Finnish Colonial Encounters. From Anti-Imperialism to Cultural Colonialism and Complicity
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Chapter 6: "Queensland Cannibals" Encountered in Finland (1886): Locally Rooted Visions of Exhibitions of Colonized People

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Abstract
The chapter examines the visit of a live ethnographic exhibition group of Australian Aboriginals, led by the impresario Robert A. Cunningham, in Helsinki and Vyborg in 1886. This exhibition, together with others of the same genre that followed a few years later, became an influential new means for Finns to encounter ideologies, imageries, and individuals closely associated with colonialism. The chapter demonstrates that the highly standardized exhibition concept did not ensure uniformity of either performance or reception. The Finnish example illustrates how the meaning of an exhibition was always locally embedded and thus subject to new interpretations. Since previous knowledge of Australia and its indigenous populations was sparse and fragmentary, Finnish journalists found the promotional material provided helpful and made use of it in a more or less straightforward and uncritical manner, thus reproducing racist and stereotyped imageries. Yet they also applied their interpretive and descriptive skills in making an unprecedented exhibition concept intelligible to the local audience. The visit by the Aboriginals became a means to express membership in a western, allegedly superior civilization, with its rationality, its practices of overcoming and mastering other human populations, and its privilege of being entertained by those very populations.

Mysterious announcements appeared on the pages of daily newspapers in Helsinki in late June 1886. "Cannibals are coming!" they stated, without any further explanation.[1] More information was received a couple of days later, when Robert A. Cunningham, an impresario of Canadian origin, arrived in town with an exhibition group of three indigenous people – a woman, a man, and a boy – from northwest Australia. The troupe performed for a week in Helsinki and then for two days in Vyborg, before continuing to nearby St. Petersburg.

Itinerant artists, musicians, and circus groups were not an uncommon sight in the late-nineteenth-century Russian Grand Duchy of Finland,[2] but the visit of the Australian troupe was something completely new. In addition to bringing individuals of indigenous Australian origin to the country for the first time,[3] it exposed Finnish people to an exhibition genre closely connected to the Western colonial world. The brief visit of the group aroused general astonishment among exhibition visitors in Helsinki and Vyborg; the extraordinary show was widely discussed in local newspapers, and articles were also reprinted in the press elsewhere in Finland. Information about the "cannibals" thus reached a wide

[1] See advertisements, *Nya Pressen*, *Folkwännen, Hufvudstadsbladet,* and *Uusi Suometar*, June 26, 1886.
[2] Hirn 1982; Hirn 1986; Halén 1986; Hirn 2007; Nevala 2011.
[3] Leitzinger, *Ulkomaalaiset Suomessa 1812–1972* [Helsinki] East-West Books Helsinki 2008, 294, 296.

Finnish audience. This exhibition, together with others of the same genre that followed a few years later,[4] became an influential new means for Finns to encounter ideologies, imageries, and individuals associated with colonialism. The focus in this chapter is on that first exhibition of 1886, so as to illuminate some of the ways in which its content was made intelligible in a Finnish context.

While living human beings had been brought to Europe from faraway countries since antiquity, more organized attempts to display them for a mass audience were connected to the late nineteenth-century colonial quest. The phenomenon of live ethnographic exhibitions, also sometimes referred to as "exotic exhibitions" or "human zoos",[5] developed and matured in a pressure field between various forces. In addition to the deepening colonial involvement of European countries in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and the need to legitimize and glorify these endeavours in the eyes of the home audience, the concept of the exhibition was affected by the evolving study of anthropology and race. As Volker Barth puts it, at these live ethnographic exhibitions, three different factors – popularization of knowledge, colonial indoctrination, and entertainment – went hand in hand.[6] Displays of living colonized people soon became a massive business and a commonplace part of metropolitan entertainment. Exhibitions played a significant role in making abstract empires manifest and imaginable, and in turning the public opinion favourable to colonial manoeuvres overseas.[7]

The exhibition business grew during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and displays of living people, whether recently colonized or soon to be so, became a standard part of world fairs, where they were witnessed by millions of westerners. They also became institutionalized in botanical gardens and zoos, such as Carl Hagenbeck's Tierpark in Hamburg, which displayed exotic animals together with peoples brought from all over the world.[8]

Previous research has emphasized the development of a specific format for the profitable organization and transportation of live ethnographic exhibitions between ever-changing venues. In her study of the history of "Völkerschauen" in Germany, for instance, Anne Dreesbach suggests that each of the approximately 400 exhibitions arranged in Germany between the 1870s and the 1930s followed a tightly organized model. Certain generic and standardized patterns thus developed to select and recruit individuals, promote exhibitions, choose venues, and structure the performance.[9] Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep go so far as to argue that ethnographic exhibitions became an international mechanism, or even a global system, which functioned similarly in various cities and towns around the world.[10]

While recognizing the existence of these generic structures and practices, the focus here is on an aspect that has received less attention: namely, the adaptability of ethnographic exhibitions to various cultural settings, especially in regions falling outside the strongest impact of colonialism. Ethnographic

[4] These included Ashantis from West Africa, "Sinhalese" from Ceylon, and indigenous people of North America.
[5] See Blanchard, Boëtsch & Snoep 2011, 46; see also 20n 1, 36.
[6] Barth 2011, 189. See also Blanchard, 2011, 184, 206, 213, 216, 220.
[7] Qureshi 2011, 2; MacKenzie & McAleer 2015, 7, 13.
[8] Ames 2009.
[9] Dreesbach 2012, section 'Völkerschauen' and the Display of the 'Other'.
[10] Blanchard, Boëtsch & Snoep 2011, 20, 22. See also Lemaire et al. 2011, 292, 295, 298.

