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Revisiting Human Zoos Through the Lens of Migration and Post-Colonial Studies: An Analysis of the Diary of an Exhibited Person in Germany

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Abstract

Human zoos constitute a unique and underexamined form of South-North migration within the broader framework of global migration history. This article aims to address this scholarly gap by exploring the lived experiences of individuals who were publicly exhibited, with particular attention to their migration trajectories. Drawing on theoretical insights from migration sociology and post-colonial studies, the concept of forced migration is employed to illuminate the socio-economic pressures that prompted their displacement, as well as the ways in which personal talents were mobilized to alleviate material hardship. To further unpack the complexities of their post-migratory realities, the paper engages with the notion of the "third space"—a conceptual lens that reveals the nuanced forms of resistance and negotiation enacted by exhibited individuals in their interactions with host societies within zoological contexts. The analysis argues that economic deprivation was a central catalyst for forced migration and that the exhibited subjects actively leveraged specific skills to navigate and reshape their conditions. Moreover, the study highlights the pivotal role of gender in structuring the dynamics between exhibitors and the exhibited, thereby foregrounding the agency and resistance that emerge within the third space.

Key words: Human zoo, forced migration, third space, gender, talents

Introduction

The exhibition of humans in zoos marks an important chapter in the history of zoos and world exhibitions, occurring in various locations such as Europe, North America, and Asia during the 19th century. Most academic investigations into this subject have been situated within larger intellectual debates—such as evolutionary theories and modernization—though three main discursive themes have emerged that influence our understanding of ethnographic exhibitions: the teleological view, which regards human zoos as catalysts for scientific advancement; the European philosophical viewpoint, which highlights power dynamics; and the post-colonial perspective, which critically examines Eurocentrism and notions of white supremacy. When analysing human zoos, it becomes evident that the perspectives and experiences of the individuals displayed are often overshadowed by those of other participants. It is particularly noteworthy that the voices of those who were exhibited rarely feature prominently in discussions.

The aim of this chapter is to fill this gap by focusing on the largely unheard voices of exhibited individuals regarding their migration experiences. To achieve this, we integrate ideas from migration sociology and post-colonial studies. On one hand, we use the concept of “forced migration” to guide our empirical analysis concerning the motivations and desires for relocation to utilize their talents in human zoos to escape financial difficulties. On the other hand, we draw on the concept of the “third space” to explore the post-migration experiences, including negotiations, cultural translations, contradictions, and resistance among exhibited migrants in their interactions with local populations, emphasizing female experiences.

The empirical evidence is derived from the diary of Abraham Ulrikab, an Inuk who was exhibited alongside his family and others by the German entrepreneur Carl Hagenbeck in several European cities from 1880 to 1881. We investigate the experiences of these individuals by analysing how they articulated their migration motivations, described their encounters with both migrants and non-migrants, and responded to the conditions they faced in the zoo. Particular emphasis is given to talent-related and gender-related aspects of the exhibited migrants. Ulrikab's diary serves as a written testimony that allows us to reconstruct his personal viewpoints before and during his time in Europe. Methodologically, we view Ulrikab's diary not only as an informative source but also as a pertinent example for addressing the common challenges historians encounter when researching the subjective perspectives of marginalized individuals.The paper will next discuss the historical evolution of exhibitions and place these events within the broader context of 19th-century in-

ternational labour migration. The following section will explore various perspectives on human zoos and introduce the analytical framework for this study. Section four will focus on the empirical analysis of Abraham Ulrikab's diary, concluding with a summary of findings.

The historical development of human zoos

Human zoos did not emerge spontaneously; rather, they developed through a historical progression that began with royal menageries, transitioned into public zoological gardens, and eventually—intertwined with broader cultural and political discourses—gave rise to the phenomenon of human exhibitions. The transformation from exclusive menageries to public zoos unfolded globally between the late 18th and late 20th centuries.[1] While menageries primarily served diplomatic and elite interests, zoos became publicly accessible spaces designed for the display of wild, non-domesticated animals within structured architectural settings. The term "zoo" was first coined in London in 1828, when the Zoological Society opened its collection in Regent's Park (May, 2020, p. 13). In South America, zoological institutions began to appear only in the late 20th century, whereas in much of Asia, they were established predominantly during the 1960s. Europe, the United States, and Australia saw the emergence of zoos much earlier, throughout the 19th century. Following the founding of the London Zoo, similar institutions were established in Dublin (1831), Amsterdam (1839), Antwerp (1843), and Berlin (1844). By the late 19th century, the exhibition of humans within zoological contexts had become a widespread trend in Europe, the United States, and Japan (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 55). In the U.S., figures like Phineas Taylor Barnum and Buffalo Bill pioneered the public staging of human difference, blending elements of the freak show with portrayals of the "exotic." (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 13). Buffalo Bill's "Wild West Show" exemplified this approach, presenting a narrative of national technological advancement through the display of "wild" individuals. In Europe, the practice of exhibiting people from colonized regions developed in parallel. One of the earliest and most infamous examples was Sarah Baartman, known as the "Hottentot Venus," who was brought to England by Alexander Dunlop and displayed in Lon-

