux “Indians” were also organized between April 18 and 29, 1884, in the Poznań zoo (Demski 2018a, 203). On May 9, the Native Americans arrived in Warsaw and appeared in the Ciniselli family circus for a week, between May 10 and 18 (see Czarnecka in this volume). Their stay was widely noted in the Poznań and Warsaw press. The troupe then traveled northeast to perform in Saint Petersburg (see Sántha in this volume). Their itinerary also passed through Budapest, where they appeared in 1886 and in 1890.

Mahdi warriors performed in the region between 1885 and 1914. In June 1885, a “Sudanese caravan” gave a few performances in Ljubljana. It was on its way to Trieste with the intention of boarding a ship to Antwerp, where the world’s fair was taking place at the time (see Mesarič in this volume). In 1886, Mahdi warriors appeared in front of audiences in several German towns. In 1898, they performed in Basel and Berlin and between June 1 and 10, 1899, in the Poznań zoo (Demski 2018a, 203). Interestingly, in 1914 several ethnic and tribal groups from Africa, including Mahdi warriors and Nubians, performed
together in Carl Marquardt’s show entitled “Performances by Peoples of the Nile Valley” (there were several versions of its German title; see Demski 2018a, 204). It was staged between July 10 and 23, 1914, in the zoo in Poznań. The troupes went to Wrocław, to perform in the city’s zoo between July 31 and August 23, 1914 (Czarnecka 2018, 190) (fig. 1.7).

As regards Somali shows in Central and Eastern Europe, data indicates that they took place between 1885 and 1928. Naturally, this involved several troupes, the largest (and one of the most famous) of which was managed by Hersi Egeh Gorseh (see Warsame in this volume). By the end of the nineteenth century, Somali performers had already established close cooperation with Hagenbeck company. Consequently, from 1907 onward they made very frequent guest appearances in Hagenbeck’s Tierpark in Stellingen. This private zoo also served as their base camp, from which they embarked on journeys to various locations in Western Europe with only a few “incidental” stops in Central and Eastern Europe. As established by Ildikó Sz. Kristóf (personal communication), Sudanese Somali people performed in the Budapest zoo as early as 1885. In 1895, aside from London, Hamburg, and other German cities, Somalis also visited Vienna. As “Abyssinians,” they performed in Prague in 1908. The audience in Vienna was able to see them again between May and October 1910. The same opportunity was given to the residents of Schweidnitz (now Świdnica in Poland) in 1911, and one year later to spectators in Luna Park in Saint Petersburg. In 1928, an “Abyssinian/Somali village” was on display in Budapest.
The Central and Eastern European tours by the Sinhalese are relatively well documented. Their visits usually sparked numerous comments in the local press. Although Sinhalese performers appeared before audiences in Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, and elsewhere in 1884 (Thode-Arora 1989; Kontler 2020), it is their tours in the late 1880s and early 1890s that prove of greater importance in the study of ethnic shows in the region. The group of natives from Ceylon (today’s Sri Lanka) that began their tour of Central and Eastern Europe in 1888 arrived in Hamburg by sea and left the continent via that same port (Dziennik Łódzki [Łódź Daily], September 19, 1888). After being divided into several smaller troupes in Munich, the group managed by John Hagenbeck arrived in Warsaw (from Wrocław) on August 23, 1888. On September 11, the Sinhalese took the train to Łódź and returned to Warsaw once more on September 19. Their next destination was Riga. The German-language press began to report on the Sinhalese troupe’s performances in Łódź in late August (Düna Zeitung [Daugava Newspaper], August 29, 1888). Latvian-language periodicals did so in early September (i.e., almost a month before the troupe’s arrival in relevant territory (Mājas [Home], September 3, 1888; see also Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020). This served to prepare the residents of Riga for the visit of non-European people. While it is impossible to ascertain the exact date when the Sinhalese entered the city, the last advertisement for their performance was published on September 24, 1888, in the Düna Zeitung. Riga was the final stop in their 1888 tour. The Sinhalese returned directly to Hamburg and sailed back to Ceylon.

The next tour of Sinhalese performers began in 1889. The troupe came to Warsaw by the Warsaw–Bydgoszcz Railway and presented its shows in the local zoo between August 2 and 18 (Kurier Warszawski, August 2, 1889). The next stop on their journey was Riga. Information about the Sinhalese performances appeared there in the German-language press (Düna Zeitung, August 19, 1889); Latvian-language periodicals made no mention of them (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020). The troupe also passed through, for example, Vilnius, Saint Petersburg (Zefeld 1890), and Moscow. The direct railway from Moscow to Warsaw via Brest (Warsaw–Terespol Railway) was completed in 1866.