exhibitions took shape in a metropolitan context, and were primarily directed to the home-country inhabitants of empires. A show's reputation was often built in large metropolitan cities, especially London, Paris, or Berlin; in order to reach larger paying audiences, however, they often toured widely within and between empires.[11] In the course of their long journeys, performing troupes thus crossed multiple political, cultural, and linguistic borders. They traversed peripheral, sparsely populated regions and arrived in numerous smaller towns, such as Helsinki and Vyborg, where they halted and performed before continuing towards their primary destinations. While live ethnographic exhibitions were designed to be transferable and repeatable, the very aspect of mobility involved an inevitable element of change. The visit of the Aboriginal groups in the two Finnish towns, as well as in many other places along the route, are revealing: they show how regional understandings of colonialism took shape and how local responses were affected by prevalent cultural and societal aspects.[12] Rather than highlighting the sameness of displays and reactions, an analysis of colonial peripheries thus sheds light on the versatility, particularism, and even originality of responses to phenomena attached to colonialism.

Cunningham's troupe offers a case in point with regard to the global mobility inherent in the exhibition business. It was originally composed of nine Manbarra and Biyaygirri aboriginals, whom Cunningham had taken to North America from two separate islands in the British colony of Queensland in 1883. Similarly to many other contemporary examples, the process whereby the individuals became attached to the troupe is largely unknown; however, rumours about Cunningham as "man-hunter", and stories about attempted escapes of the members of his group, were repeated – and denied – throughout the tour. The Aboriginals are known to have received a small payment for their work as performers.[13]

The group first became part of the touring circus of the legendary P. T. Barnum. Fascinated by the idea of displaying living exotic curiosities and creatures of all kinds, Barnum is known to have attempted to procure a "Fijian Cannibal Chief" already in the 1840s.[14] As Raita Merivirta and Johanna Skurnik discuss elsewhere in this volume, the cannibal trope was also commonly attached to Australian Aboriginals as part of a well-established stereotype of savagery. By way of a contract with Cunningham, Barnum obtained a group of individuals that could be immediately presented to the audience as "cannibals". The concept of "Queensland cannibals" was soon established by making use of popular descriptions and imagery found in earlier publications. In early 1884 Cunningham brought the group to London, and a European tour with the same concept followed. The group travelled through Belgium, Germany, and France, to Scandinavia and as far East as Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, and Constantinople, before returning to Britain by way of Austria and Italy. Roslyn Poignant, who has done detailed detective work in tracing the story of this particular troupe, suggests that it had visited approximately forty venues before arriving in Finland, and performed in another ten towns afterwards. These figures, however, may reveal only a

[11] Qureshi 2011, 2. See also Lemaire et al. 2011, 292–297, 312.
[12] Cf. to Filipová 2015, 2–4.
[13] Poignant 2004, 14–15, 67–72. For the description of recruitment in the Finnish press, see "Kannibaler I Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen,* June 30, 1886.
[14] Poignant 2004, 83.

fraction of the total.[15] Vyborg, for instance, is not mentioned in the study. The worldwide tour lasted over four years, during which the original group of nine shrunk to three due to illnesses and deaths along the way. The remaining three – Billy, Jenny, and Little Toby, as they were known – were the ones also seen in Finland.[16]

Here I argue that the standardized and repetitive mode of presentation, with its inherent references to the colonial world order and assumed racial hierarchies, did not guarantee the identical and controlled transfer of an exhibition. Helsinki and Vyborg provide examples of small towns at the same time forming part of the Russian Empire, albeit located at its fringes, and situated within the sphere of influence of the Western colonial world. The concept of live ethnographic exhibitions had developed in the West, but troupes also visited Russia, especially St. Petersburg and Moscow.[17] Ethnographic exhibitions were also arranged in Russia, to demonstrate the potential of the newly acquired territories of the empire.[18] The focus was on Central Asia; the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland did not take part in these events. It nevertheless hosted several exhibitions displaying colonized peoples of the Western empires. Obviously, the Finns were not exposed to the Western imperial ethos in the same way as those living in the main imperial centres, and did not share the cultural knowledge and assumptions prevalent there. Some practical arrangements related to the exhibition were also different. For instance, unlike some other European venues,[19] there were definitely no colonial soldiers present in the Finnish towns to ensure that the content of the show was in line with state colonial policy. In Finland, as in many other regions, an exhibition genre that had originated and developed in close connection with colonialism thus now encountered a different audience.

I examine the ways in which the late nineteenth-century Finnish cultural setting challenged the logic of live ethnographic exhibitions and the messages involved. By analyzing how the performance was made comprehensible to a Finnish audience, and how visitors described what they had witnessed, I show that the meaning of an exhibition was always locally embedded and thus subject to change and new interpretations.

In theoretical terms, the analysis leans on recent studies highlighting the idea of knowledge formation as a dynamic process, whereby knowledge takes shape gradually as it moves between various places and actors. As emphasized by Christian Jacob, knowledge is never simply transferred from one place to another; it is always rooted in specific places, and in the cultures prevalent in those places. As it moves, knowledge encounters new, unexpected horizons of reception that can affect its form, meaning, and function. In Jacob's words, there is "no transmission of knowledge without changes, loss, gain, new perspectives, mistakes, reappropriation, and anachronistic interpretations."[20] Roger Chartier has also

[15] According to a recent documentary film, Barnum's circus alone visited approximately 130 towns in the US and Canada. *Sauvages, au coeur des zoos humaines* (2018).