[1] It is Vernon Kisling's (2001) success to historically describe the shift from the menagerie to the zoo throughout different parts of the world. He introduces the readers to the local developments of the economically fruitful exhibition of animals.

don and other cities[2] between 1810 and 1815 (Holmes, 2020, p. 45). Numerous similar exhibitions followed across Europe. By the late 19th century, human exhibitions had become a profitable enterprise. Their popularity was largely driven by the public's fascination with racial difference and exoticism. Human zoos reached their peak between the 1870s and early 1930s, before cinematic portrayals of the "wild" began to dominate popular imagination (Putnam, 2013, p. 60-1). These exhibitions were also featured prominently in events such as the Paris World Expositions, drawing massive crowds—as evidenced by ticket sales, which rose from 32 million by 1889 to 48 million by 1900 (Putnam, 2013, p. 61).

The migration of exhibited people

The practice of exhibiting humans in zoological settings necessitated the recruitment and translocation of individuals from various global regions, particularly colonial territories, to numerous Western countries and Japan. Although these exhibitions occurred within a broader and quantitatively more substantial framework of global migration, the specific migratory trajectories of exhibited individuals have often been marginalized or overlooked in scholarly discourse. Several factors may explain this neglect. One is the relatively small number of individuals involved, which led to their classification under broader categories such as performers, artists, or employees in circuses and zoos. Another challenge lies in the difficulty of categorizing this form of migration within established historical typologies. The migration of exhibited individuals was characterized by mixed motivations: on one hand, it was voluntary, as many were recruited to showcase cultural practices, daily life, and personal talents; on the other hand, it was involuntary, shaped by structural violence, poverty, and limited life prospects, often accompanied by coercive recruitment methods, including physical force.

To situate these movements within the wider context of global migration history, it is instructive to examine dominant South-to-North labour migrations of the era—particularly the indentured labour

[2] 1815: American Natives, 1822: Samen, 1824: Inuit, 1829: Firelander, 1839: Guyaner and 1847: Bushmen.

system—and then position the migration of exhibited individuals within that broader framework. The indentured labour system serves as a key example of mass international migration during the 19th and early 20th centuries, wherein European powers recruited workers from the Global South to meet labour demands. Following the gradual abolition of slavery, this system—often referred to as the "coolie trade"—emerged as a replacement, spanning from the 1830s to the early 1900s. Workers were contracted from a wide array of non-Western regions, including Africa, China, India, Japan, Java, and Melanesia (Allen, 2017). As Castles and colleagues have noted, both the origins and destinations of these workers were diverse. British colonial authorities, for instance, recruited labourers from the Indian subcontinent for sugar plantations in Trinidad, British Guiana, and other Caribbean locales. Others were deployed in mines, plantations, and railway construction projects across Malaya, East Africa, and Fiji. Chinese workers were also recruited for British and Dutch colonies, including Malaya and the Dutch East Indies (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014, p. 88-9). Estimates of the total number of indentured migrants vary widely, ranging from 12 to 37 million between 1834 and 1941 (Potts, 1990, p. 5), and approximately 3.7 million between 1834 and 1920 (Allen, 2017, p. 2-3). The recruitment process often involved coercion, including kidnapping and violence, and the working and living conditions abroad were frequently harsh. Some scholars have argued that the coolie system functioned as a de facto continuation of slavery (Hoerder, 2011, p. 23-6). Although indentured workers were technically free—meaning they could not be bought or sold—they were bound by rigid contracts that imposed severe penalties for violations (Cohen, 1991, p. 11-3). Long working hours, strenuous labour, and inadequate wages were common (Northrup, 1995, p. 104-7). The system was predominantly male, as women were generally excluded by employers and colonial authorities. Exceptions occurred when women migrated as family members to support long-term settlement (Northrup, 1995, p. 125-127).

In contrast, the number of individuals exhibited in human zoos was significantly smaller, estimated at around 20,000 to 25,000. Approximately three-quarters of these exhibitions took place in Europe, with 15,000 to 20,000 individuals migrating to countries such as Germany, France, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Despite the modest scale, this form of migration represents a distinct and noteworthy chapter in European labour migration history. Unlike indentured workers, who were primarily employed in agriculture, exhibited individuals were displaced for the purpose of entertainment and education aimed at Western audiences (Putnam, 2013, p. 56). Key differences also emerge in migration patterns: indentured labourers typically remained in one location for extended periods, while exhibited individuals moved between various zoos and exhibition venues.

Nonetheless, parallels exist in the motivations behind recruitment, the utilitarian logic of labour exploitation, and the precarious conditions endured by both groups. Contracts for exhibited individuals were often drafted according to European legal standards to convey an illusion of voluntary participation. However, the authenticity of these agreements is questionable. Many recruits signed with marks or crosses, and translations were frequently absent or inadequate, raising concerns about informed consent and comprehension of contractual terms, monetary systems, and the nature of their roles (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 26). These contracts often served bureaucratic functions rather than safeguarding the rights or working conditions of the individuals involved (Dreesbach, 2012). Moreover, documentation of recruitment and employment practices was typically produced by European impresarios, limiting the objectivity and reliability of available sources. A notable exception is the case of Ulrikab and his family, whose experiences are documented both in the diary of recruiter Johan Adrian Jacobsen and in Ulrikab's own writings, allowing for a rare comparative perspective.