The 1891 tour of Sinhalese performers took a slightly different course. In April that year, a Ceylonese troupe traveled through what is now Austria. On May 1 they staged their first show in Kraków (Czas [Time], April 30, 1891); the next stop on their journey was Lviv (May 12–24) (fig. 1.8).
cities the troupe was advertised as a caravan of Sinhalese and Tamil people. The railway connection between Kraków and Lviv had existed since 1861. While it is certain that the group that had performed in Warsaw arrived in Vilnius in August that year, the Polish-language press in that city reported that the troupe was to be present in Kiev in mid-June (Słowo [Word], June 16, 1891). At this stage of research, we have yet to find any Ukrainian source that would corroborate the information about performances in Kiev. However, if the Sinhalese did indeed make a stop in that city, it would have taken place after their run in Lviv (for more on the performances and routes of Sinhalese troupes in the 1880s and 1890s, see Kopania in this volume).

Sinhalese entertainers also visited the region in 1901. From August 27 to September 10, their shows were staged in the zoological garden in Poznań.

Figure 1.8. Sinhalese and Tamil performers in Lviv, 1891. A very rare shot, juxtaposing a conventionally arranged group of non-European people posing behind a fence in the foreground, and an interested European spectator observing the act of photographing from the window of a nearby building, and thus from above. It remains unclear whether the composition of the frame was accidental or deliberate, yet it aptly portrays the constructed boundary between two worlds and a symbolical attempt at “breaching” it in the act of peeping. The right side of the image bears the handwritten inscription: “(pronounce: Symglz — [crossed out] Tamil:) A Caravan of Sinhalese and Tamils of Ceylon Island—taken around Europe by Karol Hagenbeck of Hamburg. Lviv 24/5 91.” Archive of Ethnographic Museum in Kraków.
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(Demski 2018b, 301). The Sinhalese arrived in the city together with a group from Togo. Their last European tour of considerable length began in 1926. Having performed in London, Berlin, Milan, and elsewhere, Ceylonese artists headed to Prague (June 1928) and then to Poznań. For the period from July 19 to August 1, 1928, the grounds adjacent to the Poznań zoo were transformed into a “Ceylonese village” (Demski 2018b, 302–6).

Another group of performers enjoying immense popularity during their tours of Central and Eastern Europe were inhabitants of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana). Owing to Peter Altenberg’s (2007 [1897]) collection of thirty-eight autobiographical sketches entitled Ashantee, in which he described his relations with the residents of this former British colony, the Ashanti were among the most welcome entertainers on European shores. Altenberg’s accounts were connected with the Ashanti shows staged in the Vienna zoo (then still located in the Prater), organized between July and October 1896. The performances, which drew an audience of about 500,000 people, resulted in a veritable Aschanti-Fieber (Ashanti fever) among the city’s residents (von Hammerstein 2005, 3). The Ashanti show was the first one in Europe to use on a large scale the concept of a “native village,” which the visitors could roam freely. It was an immense success, and the format was soon copied by other organizers of ethnic shows (Thode-Arora 1989, 111). In 1896, the Ashanti also made a visit to Budapest, at the time of the millennial exhibition (Kontler 2020).

It should, however, be noted that the Ashanti had already visited Central and Eastern Europe in 1888 (fig. 1.9). In Warsaw, an Ashanti troupe performed in Schumann circus in January 1888 (Kurier Codzienny [Daily Courier], January 20, 1888). That same year the Ashanti also delighted the audience in Budapest. In June 1889, the Ashanti staged shows in Vilnius (Baltijas Vēstnesis [Baltic Tribune], June 3, 1889). Next, they headed to Riga, where they performed in July in Thorensberger Park (today, in Latvian, Arkādijas Park). The group, managed by an impresario named John Hood (cf. the Dahomey shows below), comprised eight (or nine—the data presented in newspapers differed) Ashanti men, nine Dahomey women, and a child; it was therefore ethnically heterogeneous (Düna Zeitung, July 14, 1889; Zeitung für Stadt und Land [Urban and Rural Newspaper], July 18, 1889). Advertisements indicate that the Aschanti Karawane (as the group was officially named in the promotional material) performed in the seaside town
Dominika Czarnecka and Dagnosław Demski

of Jūrmala near Riga in the last days of July 1889: the last advertisement for their shows appeared in the German-language press on July 29, 1889 (Düna Zeitung, July 27, 1889; Zeitung für Stadt und Land, July 29, 1889; see also Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020).