[16] Their fate is uncertain. Poignant (2004, 186–188) suggest that Cunningham returned them to Queensland in 1888, while according to a French documentary film at least Jenny and Toby also died of tuberculosis. See *Sauvages, au coeur des zoos humaines* (2018).

[17] This field is still understudied; see Lemaire et al. 2011, 292. See also Poignant 2004, 181–184.

[18] Knight 2006; Kouteinikova 2020.

[19] Barth 2011, 186, 194, 197.

[20] Jacob 2017, 96, see also 90–94.

reminded us of the significance of the intellectual and cultural environment at the receiving end: the act of reception is always active and creative.[21] This resonates with classic studies of museum and exhibition reception, emphasizing the active and decisive role of individual visitors in determining the meanings of a display.[22] My analysis builds on these considerations in order to make the obvious local influence visible, and to highlight the fact that a single exhibition resulted in a variety of responses.

Nineteenth-century touring exhibitions were ephemeral events, that were hoped to cause instant and strong sensations among visitors. As the organizers did not usually consider documenting these reactions, or for that matter their own work, of any particular significance, newspaper resources are especially valuable in shedding light on past exhibitions. Journalists played a key role in informing audiences about forthcoming shows, and describing them to those unable or unwilling to attend. The present discussion refers to occasional archival findings, but leans primarily on the rich press resources, from both Finnish- and Swedish-language newspapers. The material analyzed consists of advertisements and press releases provided by exhibition organizers, exhibition reviews by journalists, and comments by readers.

The Exhibition Arrives: Pride in Being Entertained

At the end of June 1886, the *Nya Pressen* newspaper informed its readers in Helsinki that after visiting numerous big cities, such as London, Cologne, Berlin, Copenhagen, and Stockholm, the troupe of Australians had "now found its way as far as our northern Helsinki".[23] Promotional material of exhibitions typically included long listings of previous venues, and this information was often copied in local newspapers. These lists documented the history and international popularity of specific performing groups, and was intended to convince the ever-changing audiences of their merits. Mentioned last in the list, Helsinki also seemed to be linked with major Western metropolises, and was represented as an important place, attracting internationally famous performing groups. The visit of an unusual group was thus welcomed with a sense of pride at being part of a modern, global phenomenon. The exhibition was a way for a town to position itself among those privileged to be entertained and to express affiliation with the practices of the "civilized" world.[24]

In the late nineteenth century, alarming signals of the tightening political situation of the Grand Duchy within the Russian empire turned Finnish elites towards Western Europe. For example Leo Mechelin, a Senator and leading defender of Finnish autonomy, published a treatise, entitled *Précis du droit public du Grand-Duché de Finlande*, in which he formulated and justified his views on Finland's legal position and rights as regards Russia. After the first version in French in 1886 – the same year as the Aboriginals

[21] Chartier 1984, 233–235. See also Gavroglu et al. 2008, 159–160.
[22] See Kirchberg and Tröndle 2012.
[23] "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen*, June 30, 1886. See also "Kannibalit tulewat," *Kotkan Sanomat,* June 30, 1886.
[24] Similar comments were heard in Copenhagen, even though various shows visited the town much more frequently. Henningsen 2010, 5.

visited Finland – the treatise was circulated in many European languages across the continent, to disseminate information among Western countries and to appeal for support for the Finnish cause.[25]

Affiliation to the West was also expressed in other kinds of texts and cultural products, including exhibition reviews on the Aboriginal troupe. Even if Helsinki was rhetorically linked to Western metropolitan centres, both Helsinki and Vyborg were far from being among the main destinations of the exhibition tour. The reasons for stopping in these towns were more or less practical: both were located conveniently between two more important venues, Stockholm and St. Petersburg. Similarly to other impresarios, Cunningham made use of global communication and transportation networks, and his arrival in Finland was facilitated by a regular steamship connection between Stockholm and Helsinki.[26]

With a population of some 40,000, Helsinki was the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland and the largest town within this autonomous part of Russia. From the perspective of the contemporary international entertainment business, both Helsinki and Vyborg – with less than 20,000 inhabitants – must have seemed rather unattractive. The potential audience was further diminished by the fact that many town dwellers had left town for their summer homes in the countryside. Newspapers reported that Helsinki was "empty".[27] When the group appeared with Barnum's circus in Baltimore in May 1883, some 30,000 people saw the group on the first evening alone,[28] and since then it had performed in front of large audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. Compared to more metropolitan venues, the expected profit from the two Finnish towns was infinitesimal. When a troupe of West Africans visited Helsinki three years later, it was said to have left town with only the flu and a minimal profit.[29]

An entrance fee of one Finnish Mark was charged both at the Hesperia Park in Helsinki and at St. Anna's Park, where the troupe performed in Vyborg. This was a standard admission charge for various entertainments.[30] In Helsinki it was reduced for the last two days to 50 pennies for children, workers, and servants.[31] This suggests a very small audience, even though according to the newspapers there was a large crowd present every day.[32] Precise numbers remain unknown, but according to a contemporary estimate, Hesperia Park was typically visited by 200–400 persons on weekdays and 1,000–2,000 on Saturdays and Sundays.[33] If this was the case during the visit of the Australian aboriginals as well, the total audience in Helsinki reached approximately 5,000 visitors, i.e. eight percent of the town's population.

