

'HUMAN ZOOS' WERE VECTORS FOR RACISM, BELGIAN EXHIBITION SHOWS



Photo shows a craniograph and skull measurement at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions' in Tervuren. —AFP photos



Photo shows an ivory bust at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions' in Tervuren.



Photo shows plaster casts from 'Live Congolese' by the artist Arsene Matton in 1911 at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions', in Tervuren.

In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, recreated African villages were set up across Europe as amusement parks that served to extol the supposed cultural superiority of colonizing empires. They were also powerful vectors for racist stereotyping, as a Belgian museum show under way illustrates.

"Human Zoo: The age of colonial exhibitions" at the Africa Museum outside Brussels until March next year has resonance, because its buildings are on the site where Belgium's King Leopold II in 1897 reconstructed three "Congolese villages" on royal grounds. At the time, the Belgian Congo - today the Democratic Republic of Congo - was Leopold's private property and 267 men and women were taken from it by force to be put on show in Brussels' World Fair, made to sit in front of the dwellings. Seven of them died, from cold or sickness.

That episode features in the museum's exhibition, which displays 500 items and documents showing what indigenous peoples suffered under various colonial powers. The old ethnographic displays were designed to "show the other as primitive" and to "manufacture the 'savage'" to "reinforce the superiority of whites," the organizers explained. Measurements of skulls - craniome-

try - were used to support theories of "inferior races". The curators of the show estimate that the "industry" of putting human beings on display lured in around 1.5 billion people

them owed part of their existence to "freak shows" where individuals with physical abnormalities - gigantism, dwarfism, or women with beards among others - were pre-

vious public the impression of visiting real African villages. While Germany and France had already hosted their own "villages", Belgium got its first in 1885, near Antwerp, with 12 Africans.

Twelve years later their number grew 20 times bigger, and the colonial section of the World Fair in Brussels' satellite town of Tervuren attracted a million visitors. Over and over again, "the same message was repeated thousands of times, and the public ended up truly thinking that the African was a cannibal, inferior, dirty, lazy," one of the curators, Maarten Coutenier, told AFP. "And these stereotypes still exist today - proof that the colonial propaganda worked."

In the final part of the exhibition, the issue of how this racist denigration persists in everyday language challenges visitors with clichéd phrases written in big letters on a white wall. "I love black people!" - "Oh, you did better than I expected" - "The apartment's already rented". For Salome Ysebaert, who conceptualised the museum's exhibition, such comments appear inoffensive and banal, but in reality are "microaggressions" revealing that racism is still lurking in minds, more than 60 years after the last "human zoo" in Brussels closed, in 1958. —AFP



Photo shows plaster casts from 'Live Congolese' by the artist Arsene Matton in 1911 at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) during the temporary exhibition 'Human Zoo The age of colonial exhibitions.'

between the 16th century and 1960 to gawk.

'Freak show' roots
The reconstructed villages and the human "specimens" displayed in

sent as spectacle by circus owner PT Barnum among others. In Europe, the "human zoos" reached their peak popularity from the 1880s after new colonial conquests. Imported exotic decors gave a curi-

Boys not girls more prone to physical, psychological abuse in sport: Study

Three-quarters of children have faced abuse in sport and boys are more likely to be victims than girls, a study of more than 10,000 individuals in six European countries released yesterday shows. The most common form of abuse suffered by children taking part in sport outside of school was psychological, ranging from a lack of praise to humiliating treatment, the European Union-funded study shows.

Nearly two-thirds of those polled for the Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics (CASES) study said they had suffered psychological abuse while 44 percent had experienced physical violence. The report's lead author, Professor Mike Hartill of Edge Hill University in England, said the findings show those who govern sport in Europe have done "too little" to safeguard children in sport and must do "far more than producing policy".

"Our findings are obviously of great concern. We have seen a number of high-profile cases of child abuse in sport in recent times, but this research helps us to understand the scale of the problem more clearly," Hartill said. The study, led by Edge Hill University and the University of Wuppertal in Germany, questioned individuals aged between 18 and 30 who had taken part in sport when they were under 18.

The highest incidence of abuse was among children who had competed internationally - 84 percent at that level had experienced some form of abuse. Hartill, a specialist in the sociology of sport, said the absence of praise or encouragement was often cited as a form of abuse. "Withholding praise from children can be damaging. You can imagine that it could go from a mild occurrence to it being used as grooming for more serious abuse," he said, speaking at a symposium to launch the study at the headquarters of World Athletics in Monaco.