The success of the 1896 shows earned the “exotic” troupe another invitation to Vienna. They were brought there in 1897 (von Hammerstein 2005, 3; Mesarič in this volume). The role of the impresario was taken by one Victor Bamberger. In May 1897, the African performers were on exhibit in the Vienna zoo; in August that year they appeared in Prague (Herza 2016, 97). Bamberger organized another visit to Vienna in the autumn of 1898. From there, the Ashanti troupe traveled to Dresden, Königsberg, Hamburg, and Leipzig (Breslauer Morgen Zeitung [Breslau Morning Newspaper], June 23,
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1899; Breslauer Zeitung [Breslau Newspaper], June 15, 1899). Their shows in the Wrocław zoo were staged between June 13 and July 19, 1899 (Czarnecka 2018, 190), while the ones in Prague were staged in August of that year (Herza 2016, 97).

Many Central and Eastern European cities were also on the itineraries of Dahomey Amazons. One of the more significant tours was organized by John Wood (whom the press frequently referred to as John Hood). It began in 1889 and lasted for several years (see Czarnecka 2020). In January 1889, people from Dahomey performed in Oslo and then in Helsinki9 but had already moved on to Riga by June (it was probably the troupe mentioned above, composed of both Dahomey and Ashanti people). The local press there had started to advertise the shows at the beginning of the month (Baltijas Vēstnesis, June 5, 1889; see also Boldāne-Zelēnkova 2020). In Warsaw the “caravan” performed between June 19 and July 3, 1889. On the day following their last show, the non-European troupe set off to Lublin (then under Russian rule; Czarnecka

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Figure 1.10. The Dahomey caravan, Vienna. Clemens Radauer’s collection. The photograph reflects a convention of presenting Dahomey people popular at the time, in which armed Dahomey women were depicted as icons of “savage” Africa in the local imagination.

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9 We extend our thanks to Johanna Berg for providing information on Dahomey Amazon performances in Oslo, Helsinki, and Munich.
Dominika Czarnecka and Dagnosław Demski

It has also been established that the troupe performed in Umlaufl’s Weltmuseum in Hamburg in late June/early July (Thode-Arora 1989, 171). In February 1891 it visited Paris; in August that year it stopped in Berlin and Frankfurt. Unfortunately, there the trail is lost again. The next set of information on the troupe’s performances is dated 1892. The audience in Poznań had the chance to see the Amazons between June 26 and July 3 (in the local zoo). The troupe was then headed to Kraków, where it performed between July 5 and 18 (Czarnecka 2020). In August 1892, the Amazons staged shows in Budapest and Vienna (fig. 1.10) and visited Prague in September (Herza 2016, 97). In November 1892 the audience could see them in Munich.

The next time Dahomey people visited Central and Eastern Europe was in the late 1890s. It is certain that a troupe was performing in Riga in March 1896 (Novikova 2013, 583). A group of Dahomey people (comprising twenty-four women and eight men) stayed in Warsaw in April and May 1896 (Kurier Warszawski, April 30 and May 15, 1896).10 In February 1897, an Amazon troupe arrived in Vienna, where their shows were staged in the Schumann circus (Herza 2016, 97; see also Czarnecka 2020). In 1898, the troupe entertained the audience in the zoo in Budapest. In July the Amazons were in Brno (Lidové Noviny [People’s Newspaper], July 5, 1898); in August, in Prague (Herza 2016, 97); and in winter, in Wrocław (Czarnecka 2020).

Dahomey Amazon shows were also staged in Moscow in April 1901. In June and July that year, the troupe was performing in Riga, as a part of that city’s seven-hundredth anniversary celebrations (Novikova 2013, 583; Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2020). The Moscow audience had another chance to see the Amazons in August 1909 (see Leskinen in this volume).

In conclusion, even this brief selection of examples indicates that the itineraries of performance troupes touring Central and Eastern Europe followed the main railways. Since non-European people invariably traveled by train, they could only reach cities and towns with a railway connection. As the network of train lines became more developed with every passing decade of the nineteenth century, the phenomenon of ethnic shows grew in scope, and the distance traveled by “exotic” groups increased accordingly. However, this does not mean that every city or town with a railway station organized

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10 We extend our thanks to Ludomir Franczak for providing information on Dahomey Amazon performances in Warsaw in 1896.
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ethnic shows with the same frequency. In Bucharest, for instance, researchers conducting archival queries have found no mentions of standard ethnic shows (apart from Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show and the “exotic” Others to be seen in circuses).