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[25] Jussila 2004, 541–550.
[26] "Hesperia," *Folkvännen*, June 29, 1886. Poignant 2004*,* 13, 113–114.
[27] Nabo, "Våra sommarnöjen," *Finland*, July 7, 1886; W-r –m, "Sommarkåseri från hufvudstaden," *Fredikshamns Tidning*, August 18, 1886.
[28] Poignant 2004, 90. For the size of audiences in Europe, see Blanchard 2011, 229.
[29] "Singhaleserna," *Nya Pressen*, September 29, 1889.
[30] This was also the price of the display of West African Ashantis which, however, was criticised as expensive. *Nya Pressen*, September 11, 1889.
[31] See "Hesperia," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* July 3, 1886. See also "I S:t Annæ park," *Östra Finland,* July 7, 1886.
[32] "Hesperiassa," *Uusi Suometar,* June 30, 1886; "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886; "Kannibalerna," *Finland,* June 30, 1886; "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen,* June 30, 1886; "Kannibalerna," *Folkwännen,* June 30, 1886; "På Hesperia," *Nya Pressen,* July 5, 1886; "Bref från Helsingfors," *Åbo Underrättelser,* July 31, 1886.
[33] Esa, "Kirje Helsingisä [sic]," *Oulun Lehti,* September 14, 1887.

Cunningham was aware of the economic forces that made his enterprise possible, and he is known to have studied American and European population statistics.[34] Yet, neither the smallness of the expected audience and profit nor the fact that the spectators did not represent the intended target audience prevented Cunningham from unpacking the entire exhibition package in Helsinki and Vyborg. An organized advertising campaign for the group begun three days before the arrival of the group.[35] This demonstrates that the visit to Helsinki had been planned in advance – even though the audience in Stockholm had been informed that the next venue would be St. Petersburg.[36] Cunningham must have negotiated the use of the premises with the Hesperia management, but otherwise he evidently organized everything himself, without engaging local people.

During the days when the forthcoming event was advertised, the newspapers also published brief news items about it. Some articles referred to descriptions that had been published in the Swedish newspapers,[37] while others were clearly based on promotional material that the journalists had been given. The items included classic assurances as to the authenticity of the individuals on display, as well as elevating comments on Cunningham's merits as an impresario.[38] Increasingly detailed announcements, based on the same text template that had been used in Stockholm a few days earlier, appeared in Swedish-language newspapers in Helsinki on the first exhibition day.[39] Finnish newspapers translated the Swedish texts independently of each other so that within a few days different variants and expressions appeared in Finnish as well.[40] In addition to the text template, newspapers had access to a wood engraving plate that Cunningham had had made in London, reproducing an illustration of a cannibalistic scene.[41] In addition, "cruel and cannibalistic" exhibition posters, undoubtedly identical to the colourful lithographs that had been printed for the group in Frankfurt and used in subsequent venues,[42] were attached to "every street corner" in Finland.[43] A Swedish-language version of the original exhibition brochure was also used in Finland.[44] Indeed, the possibility of using existing Swedish-language promotional materials may have contributed significantly to Cunningham's decision to present his troupe in Helsinki and Vyborg.

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[34] Poignant 2004, 13–14.

[35] Announcements were published in the pages of *Nya Pressen, Hufvudstadsbladet, Folkwännen,* and *Uusi Suometar*, June 26, 1886. For practices of promoting an exhibition group, see Qureshi 2011.

[36] "Hvad nytt från Stockholm," *Åbo Tidning*, July 14, 1886. Similarly, first announcement appeared in Vyborg at the time when the troupe was still in Helsinki. "Restaurant St. Annæ," *Wiborgsbladet,* July 4, 1886.

[37] "Mr Cunningham och hans kannibaler," *Nya Pressen,* June 27, 1886; "Ett sällskap Australnegrer från Queensland," *Finland,* June 29, 1886. See also "Kannibaler I Köpenhamn," *Åbo Tidning*, May 11, 1886.

[38] "Tre australier eller kannibaler," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, June 27, 1886; "Kannibalit tulewat," *Uusi Suometar*, June 27, 1886; "Hesperiassa," *Uusi Suometar*, June 29, 1886. Some excerpts from the brochure were reproduced; see "Krönika," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, June 30, 1886. For the practice of sending material to journalists, see Poignant 2004, 269 note 20.

[39] "Hesperia," *Hufvudstadsbladet, Finland, Folkwännen, Nya Pressen,* June 29, 1886.

[40] See, e.g., "Hesperia," *Uusi Suometar,* June 30, 1886; "Kanibalit owat Helsingissä," *Tampereen Sanomat*, July 2, 1886.

[41] See, e.g. "Hesperia," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886. Cf. Poignant 2004, 27.

[42] Poignant 2004, 173; Snoep 2011, 119.

[43] W-r –m, "Sommarkåseri från hufvudstaden," *Fredikshamns Tidning*, August 18, 1886. Also see "I S:t Annæ," *Östra* Finland, July 6, 1886.

[44] Poignant 2004, 16, 171, 258 note 1.

Figure 1: Exhibition advertisements were based on text templates provided by Cunningham. Some newspapers also took the opportunity to use the wood engraving plate to print an illustration of a cannibalistic scene. *Wyborgsbladet*, 6 July 1886, frontpage.