As discussed further below, the rights and welfare of exhibited individuals were rarely protected, and instances of arbitrary treatment and physical abuse were widespread. While the trajectories of human zoo migration and indentured labour migration developed largely independently, the growing popularity of human exhibitions in Europe and North America led to increasing intersections between these two spheres.

Literature Review

Zoos—including human zoos and the practices surrounding recruitment and exhibition—have long been subjects of both public debate and scholarly inquiry. These discussions, often contentious, were embedded within broader intellectual currents of their time, particularly evolutionary theory, which was later revisited and reinterpreted by functionalist and modernization theorists after the 1950s. As historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler observed, modernization theories across the globe drew upon evolutionary frameworks that had claimed universal relevance since the 18th century, linking them to the functionalist paradigms of the 20th century (Wehler, 2010, p. 19). In other words, ideas surrounding human zoos and the roles of those exhibited were frequently shaped by pre-existing philosophical discourses. These interpretations have since been critically reassessed by philosophers and postcolonial scholars. Within this context, three dominant perspectives have emerged in academic discussions on human zoos.

Human Zoos as Scientific Advancement

The transformation from aristocratic menageries to public zoos is often narrated as a linear story of progress—an interpretation still prevalent among zookeepers and biologists today. This perspective frames the zoo as a symbol of scientific and societal advancement (May, 2020, p. 188). The outdated practice of staging animals for elite entertainment was replaced by more animal-friendly designs, notably those developed by Carl Hagenbeck. In his 1896 patent, Hagenbeck introduced a revolutionary concept: animals could be displayed without visible barriers, simulating their natural habitats (Hagenbeck, 1896). His architectural innovations were adopted globally—in Japan, Australia, and beyond—enhancing animal welfare and boosting public appeal and profitability (Kisling, 2001, p. 44-7). Hagenbeck's approach allowed for the co-exhibition of diverse species based on geographic origin rather than taxonomic classification (Strehlow, 2001, p. 103), breaking with the Linnean system of the 18th century. This shift enabled more immersive and seemingly "natural" displays, which in turn facilitated empirical research on live animals and marked a departure from the comparative anatomy that had previously dominated zoological science. The spread of Ernst Haeckel's evolutionary theory in Germany further fueled scientific interest in human biology (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 14). Human exhibitions, popularized by Hagenbeck, became tools for anthropological study (Dreesbach, 2012, p. 25). Scholars like Rudolf Virchow used these displays to conduct anatomical research, often in pursuit of the so-called "missing link" between humans and apes (Dreesbach, 2012, p. 6).

Philosophical Critiques

In the latter half of the 20th century, European philosophers began to challenge the teleological narrative of zoos, arguing that these institutions were deeply entangled with capitalist structures. John Berger, for example, interpreted the zoo as emblematic of the literal and symbolic disappearance of the wild (Berger, 2009, p. 12-7). Drawing on Cartesian notions of subjectivity and the impact of industrialization, Berger argued that both animals and humans had been reduced to manipulable objects (Berger, 2009, p. 23). He saw the zoo as a turning point where animals ceased

to be subjects capable of observation and instead became mere objects of human knowledge and control—a reflection of power and separation (Berger, 2009, p. 27).

Berger lamented the loss of the mysterious, questioning gaze of animals in nature, which had once signified a profound, unknowable connection. In his view, the zoo exemplifies a capitalist anthropology that objectifies both humans and animals (Berger, 2009, p. 13). Jacques Derrida extended this critique by framing the zoo as a manifestation of biopolitical power (Derrida, 2008, p. 381-418). He argued that modern zoo architecture created an illusion of freedom, even as animals remained confined and unable to reproduce naturally. This mirrored the condition of citizens in a biopolitical state, where visible barriers may be removed, but underlying structures of control persist (Derrida, 2008, p. 382).

Derrida emphasized how biopolitics relies on subtle visual cues to define norms, particularly through the portrayal of the "uncivilized other." Human exhibitions, often depicting individuals as naked, primitive, and sexually deviant, reinforced societal expectations of proper behaviour. Visitors were led to believe they were gaining knowledge about other cultures, while in reality, they were being conditioned to conform to liberal ideals of citizenship (Foucault, 2004). The 19th-century zoo thus served as a pedagogical tool, reinforcing notions of European superiority and civilizational progress. The case of Ulrikab illustrates this dynamic vividly. The separation of his family from the Terrianiak family into distinct tents symbolized a hierarchy of civilization, with Ulrikab's Christian marriage positioning his family as more "advanced." This exhibition reinforced patriarchal norms and the ideal of the monogamous, Christian nuclear family, aligning with liberal state values. In this way, the human zoo functioned simultaneously as an educational and social institution, promoting biopolitical control.