The majority of “exotic” troupes visited the same urban centers, often stopping there during each of their tours. This was probably due to numerous practical concerns (aside from transportation), such as the need to be provided with an appropriate venue and the promise of a suitably large audience. All other functions aside, ethnic shows were—first and foremost—commercial events and, as such, needed to generate a specific amount of profit. No strictly defined rules for transporting performance troupes across Europe existed at the time, which makes it harder to retrace the routes they had taken. In practice, non-European people often traveled in different directions along the same route. The direction was largely dependent on the starting point—that is, the port of arrival or (e.g., in the case of the Samoyeds) the eastern city from which the troupe set off. Entrepreneurs were not bound by any specific principles in this respect. Thus, what counted was the expected profit, the existing infrastructure, and the network of connections with local businesspeople (e.g., owners of zoological gardens), in which respect the Hagenbeck company was the uncontested leader (see Thode-Arora in this volume). Although the first encounters between residents of Central and Eastern Europe and members of the various non-European ethnic groups took place later than had been the case in Western Europe, the existing data indicates that such contacts were numerous, while the network of cities organizing such entertainment was vast.

This book adopts a multiperspectival approach to the study of ethnic shows, “exotic” Others, and turn-of-the-century Central and Eastern European culture. Our use of case studies across disciplinary and geographical boundaries is intended to suggest the quality and substance of the debates that cut across the heterogeneous forms, meanings, and understanding of ethnic live displays.

Ethnic shows offering popular ethnographic knowledge or spectacles can be read simultaneously as colonialist propaganda; as dominant and desiring gazes upon objectified non-European people; as a historical form of mass entertainment; as a subject of anthropological research; as one of
the period’s “instruments” of creating European, regional, and local identity; as a modern exhibitionary arena; as a manifestation of the particular power structure; and/or as a form of intercultural contact. The chapters in this book indicate that the same ethnic/ethnographic spectacles could carry different meanings to audiences who were dissimilar in terms of citizenship, ethnicity, and social background. Ethnic shows were subject to constant renegotiation by audiences and exhibitors and, in time, also (though to a much lesser degree) by non-European people. By approaching ethnic shows from the perspective of a variety of local Central and Eastern European voices, this book seeks to contribute to a more nuanced and diversified understanding of the nature and effects of this cultural phenomenon.

The book is organized into three parts. The first part, presenting the methods of recruitment and organization of ethnic shows and their reception in local communities, puts emphasis on an actor-centered approach. Each of the first four chapters analyzes the motives and strategies that guided the actions of European entrepreneurs, recruiters, and impresarios of ethnic shows but also the actions of non-European people. Despite the inherent imbalance of power observable throughout the development of the phenomenon under study, all four case studies present various examples of manifestations of indigenous agency.

The second part is centered around ways of constructing performed Others and the role these played in the evolution of the social and cultural horizon of the period. Each of the three chapters attempts to clarify whose reality we are talking about when looking at both the performer and the audience as part of the same spectacle. All three articles indicate that the essence of ethnic shows lay not in reflecting any readymade reality but in manufacturing meanings. One of the phenomena characteristic of the modern era involves combining the real world with “stage reality”—the way things are and the way they might be.

The third part examines in detail some of the ethnic shows in four local contexts: Slovenia (under Habsburg rule), Russia, Poland (under Russian and Habsburg rule), and Banat and Transylvania (under Habsburg rule). The first four chapters concentrate on the complex outcomes following the emergence of ethnic shows in particular localities. The selection of varied examples provides interesting material for comparative studies of ethnic shows. Despite still being connected to a specific local context, the fifth chapter, which concludes
the book, differs significantly from the other contributions in the volume. It only discusses the issue of ethnic shows in a brief fashion, focusing instead on nineteenth-century freak shows in Saint Petersburg and public shaman performances in the Soviet Union. The chapter presents the latter as a later stage in the development of live performances of Others in Russia. Bearing these differences in mind, we nevertheless decided to use our editorial privilege of shaping the structure and content of the volume and include the chapter. We regard its different nature as added value, believing that even though the text does not pertain to ethnic shows in the strictest understanding of the term, it offers new and interesting insight into the evolution of live performances of Others in the Soviet period. Furthermore, the chapter presents the details of the process of searching for source material on ethnic shows in present-day Saint Petersburg and the problems the author encountered, describing the process from an individual perspective.

As editors of the volume, we sincerely hope that this volume forms a worthwhile contribution to the study of ethnic shows in Europe and will fill in some gaps in our present understanding of the phenomenon, and that each of the chapters will provide interesting information, encourage further reflection, and inspire scholars to ask new questions.

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