

ABSTRACT

FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGIZED NATIVE TO THE EXHIBITED 'SAVAGE': ETHNOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS AT THE VICTORIAN SPECTACLE DURING THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The nineteenth century was an important period when the British Empire pursued a strong imperial policy by expanding its boundaries both in political and economic ways. A significant source of the British colonialism was the cultural and more importantly 'scientific' penetration in the colonized lands, which helped Britain to carry its colonial power onto a more legitimate ground. One of the most important results of this penetration was the development of the anthropology a discipline that carried the colonialism to a 'scientific' level and it also continued to practice its methods and approaches by using the advantages provided by colonialism. In return, anthropology legitimized imperial power through scientific methods. The human ethnographic exhibitions and shows that are at the center of this thesis are located in between this mutual interaction, as they were aimed to remind the imperial and colonial power to the European public by displaying African men, women and children.

This thesis aims to survey the use of anthropology as a political tool by the British Empire during the production of colonial discourse as well as the history, content and public presentation of ethnographic exhibits. The main focus of this thesis is on the causes and effects of the constructed narratives within these displays, which were based upon the intertwined relationship between anthropology and the colonial discourse during the first half of the nineteenth century. The first chapter conducts an analysis of the transformation of the native as a result of the unequal encounters between the anthropologist and the native encounter. Since the ethnographic body or the body of the African black native, was viewed as 'savage', the second chapter aims to problematize how this transformation was being legitimized and how it became visible on the display stage. In the third chapter, the close relationship between the ethnographic body and the 'freak body' or between the ethnographic exhibitions and the 'freak shows' during the mid nineteenth century is surveyed based on historical materials such as posters, pictures and newspapers.