Postcolonial Perspectives

Human exhibitions were also closely tied to colonial ideologies. Various European powers showcased individuals from their colonies: Britain displayed Indians, France exhibited Algerians, Chinese, and sub-Saharan Africans, the Netherlands presented Indonesians, Germany featured Togolese and Cameroonians, Italy showed North-East Africans, and Portugal displayed East Africans. Japan, too, constructed zoos that featured people from Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa, and China—nations it deemed inferior (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 20-21). Anne Dreesbach argues that the

link between human zoos and colonial propaganda is complex. While the exhibitions often portrayed colonized peoples as exotic and primitive—women shown with bare breasts, men as cannibals—this was not necessarily a direct extension of colonial messaging (Dreesbach, 2012). Rather, it functioned as a marketing strategy aimed at maximizing ticket sales. Audiences were drawn to sensationalized portrayals reminiscent of Karl May's adventure novels, rather than seeking genuine insight into colonial life. Nonetheless, these portrayals aligned with and reinforced colonial ideologies. The depiction of colonized individuals as wild and uncivilized supported the narrative of European cultural and evolutionary superiority. Consequently, many scholars have employed postcolonial frameworks to analyse the human zoo phenomenon (Dejung, 2014, p. 336-38). These exhibitions served as material expressions of racist and imperialist ideologies, shaping public perceptions and naturalizing hierarchical visual relationships between observer and observed (Putnam, 2013, p. 57).

Toward an alternative perspective on human zoos

Across the previously discussed scholarly perspectives, the voices and viewpoints of those who were exhibited have rarely been examined independently. While postcolonial studies have offered valuable critiques of human zoos—highlighting their role as manifestations of colonial power structures and the racial and gendered dynamics within European societies—they have contributed little to understanding the specific migration processes or the lived experiences and perceptions of the individuals involved. This oversight is mirrored in migration studies, which, despite offering broad analyses of global migration history (Hoerder, 2011) or focusing on particular historical movements (such as those involving travellers, performers, or zoo and circus workers) (Bade et al., 2008; Lucassen & Lucassen, 2009, p. 347-377), often remain silent on the motivations, journeys, and interpersonal encounters of exhibited individuals—especially regarding how these were experienced and interpreted by the subjects themselves. To address this gap, the following sections introduce a conceptual framework that draws on the notions of forced migration and the "third space" as key analytical tools. These concepts offer a fresh lens through which to examine the human zoo phenomenon. Subsequently, they are applied to an empirical analysis of Ulrikab's diary, providing insight into the aspirations and experiences surrounding his migration and exhibition. As Cristof Dejung cautions, scholars should avoid overgeneralizing the phenomenon of human exhibitions, as this risks flattening the diversity of both European actors and the exhibited commu-

nities (Dejung, 2014, p. 333-54). Methodologically, this issue is tied to two spatial biases: first, Eurocentrism, which privileges European perspectives and assumes Europe's central role in shaping modernity and defining global narratives (Conrad, 2016, p. 3-5); and second, methodological nationalism, which limits analysis by framing nation-states and national societies as the primary units of inquiry (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003, p. 576-78). These biases have significantly influenced migration research. Eurocentrism has led to the exclusion of non-European ideas and developments (Ravenstein, 1885, p. 48)[3], while methodological nationalism has obscured the transnational ties and practices of migrants. Most critically, both approaches have contributed to the marginalization of the very individuals at the heart of these studies—the exhibited people themselves. Consequently, the majority of available documentation on human zoos (such as letters, articles, and contracts) originates from the perspectives of exhibitors and recruiters, rather than from the exhibited individuals (Andreassen, 2016, p. 4-6).

Forced migration

As previously discussed, the creation of human exhibitions necessitated the recruitment and relocation of individuals from marginalized regions of the world, prompting critical questions about the underlying motivations for such movements. The concept of forced migration offers a valuable lens through which to interpret the migration of exhibited individuals to Europe. Its meaning varies across disciplines: historians typically associate it with the transatlantic slave trade and similar coercive labour systems, such as indentured servitude, often emphasizing direct physical violence (Manning & Trimmer, 2020, p. 1-10). More recently, however, forced migration has gained prominence in migration sociology, where it serves as a broader analytical framework—particularly relevant to the context of human exhibitions (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2016, p. 1-22).

[3] Regarding Eurocentrism E.G. Ravenstein's (1885) prominent study 'The Laws of Migration' on the patterns in migration processes represents an illustrative example. The statistical data that the scholar used for his theory model was in fact limited to the United Kingdom. Although limitation existed, Ravenstein took the leap to develop from his analysis a set of seven *universalistic* laws of migration in order to explain migration patterns in Europe and even beyond the region.

Stephen Castles, for example, includes a wide range of migrant categories under this term, such as internally displaced persons, those affected by development projects, and environmentally displaced populations (Castles, 2003, p. 14-15). Crucially, he situates forced migration within the larger context of global transformations—such as economic globalization and persistent North-South inequalities—that drive social change. This perspective encourages a more nuanced understanding of coercion.

Building on Johan Galtung's theory, coercion can be conceptualized in two distinct forms: direct coercion, involving personal violence or conflict in the place of origin, and structural coercion, referring to deteriorating living conditions caused by global shifts and systemic inequalities (Galtung, 1969, p. 169-170). The latter reflects the widely held notion that migration is often a response to poverty and lack of opportunity (Galbraith, 1979, p. 7).