From the exhibition reviews and other descriptions, it is evident that the performance included all the principal elements that had been regularly repeated in previous venues. The repertoire consisted of singing, dancing, playing of instruments, and the display of tools and weaponry, including boomerang throwing, the last-mentioned clearly being the main attraction in Finland and elsewhere.[45] In addition to these elements, the three indigenous Australians wandered among the audience, selling brochures and carte-de-visite–sized photographs depicting themselves, taken by the firm Negretti and Zambra in London two years earlier.[46] Cunningham directed the show; according to one local newspaper, however, he was accompanied by "another European", whose identity remains unknown.[47] Together they narrated the show to the audience; as in previous venues,[48] they also arranged special presentations for invited journalists.[49]

While exhibitions were set up in their entirety even in small provincial venues, and visitors were exposed to promotional materials that had been produced for metropolitan audiences, performances and responses were nevertheless not uniform but also integrated local elements. In the next sections, I take a closer look at the local reception of the performance: how it was perceived and explained in Finland.

Language Barrier and Lack of Words

[45] "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, June 30, 1886; "Kannibalerna," *Finland*, June 30, 1886; "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen,* June 30, 1886; "Hesperiassa," *Uusi Suometar,* June 30, 1886; "På Hesperia," *Nya Pressen,* July 5, 1886; W-r –m, "Sommarkåseri från hufvudstaden," *Fredikshamns Tidning,* August 18, 1886.
[46] "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886; "Hesperiassa," *Uusi Suometar,* June 30, 1886; "I S:t Annæ park," *Östra Finland,* July 7, 1886. One promotional photograph has survived in Finland, 961.4., Picture Collections, Finnish Heritage Agency, Helsinki. See Poignant 2004, 17, 29.
[47] "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886. Cunningham is known to have hired assistants during the tour, see Poignant 2004, 121, 156, 161.
[48] "Mr Cunningham och hans kannibaler," *Nya Pressen,* June 27, 1886.
[49] "Bumerangkastning," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* July 1, 1886.

Since exhibition announcements repeated textual elements copied from a standard template, Finnish audiences were informed that the exhibited individuals were “Austral negroes”, “cannibals from Queensland”, and “Bushmen from the continent of the Southern Hemisphere”. From the Finnish point of view, these vague geographical references were not particularly helpful in understanding where exactly the foreigners came from. Australia was familiar as a place-name from schoolbooks, newspapers, and translated travel and adventure literature, but only a very few Finnish sailors and gold prospectors had personal experience of the continent and its indigenous populations.[50] More information became available only at the turn of the century, with the rise of Finnish long-distance seafaring and migration from Finland to Australia.[51] At this point, the British colony of Queensland also became better known, as it sought to attract newcomers especially from the Nordic countries by offering free voyages. These extensive publicity campaigns reached Finland a few years after the visit of the Australian troupe.[52]

Africa, however, was better known, as a number of Finnish missionaries had been working in the Owambo region in South-West Africa since 1870. They had actively disseminated information about their work, in order to ensure the moral and economic support of the home audience. The recent Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, and the subsequent colonial division of Africa, had also been reported in the Finnish press. Finnish people had also had some opportunities to see entertainers of African or African-American background.[53] This previous knowledge of Africa, combined with vague references to “negroes” and “Bushmen” in the advertisements, explains why Cunningham’s group was first mistakenly connected to Africa. On the day when the troupe had already arrived but had not yet been seen performing, the *Folkwännen* newspaper informed its readers that in addition to “wild people from Australia” the troupe consisted of “Bushmen from South Africa”.[54] This was obviously a mistake that was not later repeated. However, as journalists kept on referring to “Austral-negroes”, and in everyday language the “n-word” was primarily associated with Africans, many Finnish readers and exhibition visitors may have made the same erroneous connection to Africa as the reporter in question.

In addition to making use of press releases, Finnish journalists formulated descriptions of their own on the basis of their visits and observations. A closer examination of these texts suggests that the ability of journalists to describe what they had seen was significantly affected by the language barrier. Helsinki and Vyborg were the most multilingual towns in Finland. In addition to native Finnish and Swedish speakers, one or the other of these towns were home to most of the foreigners in the country, as well as to aristocratic and educated families who might be proficient in other languages.[55] As garrison towns, they also had many Russian speakers, especially in multi-ethnic circles of military officers and civil servants, while German was needed in commerce and trade relations. It is nevertheless likely that the

[50] Koivukangas 1998, 87–92.
[51] For the Australian ports frequented by Finnish sailing ships, see Kaukiainen 2008, 233, 261.
[52] Koivukangas 1998*,* 92–94.
[53] Kaartinen 2004; Jonasson 2004, 127; Hirn 2007, 83*;* Rastas & Peltokangas 2018. See also Nabo, ”Våra sommernöjen,” *Finland*, July 7, 1886.
[54] ”I Hesperia,” *Folkvännen*, June 29, 1886.
[55] Wolff 2016, 105–127.

majority of journalists and exhibition visitors did not have a language in common with Cunningham and his troupe. Cunningham and his assistant are known to have explained aspects of the show to the audience,[56] but no evidence can be found of the presence of an interpreter. Only one journalist referred to Cunningham's accounts in detail.[57] It seems that most of the others had only a vague – if any – idea of what was being explained.