The migration of individuals for human exhibitions can thus be seen as a specific form of forced migration shaped by both direct and indirect coercive forces. The extent of coercion varied over time and was closely tied to the development of human zoos. In the early stages, direct violence played a more prominent role (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 60). However, historical accounts suggest that coercion diminished in later phases, likely due to two interrelated developments (Thode-Arora, 1989, p. 19).

First, exhibited individuals became more experienced and aware of the implications of participation. A telling example is the Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation, who declined a recruitment offer from Jacobsen after having previously endured unfavourable conditions. Their refusal reflected not only accumulated experience but also a growing sense of empowerment and agency. Second, increasing public awareness and advocacy—particularly within anti-colonial and religious movements—led to greater recognition of the rights of colonized and exhibited individuals (Blanchard et al., 2012, p. 61). This shift placed mounting pressure on recruiters and exhibitors to reform their practices. Over time, a more structured migration infrastructure emerged, involving new actors and procedures. These included the establishment of oversight bodies in colonial territories, the allowance of family migration, and the formalization of employment contracts. Additionally, zoo organizers began to rely on local intermediaries, whose involvement helped professional-

ize recruitment and reduce the use of violent methods. These evolving practices fostered new spaces for interaction, reshaping the dynamics between exhibited individuals, organizers, and audiences. These relational shifts—and their impact on mutual perceptions—will be explored in the following section.

The Third Space

As previously outlined, this paper aims to reinterpret the phenomenon of human zoos through the lens of migration, drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space." This notion describes a fluid and generative semiotic realm marked by negotiation, contradiction, cultural translation, and resistance between newcomers and established societal actors. While the zoo—both literally and symbolically—constructs a racialized and colonial gaze upon the exhibited individuals, it simultaneously creates opportunities for challenging and renegotiating these ideological projections. Within this space, power relations are not only reinforced but also contested by both the exhibited subjects and their audiences.

From this perspective, the zoo becomes a site where dominant colonial narratives can be disrupted, allowing for the emergence of hybrid identities that transcend rigid ideological and binary categorizations. In this analytical framework, we examine Abraham's diary as a form of "minority writing"—a narrative that exposes and questions mechanisms of power and boundary-making. We interpret his account as a record of negotiating, mediating, and legitimizing competing and often conflicting demands for collective self-representation (Bhabha, 1999, p. 38-39).

The two previously introduced concepts—forced migration and the third space—serve as valuable analytical tools. They help uncover underlying structural conditions such as indirect violence and asymmetrical power relations, offering deeper insight into the motivations behind migration and the lived experiences of those involved. This is particularly relevant for studying human zoos, a historical phenomenon that demands both empirical and theoretical contextualization to adequately explore the subjective dimensions of aspiration, pre- and post-migration living conditions, and interpersonal encounters during exhibition periods.

To complement historical and theoretical analysis, this paper also incorporates personal dimensions by examining both ascribed and acquired traits of the exhibited individuals. Gender and talent, in particular, are key factors that shaped how these individuals were perceived and treated.

Regarding gender, evidence suggests that exhibited women were especially subject to hierarchical social structures. As Andreassen argues, European societies imposed behavioural norms rooted in race, gender, and class hierarchies, which severely constrained individual agency (Andreassen, 2016, p. 122). Within this framework, exhibited women occupied the lowest social tier: racially, they were viewed as undeveloped and instinct-driven; socially, they were presumed to belong to the lowest class; and in terms of gender, they were considered intellectually and physically inferior to men. These prejudices influenced both recruitment practices and the treatment of women during their time in exhibition venues. The case of Saartjie Baartman—known as the "Hottentot Venus"—is emblematic. Her display focused on her physical features, particularly her buttocks and genitalia, which were sensationalized by European audiences (Gilman, 2010, p. 15-17).

In terms of talent, some exhibited individuals transitioned into roles as impresarios, actively participating in the recruitment and organization of exhibitions. These "professional savages" (Poignant, 2004, p. 243) became entrepreneurs within the human zoo circuit. A notable example is Nayo Bruce from Togo, who was first recruited for a German exhibition in 1896. As Brändle documents, Bruce later returned to Europe with his family and fellow countrymen, launching a career as an impresario and organizing exhibitions across multiple cities (Brändle, 2007). This entrepreneurial trajectory significantly altered the migration experiences of exhibited individuals and offers valuable insight into early forms of talent-driven migration (Aksakal, forthcoming). A similar case is that of Somali impresario Hersi Egeh Gorseh, as discussed by Dreesbach (2012).

Abraham Ulrikab's diary

Abraham Ulrikab's diary offers a rare and compelling glimpse into the lived experiences of an exhibited migrant and the group that accompanied him. To contextualize the empirical analysis that follows, some background information is essential.

Abraham's original name remains unknown, as it was assigned to him by German missionaries following his Christian baptism. His surname, Ulrikab, was derived from his wife Ulrike—a common

German name—following Inuit naming customs. The Ulrikab family included Abraham, Ulrike, their daughters Sarah and Maria, and Abraham's nephew Tobias. Prior to their recruitment by Johann Jacobsen, an agent working for Carl Hagenbeck, the family resided at a German missionary station in Hebron, Labrador. Due to financial constraints, additional individuals were recruited to complete the exhibition group. These included the shaman Terrianiak, his wife Paingo, also a shaman, and their daughter Noggasak from the Navak region. Abraham's multilingual abilities—in Inuit, German, and English—positioned him as a key intermediary and translator during the recruitment process.