This poor knowledge of English reduced the specificity of exhibition reviews in Finnish newspapers. Compared to their colleagues in Britain or France, Finnish journalists were much less precise or detailed in describing for instance the meaning of the different dance routines. The Finnish press might refer to them merely as "some sort of a primitive dance" or "national dance",[58] whereas in many other countries they were described in detail and specified for instance as funeral or war dances. We know from a report by the French anthropologists Emile Houzé and Victor Jacques that a war dance performed by members of the Aboriginal troupe consisted of several consecutive stages, and could take up to an hour.[59] In addition to language problems, the thinness of Finnish descriptions can be connected to the fact that sources describing exotic foreign cultures were not widely available in Finland. The vocabulary used to describe the outward appearance, character, and customs of colonized people was less extensive or generally established than in colonial centres. That vocabulary spread and became stronger only gradually, with the increase of translated juvenile literature, books on adventure, travel and geography, and school textbooks.[60]

At times, this lack of precise understanding was compensated for by careful observation. This is especially evident from the descriptions of boomerang throwing and of the object itself. While there had been occasional references to boomerangs from the 1850s onwards in the Swedish-language press in Finland, the 1886 exhibition brought the actual object to Finland for the first time, and prompted the adoption of the word in Finnish (bumerangi).[61] Following careful observation of the object and its handling, journalists often wrote long and detailed descriptions, characterizing the size and shape of the artefact as well as its movements in the air. Boomerang descriptions are also illustrative of the inclination of journalists to resort to familiar words and analogies in trying to explain what they had witnessed. Due to the lack of exact words, aspects of the show were typically described by referring to artefacts and other things familiar to Finns. Thus, a boomerang was said to move through the air like an arrow or bird,

[56] Poignant 2004, 121, 156, 171. See also "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, June 30, 1886. The three indigenous Australians are known to have learnt some words of English, French, and German during the years of travel. Poignant 2004, 7, 95, 125–126, 142–143, 151, 156, 184. See also "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen*, June 30, 1886.

[57] "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen,* June 30, 1886.

[58] "Tre australier eller kannibaler," *Hufvudstandsbladet,* June 27, 1886; "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886.

[59] Poignant 2004, 29–30, see also 123.

[60] See the chapter by Raita Merivirta in this anthology.

[61] Donations received by the ethnographic collection at the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki included some objects of Oceanian origin already in the mid-nineteenth century, but the first boomerangs were received only in the early 1910s, as part of a collection purchased from the Ethnographic Museum of Leipzig. Koivunen 2015, 52, 222.

and its shape was compared to that of the sickle blade.[62] The *Ilmarinen* newspaper called it "boomerang-sickle".[63] Another tool on display at the exhibition was said to resemble the hammer of Tor,[64] the god associated with thunder in old Norse mythology and often depicted with a sledgehammer – an object familiar to every Finn.

Journalists also resorted to analogies in their attempts to describe the performers' appearance. Their hair was described as "woolly" or "bush-like"; their skin was characterized as "dark olive", and was said to feel as soft as velvet – a comment revealing that the journalist had probably touched one of the performers.[65] An interesting new word was also introduced in translating promotional materials from Swedish into Finnish: in one of the advertisements the latter part of the word "Queensland" was translated into Finnish to produce a new combination: the calque form "Queenmaa".[66] Even if "Queenmaa" included a familiar element, it probably made as little sense as the original word: most visitors could undoubtedly not situate Queensland on the map of Australia, and none of the journalists took the trouble to explain its location in their articles. Unlike the new Finnish word for boomerang, "Queenmaa" did not became a permanent part of Finnish lexicon. As Päivi Laine has shown in her research, the Finnish geographical lexicon was actively developed during the nineteenth century as part of more general attempts to create a versatile and sophisticated literary language. In the process, new words were created mainly through translation, but most of the new variants disappeared soon after they were first introduced.[67]

The Finnish examples also demonstrate how standard exhibition components were adopted as such, even if they did not make much sense in this particular context. An article published in *Hufvudstadsbladet*, for example, mentions that the individuals on display belonged to an "ugly negro type".[68] This brief reference was connected to the French anthropologist Paul Topinard's recent report, *Présentation de trois Australiens vivants* (1885), based on his examination of the group in Paris in November 1885. In his treatise, Topinard had reaffirmed a contemporary assumption of the connection between the alleged stage of development and outward appearance, arguing that the indigenous population of Australia was composed of two different racial types: one tall and handsome, the other small and ugly.[69] He placed the individuals in Cunningham's group in the latter category. A brief extract from Topinard's report was inserted in the group's promotional material and copied from there by journalists. In Finland, the idea of "ugliness" was repeated without reference to Topinard or his report. The ugliness of the people on display was thus presented as a self-evident fact, rather than as one recent anthropological hypothesis.

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[62] "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, June 30, 1886; "Kannibalerna," *Finland,* June 30, 1886; "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen,* June 30, 1886; "Bumerangkastning," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, July 1, 1886; W-r -m., "Sommarkåseri," *Fredrikshamns Tidning,* August 18, 1886.
[63] "Ihmissyöjiä," *Ilmarinen*, July 6, 1886.
[64] "Kannibaler i Helsingfors," *Nya Pressen,* June 30, 1886.
[65] "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886; "St. Annan," *Wiipurin Sanomat,* July 9, 1886.
[66] "Hesperia," *Uusi Suometar,* June 30 and July 1, 1886.
[67] Laine 2007.
[68] "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30 1886.
[69] Anderson 2008, 233, 240–243. Also see Snoep 2011, 114, 120.

The Aboriginal performers were commonly referred to using words adopted from the promotional materials, such as “savages”, “cannibals”, “primitives”, or “wild people”. At the time of the exhibition, the Finns were struggling with the question of their own racial identity; many nineteenth-century racial theorists had suggested that rather than being racially European or Caucasian, Finns actually belonged to the Mongolian or Asiatic racial stock.[70] Pekka Isaksson and Jouko Jokisalo have suggested that these claims restricted the general adoption of racial thinking in Finland: the association with Mongols locked Finns up in a “glass case”, from which it was deemed unwise to suggest strong racial assessments of other populations.[71] However, it is also evident that the assumed link with East Asia encouraged Finns to defend and emphasize their European identity. Thus, the use of relatively harsh language in the context of the visit of the Australian aboriginals can be seen as part of more general Finnish efforts to be associated with western Europeans and the civilized world in general. This also meant distancing themselves from populations regarded as primitive and racially inferior.

Amalgamating the Foreign and the Familiar

It is known that when visiting Berlin in the summer of 1884, the male performers carved new boomerangs out of birch. As boomerangs were a central attraction, presented on a daily basis, it is obvious that the ones brought from Australia had long ago split or broken into pieces. New objects were constantly needed and produced for performances, and, as Poignant suggests, for sale to exhibition visitors as exotic souvenirs.[72] These local reproductions of boomerangs combined traditional craftsmanship, design, and decoration with whatever kind of wood was available in a given locale.

In a similar vein, the entire idea of the exhibition was constantly influenced by various local elements, which affected its contextualization and interpretation. The Finnish sources are illustrative, demonstrating how certain details of an international exhibition could become especially interesting and important simply because they included elements that happened or seemed to be familiar and recognizable from the local point of view. One day in Helsinki, for example, the older male of the troupe, Billy, happened to slap an exhibition visitor who had touched his hair. This unexpected event was reported in the press. Rather than describing the aggression as evidence of savagery, one local newspaper associated it with a recent event in the town of Vaasa on the west coast, where a certain army captain had hit a man in his regiment. The journalist also referred to another captain, who had accidently shot a man, and whose skills in handling weaponry were therefore described as inferior to those of the “cannibals”.[73] The article thus ridiculed the idea of savage violence associated with the display, suggesting that equal – and worse – examples could easily be found at home. Visitors in other venues also wished to touch the Aboriginals, with the same consequences. It is known that earlier, in

[70] Kemiläinen 1998, chapter IV; Isaksson & Jokisalo 1998, 151–156.
[71] Isaksson & Jokisalo 1998, 156.
[72] Poignant 2004, 135–138. For objects brought from Australia, see page 29.
[73] ”Helsingistä,” *Matti Meikäläinen,* July 10, 1886 (no 14), 3. For a description of events in Vaasa, see “Vaasasta,” *Uusi Suometar,* June 27, 1886. See also “På Hesperia,” *Nya Pressen,* July 5, 1886; “På gatan,” *Spets*, July 10, 1886 (no 8).

Copenhagen, Billy had hit a Danish visitor who had pulled at his nose-bone ornament.[74] After years of touring, the Aboriginals had became increasingly aware of their status as professional performers; rather than simply accepting intrusive behaviour on the part of the audience, they protected their physical integrity.

Cultural knowledge formed an obvious background against which information about the exhibition was reflected. Finnish journalists were less well equipped to criticize the staged authenticity of ethnographic exhibitions than their colleagues in countries where such displays were more commonplace, and where discussion of their authenticity had been going on already for years.[75] The assumed cannibalism of the Aboriginals, for instance, which Cunningham highlighted in all his promotional material to attract potential visitors, was met with suspicion all over North America and Europe. The increasing critique eventually made him shift the emphasis away from cannibalism and instead turn attention to the "Anthropological Wonders of the World", as the exhibition was advertised in London in April 1887.[76] When visiting Finland in the previous summer, the exhibition still focused heavily on the idea of cannibalism; this, however, did not evoke much attention or debate among local journalists. Most of them did not deal with the question of cannibalism at all, while some implied they did not believe it by joking about the topic.[77] Although Finnish journalists were not knowledgeable about the earlier wide-ranging discussion of cannibalism, or of the authenticity of the exhibition in general, they also commented critically on the basis of their own observations. A journalist in Vyborg, for example, wrote that he did not see the Australians as hardy and persevering, as asserted by the impresario, but on the contrary regarded them as small in stature and of weak physique.[78] Cultural expectations, combined with sensationalist advertising, also confused other observers: the Australians' singing was reported not to sound like singing at all, and the female member of the group was said to be less beautiful than she had been described.[79]

One highly critical observation was published in Helsinki under the pseudonym "Nabo", a neighbour, after the troupe had already left the town. The writer felt sorry for the performers: they were "poor cannibals", "ripped from the forests of their home country." Nabo argued that this form of entertainment was morally dubious, and that Finns should keep their distance from such dangerous and empty amusement.[80] The writer clearly found the concept of the exhibition, and its embedded values, indefensible as such, but he or she also emphasized its foreignness and inappropriateness in the Finnish cultural context. The exhibition was associated with a world and worldviews that were regarded as alien and inadvisable for the Finns, who therefore should not partake in such imported entertainment.