Their journey to Germany lasted 32 days, after which the group was exhibited in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Austria between 1880 and 1881, marking an early phase of the so-called Völkerschauen (ethnographic exhibitions). Tragically, within four months of their arrival, all members of the group succumbed to illness—most likely due to the failure to vaccinate them against smallpox prior to their departure.

From a methodological standpoint, the diary presents challenges. The original manuscript has been lost, and only a German translation by missionary Kretschmer from Labrador remains (Lutz & Grollmuß, 2007, 9-21). It is unclear whether the translation is complete or accurate. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's metaphor of "loving" translation, inspired by Derrida, Kretschmer appears not to have approached the text with the sensitivity and responsibility required of a translator working with a language outside the dominant European canon (Spivak, 2005, p. 93-110). Rather than engaging with the unique linguistic structure of the original, the translation seems to diminish the Inuit language, portraying it as inferior to German (Spivak, 2005, p. 94). This impression is reinforced by the portrayal of Abraham's writing as grammatically flawed and lacking precise terminology. For example, trains are described in the diary as "wonderful steam" (Lutz, 2007, p. 35)[4] or "when we were traveling with steam we were faster than flyers," (Lutz, 2005, p. 35)[5] suggesting a child-like or unsophisticated linguistic framework. Such representations risk perpetuating stereotypes about

[4] "wundervoller Dampf" (Lutz, *Tagebuch*, 35).

[5] Lutz, *Diary*, 35. "als wir reisten mit Dampf waren wir schneller als Fliegende".

the simplicity of Indigenous languages. Despite these limitations, Ulrikab's diary remains one of the few surviving accounts from an exhibited individual in Germany. It offers invaluable insights into the personal and collective experiences of the group, including aspects of their migration journey, which will be explored in the following section.

Drivers to migrate to Europe

Migration drivers can be understood as a complex interplay of factors operating at multiple levels, shaping individual decisions to migrate (Aksakal, 2020, p. 97-124). These range from crises and economic hardship to the influence of migrant networks and the availability of migration infrastructure. As previously discussed, such factors may also include forms of direct or indirect coercion that compel individuals to leave their place of origin. While Abraham Ulrikab's diary does not offer a comprehensive account of all these influences, it does provide valuable insight into several key motivations.

A central theme in Abraham's reflections is the difficult socio-economic situation he and his family faced. One passage in particular reveals the burden of unresolved debts:

> "But as I was in doubt to pay all my and my late father's debts from kayaking, I thought (at this chance) to collect some money for discharging them (…) Not that we would have been tired of our teachers, but due to the weight of my debts, of which I still have 100 Shilling." (Lutz, 2007, p. 4-5).[6]

[6] Lutz, *Tagebuch*, 4-5: "Da ich aber zweifeln musste, meine und meines Vaters Schulden durch Kajakfahren abzubezahlen, glaube ich mir (bei dieser Gelegenheit) Geld sammeln zu können, um sie bezahlen zu können. (…) Nicht das wir unserer Lehrer müde gewesen wären, sondern der Schwere meiner Schulden wegen, deren ich noch über 100 Schillinge habe" (Lutz, *Diary*, 25).

This excerpt suggests that financial hardship—specifically debt—was a major factor driving Abraham's decision to migrate to Europe. His hope was to earn money abroad to alleviate his economic burdens back home in Labrador. Unfortunately, the diary does not provide further details about the origin of these debts or the individuals to whom they were owed, which limits our understanding of the full scope of his financial situation. Similarly, there is little information about how Abraham learned of potential earning opportunities in Europe beyond his contact with the recruiter Jacobsen, leaving questions about the role of informal networks or other channels.

What is evident, however, is Abraham's strong motivation to migrate. His commitment was so pronounced that he actively assisted Jacobsen in recruiting additional Inuit participants—including a family of high spiritual status within the community, whose involvement might otherwise seem unlikely. This suggests that Abraham's influence extended beyond his own household, and that he played a key role in facilitating the migration of others. In addition to economic motives, Abraham's diary hints at personal and cultural interests, such as curiosity and a desire to explore Europe. He writes:

> "I didn't want to act like a fool, but I remember to have wished to see Europe and some of the communities over there for a long time." (Lutz, 2007, p. 5)[7]

This statement reflects a longstanding interest in Europe, particularly Germany, which may have been shaped by his religious convictions. His deep connection to Christianity appears to have influenced not only his decision to migrate but also his views on non-Christian individuals, as discussed later in the paper.

[7] Ich wollte nicht als Thörichter handeln, erinnerte mich aber, daß ich schon längst gewünscht habe, Europa und einige der dortigen Gemeinden zu sehen. (Lutz, *Tagebuch*, 5).