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[74] Poignant 2004, 174, 180.
[75] See, e.g., Qureshi 2011*,* 166, 169.
[76] Poignant 2004, 139, 143, 151, 175, 185.
[77] "På Hesperia," *Nya Presen,* July 5, 1886; W-r -m., "Sommarkåseri från hufvudstaden," *Fredrikshamns Tidning,* August 18, 1886.
[78] "I S:t Annæ park," *Östra Finland,* July 7, 1886. See also W-r -m., "Sommarkåseri från hufvudstaden," *Fredrikshamns Tidning,* August 18, 1886.
[79] W-r -m., "Sommarkåseri från hufvudstaden," *Fredrikshamns Tidning,* August 18, 1886. See also "Kannibalerna," *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 30, 1886.
[80] Nabo, "Våra sommernöjen," *Finland* July 7, 1886. Cf. "Kirje Helsingistä," *Oulun lehti,* September 14, 1887.

Peculiar amalgamations of the foreign and the familiar emerged when the concept of the exhibition came in contact with concrete physical features and other aspects of local venues. For instance, the boomerang-throwing performance, repeatedly referred to as the most authentic part of the show, was constantly adapted to changing spatial conditions. It is known that boomerangs were thrown on baseball fields in North America, in the park adjacent to the Crystal Palace in London, and around the Nelson Column in Glasgow and factory chimneys in German industrial towns.[81] In Finland, the natural environment played a role in the arrangements. Densely growing large trees in Hesperia Park prevented the boomerang performance, forcing it to move to an open lawn. This park environment was far from authentic, but many spectators were impressed by the scene. One journalist poetically described the fascination of observing a picturesquely dressed "little cannibal", absorbed in his favourite occupation on a green lawn in the afternoon sun.[82] In Vyborg, a different natural condition, namely a strong wind, affected the boomerang show by preventing it altogether.[83]

Another local peculiarity in Finland had to do with music. Exhibition advertisements reveal that the Helsinki and Vyborg shows actually consisted of two elements: In addition to the performance of the Australian troupe, a military band played music for the audience. In Helsinki it was the orchestra of the local Uudenmaa Battalion, while in Vyborg the band had arrived from as far away as the Yenisei region in Central Russia.[84] Military orchestras were a common sight in Finland at various public events and entertainments. Neither advertisements nor exhibition reports show how exactly the military music was combined with the display of the indigenous Australians. One Vyborg-based newspaper commented on the simultaneous presence of these different entertainments, saying that since the orchestra of the Yenisei regiment was present at the event, visitors should feel safe in meeting the “cannibals”.[85]

Conclusion

While Cunningham’s troupe was being examined by the anthropologist Topinard in Paris in 1885, one of the performers, Billy, begin reciting the places he and his companions had visited since their removal from Queensland.[86] This was a global extension of the traditional aboriginal practice of conceptualizing and remembering past time and places. Undoubtedly, the two small northern European towns called Helsinki and Vyborg also came to be included in Billy’s ever-growing list. Global mobility was fundamental to the success of ethnographic show business. It also carried groups of colonized people to somewhat unexpected corners of the world, outside the borders of the main colonizing countries and the primary sphere of colonialism. By repeating standard performances that had developed hand in hand with the advance of colonialism, live ethnographic exhibitions played a major role in familiarizing wide populations in Europe and elsewhere with the western colonial mindset. This chapter, however, has demonstrated that the highly standardized exhibition concept did not ensure uniformity of either

[81] Poignant 2004, 104, 122–123, 149, 169.
[82] ”Bumerankastning,” *Hufvudstadsbladet,* July 1, 1886.
[83] “I S:t Annæ park,” *Östra Finland,* July 7, 1886; “P. Annan,” *Wiipurin Sanomat,* July 9, 1886.
[84] E.g., “Hesperia,” *Hufvudstadsbladet,* June 29, 1886; ”Restaurant S:t Annæ,” *Wiborgsbladet,* July 4, 1886.
[85] “I S:t Annæ,” *Östra Finland,* July 6, 1886. See also “Å Hesperia,” *Huvudstadsbladet,* July 3, 1886.
[86] Poignant 2004, 164.

performance or reception. The Finnish example shows that the local response could consist of a relatively strange mixture of elements, and one which from the organizers' point of view was quite unpredictable.

Roslyn Poignant presents an interesting argument on the differences in the way the exhibition of the Australian troupe was described in metropolitan cities, as compared to more peripheral and provincial regions. She suggests that journalists in imperial centres writing about the group were inclined to emphasize the sensational and employed racist language, along with stereotypes strongly associated with colonialism; the descriptions produced in the provinces, in contrast, were more moderate, perceptive, and critical.[87] The Finnish material discussed here does not offer support for Poignant's argument. Rather, it seems that since previous knowledge of Australia and its indigenous populations was sparse and fragmentary, Finnish journalists found the promotional material provided helpful and made use of it in a more or less straightforward and uncritical manner. Thus the scarcity of previous information, firsthand experience, or contrasting opinions could also lead to a situation where the racist, stereotyped, and sensationalistic promotional material provided was copied and recycled without much hesitation or alteration.

Yet, it is equally significant that the narratives that emerged to describe the exhibition could also become highly individual in their emphasis and interpretation. Finnish journalists applied their creativity and their interpretive and descriptive skills in making an unprecedented exhibition concept, and the foreigners showcased in it, intelligible to the local audience. They employed analogies and familiar concepts, translated and invented words, and made connections to events and phenomena that happened to be topical and meaningful from the local point of view. Descriptions of the exhibition were intertwined with discussion of the status of Finns in terms of racial categories, culture, and nationhood. Thus the brief visit by the Aboriginals became a means to express membership in a western, allegedly superior civilization, with its rationality, its practices of overcoming and mastering other human populations, and its privilege of being entertained by those very populations.

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[87] Poignant 2004, 119, 143, 174.

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