In summary, Abraham's migration was primarily driven by economic hardship, especially debt. However, his diary also reveals non-material motivations, such as spiritual curiosity and personal ambition. His willingness to encourage others to join the journey—without any apparent compensation—underscores his role as a mediator between recruiter and recruits, effectively translating aspiration into action and demonstrating his skill as a cultural intermediary

Experiences after Arrival

Abraham Ulrikab's mimicry – an ambivalent role within the colonial discourse

Abraham Ulrikab's diary reveals a form of mimicry (Bhabha, 1994, p. 125-136) as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha—an ambivalent strategy through which colonized individuals adopt the behaviours and values of the colonizers. Abraham's aspiration to emulate white German identity not only exposes his internalized identification patterns but also reflects the broader power structures embedded in the human zoo context. His actions and writings unconsciously mirror the dominant norms of German society, revealing their contingent and constructed nature.

As previously discussed, Abraham played a pivotal role as an intermediary for recruiter Johann Jacobsen, helping to assemble the Inuit group for Carl Hagenbeck's exhibition. His persuasive abilities and active involvement underscore his significance in the recruitment process. However, his diary also suggests that he internalized Eurocentric and racialized ideologies, exhibiting what W.E.B. Du Bois termed "double consciousness." (Du Bois, 2008). Abraham appears to have adopted the German narrative that baptized Christians were more civilized than Inuit who maintained shamanic traditions. This sense of superiority is evident throughout his diary and reflects the colonized subject's desire to be recognized by the dominant group through assimilation.

Similar to Jacobsen, who dismissed shamanic practices during their voyage (Lutz, 2007, p. 16), Abraham expresses disdain for the Terrianiak family, whose spiritual role held authority within Inuit communities. He writes:

> "The wife of the Northener is sick, very sick indeed. We are very grateful that they have a home for themselves. We don't like their habits, both practise magic. I often ask them to convert, but it doesn't help. Again and again they catch a bad cold. They reject to take any medicine; they hope to get well by magic." (Lutz, 2007, p. 37).[8]

German observers referred to Abraham as the "civilized Eskimo," (Lutz, 2007, p. 85) emphasizing the distinction between Christian Inuit and "heathens." (Lutz, 2007, p. 86). Anthropologist Rudolf Virchow reinforced this binary, praising Abraham's family for their education and Christian values while portraying the Terrianiak family as primitive and ideal subjects for anthropological study (Virchow, 2005, p. 57).

Abraham's diary reflects both a sense of superiority and an underlying inferiority. He acknowledges the value placed on him by German society due to his baptism, language skills, and musical ability, yet also credits German culture and science for his personal development: "Already now I know better about many things" (Lutz, 2005, p. 37). His reference to the missionaries as "teachers" further illustrates his internalized hierarchy (Lutz, 2007, p. 27).[9]

The Body as a Site of Subversion

From a socio-psychological perspective, physical wellbeing plays a crucial role in shaping migration experiences. In this context, the bodies of Abraham and his family become instruments of resistance, subtly challenging colonial narratives. Although the diary is written in the first person, the physical and emotional responses described within it undermine Abraham's idealized view of German society. The diary thus serves as a valuable source for analysing the human zoo as a "third space," where bodily experiences disrupt dominant discourses.

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[8] Lutz, *Tagebuch*, 37: Die Frau unseres Nordländers ist krank, sogar sehr krank. Daß sie ein Haus für sich haben, ist uns sehr dankenswerth. Ihre Gewohnheiten gefallen uns nicht, beide treiben Zauberei. Ich sage ihnen wohl oft, sie möchten sich bekehren, es nutzt aber nichts. Ein böser Schnupfen kehrt bei ihnen immer wieder zurück. Medicin zu nehmen, weigern sie sich, sie hoffen von Zauberei Besserung (Lutz, Diary, 26).

[9] Lutz *Tagebuch*, 27. "Ich weiß jetzt schon um Vieles besser Bescheid" (Lutz *Diary*, 26).

Descriptions of physical discomfort and emotional distress contradict the claims made by Hagenbeck and Jacobsen regarding the wellbeing of the exhibited individuals. For instance, after Jacobsen beat Abraham's nephew Tobias, he attempted to placate Abraham with gifts and kindness to prevent him from reporting the incident:

> "Our companion, the unmarried Tobias, was beaten with a dog whip by our master, Jacobsen. (…) If Mr. Jacobsen does that twice I shall write to England as I am told. Afterwards, he was very friendly towards me so that I don't write. Even our two wives were immediately bought silken ribbons." (Lutz, 2005, p. 58).[10]

Despite these efforts, the diary documents poor treatment, including malnutrition:

> "The food here is no good. We don't lack dry bread; we also get some fish. Because of the fish we take some refreshment." (Lutz, 2005, p. 38).[11]

Scholars have argued that Hagenbeck deliberately created conditions that encouraged visitors to interact with the exhibited individuals (Kim, 2005). The diary supports this claim, showing how inadequate nourishment led the Inuit to rely on food gifts from visitors:

> "The Kablunat audience always take delicious things with them to treat us with; all kinds of things to chew, which they give us, and big fruits, which have even juice." (Lutz, 2007, p. 59f).[12]

In addition to hunger, the Inuit suffered from cold temperatures:

> "On Oct. 23rd, snow was falling all the time, the Kablunat are freezing, even we are freezing very much." (Lutz, 2005, p. 42).[13]

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[10]Lutz *Dairy*, 58. Unser Gefährte, der led. Tobias wurde von unserem Herrn Jakobsen mit der Hundepeitsche gegauen. (Herr Jakobsen) war gleich zornig, weil Tobias ihm nicht immer folge, wie er sagte, er hätte sich schon viel bei ihm eingebrockt. Beinahe ist er nicht genommen worden u. fortgeschickt. Wenn es Herr. J. zweimal so macht, so werde ich nach England schreiben, weil ich so befohlen bin. (?) Nachher war er sehr freundlich zu mir, damit ich dieses nicht schreibe. Sogar unsern beiden Frauen wurden seidne Bänder gekauft gleich. Wenn Tobias widerspenstig ist, wird er keine Bezahlung haben, wenn er aber schön ist, wird er große Bezahlung haben. Nach diesem war Tobias schlecht krank. (Lutz *Tagebuch*, 33.)

[11] Lutz *Dairy*, 38. "Das Essen hier ist nicht schön. An hartem Brot leiden wir wohl keinen Mangel, auch Fische bekommen wir. Durch die Fische stärken wir uns etwas" (Lutz *Tagebuch*, 27.)

[12] Lutz *Tagebuch*, 59f. "Die Kablunat (die Zuschauer) führen immer Gutschmeckendes mit sich, allerlei zum Kauen, was sie uns schenken, u. große Früchte, die sogar Saft haben (frisches Obst)."

[13] Lutz *Diary*, 42. "Okt. 23 schneite es immer fort, die Kablunat frieren sehr, sogar wir frieren sehr." (Lutz *Tagebuch*, 29).

Despite their familiarity with cold climates, the constant exposure contributed to illness and ultimately death. Hagenbeck, known for his innovations in animal acclimatization, may have viewed this exposure as part of a broader effort to "civilize" the wild—an ideology tragically extended to human subjects (Zickgraf, 2002, p. 35-37).

Resisting Scientific Authority Through the Female Body

Anthropologist Rudolf Virchow used the Inuit exhibition for anthropometric research, aiming to measure and classify bodies in the name of scientific progress (Virchow, 2005, p. 61). Paingo, however, resisted his examination, challenging the authority of white, male science (Virchow, 2005, p. 59). Virchow described her reaction as a hysterical fit:

> "While I was spreading her arms horizontally… she suddenly had the fit: she slipped underneath my arm and started 'carrying on all over' the room with such a fury… I expected it to turn into a hysterical catatonic fit… But soon it became clear… it was a psychic cramp… comparable to what people perform in a state of highest rage." (Virchow, 2005, p. 59-60).

From a postcolonial perspective, Paingo's response can be interpreted as a powerful act of defiance against the objectification and dehumanization imposed by colonial science. Virchow's discomfort with her resistance led him to insult her appearance:

> "She jumped from one corner into the other and was screaming with a crying voice, her ugly face looked dark red, her eyes were glowing, and there was a bit of foam at her mouth; to sum it up: it was a highly disgusting sight." (Virchow, 2005, p. 60).

His derogatory remarks reveal an attempt to reassert dominance and avoid confronting the fragility of his own ideological constructs. Paingo's bodily resistance disrupts Virchow's narrative, exposing the limits of colonial authority and the agency of the subaltern. Beyond that it undermines Abraham's perspective as well, who conceptualizes himself as being more civilized as Paingo due to his Christianity. Her physical outburst therefore shows two things: First, she is the ultimate subaltern (Spivak, 2008, p. 80-2): Both, the local patriarchy (here represented by Ulrikab) as well as the western hegemony (here represented by Virchow) silence her. Her position is neither represented in the diary nor in the description by Virchow. Her doubled silencing is disrupted by her vehement outburst, that can be read as a subversive try to be heard and seen beyond the colonial, patriarchal glasses.

Conclusion

This paper approached the phenomenon of human zoos through the lens of migration, focusing on how exhibited individuals articulated their reasons for leaving their homelands, how they interpreted their interactions with both migrant and non-migrant groups, and how they navigated the social and cultural conditions they encountered in Europe.

Figure 1: Cover of the published diary of

Abraham Ulrikab[14]

We contended that prevailing scholarly debates—including philosophical and postcolonial critiques—have largely overlooked the perspectives of the exhibited individuals themselves. This chapter aimed to offer a different entry point into the history of human zoos by foregrounding the lived experiences of those displayed, focusing on their motivations, perceptions, and responses. In particular, Abraham's role as a cultural intermediary—using his skills to navigate economic hardship and fulfil a desire to explore—offers a compelling example of agency within constrained circumstances.

[14] Lutz, *Tagebuch*, front page

While we were able to recover and juxtapose several details against dominant narratives, the overall picture remains fragmentary. As illustrated by the cover image of Hartmut Lutz's book, Abraham's family and their companions continue to be marginalized in visual and historical representation. Although this discussion highlighted the significance of talent and gender in shaping migration experiences, these dimensions—as markers of social inequality—remain insufficiently explored and warrant deeper investigation in future research.

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