Total of 10,302 individuals were questioned in Austria, the Wallonia region of Belgium, Germany, Romania, Spain and Britain. They were asked to complete an online questionnaire distributed by polling company Ipsos MORI, with interesting answers triggering further questions from researchers. The highest prevalence of abuse was in Belgium at 80 percent while the lowest was in Austria (70 percent). Across all countries, with the exception of Austria, boys were significantly more likely to experience violence.

'Too little done'

Co-author Professor Bettina Rulofs said one finding in particular had surprised the researchers: "It is remarkable to have more males in the category of contact sexual violence than girls." The authors said the report showed that many sports bodies had failed to widen their policies beyond safeguards against sexual violence to take in psychological issues.

Hartill said: "Unfortunately, these findings indicate a sector that has done too little to address deep-rooted issues within sports. "Those that govern sport in Europe must do far more than producing policy. The problem is ultimately rooted within the nature of the relationships between adults and children within sport." However, the report did find that the incidence of abuse in sport was lower than in wider society and it also noted that 85 percent of adults reported having a positive experience through sport as children. —AFP

Party like it's 1919? Rio hopes for Carnival comeback



Viradouro's Samba Queen Erika Januza dances on a dais during Viradouro samba school's rehearsal, in view of the upcoming 2022 carnival, in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro state. —AFP



Musicians perform during Viradouro samba school's rehearsal, in view of the upcoming 2022 carnival, in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil. —AFP

The sequins are swirling, the bass drums are booming: after being canceled by COVID-19, carnival is back - at least at Rio de Janeiro's samba schools, which hope to put on the party of the century in three months' time. The iconic Brazilian beach city's elite samba schools have started holding rehearsals again, hoping authorities will let carnival festivities go ahead from February 25 to March 1.

The schools want 2022's comeback carnival to be the biggest since 1919, the year Rio residents joyfully reembraced life after the devastation of another pandemic, the Spanish flu. That carnival has gone down in history as one of the all-time legendary parties. Now, the situation looks similar. After canceling carnival this year because of COVID-19, authorities say a recent plunge in cases could make next year's edition possible.

The reigning champions of Rio's carnival parade competition, the Viradouro samba school, even chose the 1919 carnival as the theme of their comeback parade. At a recent rehearsal, school members hugged joyfully on the dance floor and belted out the music, mostly without face masks. As the school's "drum-corps queen" shimmied in a gold-fringed miniskirt, the veteran head of the drummers, Moacyr da Silva Pinto, led some 50 percussionists through a booming rehearsal, a loud whistle around his neck.

"We're going to have the greatest carnival since 1919," said Pinto, a spry 65-year-old. "In Rio de Janeiro, samba is enmeshed in our lives, just like football and the beach." Attendance at the rehearsal was restricted because of COVID-19. But that did not dampen the mood. "This is a cry of freedom, of coming home," said 35-year-old Leonina Gabriel. "It's infinite happiness: we can take off our masks, we're vaccinated."

Lingering uncertainty

Authorities, however, are more cautious. They say holding carnival will depend on the pandemic outlook. The event is a potential epidemiologist's nightmare: more than two million tourists usually descend on Rio for the festivities, partying at close quarters.

The virus has claimed more than 600,000 lives in Brazil - second only to the United States. But the devastation has receded in recent months. With more than 60 percent of Brazil's 213 million people now fully vaccinat-



Musicians and singers perform during Viradouro samba school's rehearsal, in view of the upcoming 2022 carnival, in Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro state. —AFP

ed, the average daily COVID-19 death toll has fallen from more than 3,000 in April to around 200. Confident, samba schools have kicked the carnival machine into high gear, churning out thousands of glittering costumes and fleets of floats.

At "Samba City," the huge port-district yard where each school has a hangar to prepare, carpenters,

welders and costume designers are working full-steam. "Rio's carnival is a giant industry that supports many families," said Marcus Ferreira, a creative director at Viradouro. One of those families is Simone dos Santos's. Dos Santos, 46, Viradouro's head seamstress, said she had to find whatever work she could to scrape by when the carnival economy ground to a halt. "The pandemic was very hard for all of us," she said.

Bolsonaro against

In Rio, where more than 95 percent of adults are vaccinated, authorities recently lifted the requirement to wear masks outdoors. But experts urge caution, given the risk of a new wave of COVID-19. Countries such as Austria and Germany have vaccinated a higher percentage of their populations than Brazil, but are currently reeling from the virus, leading public health institute Fiocruz warned recently. "It worries me to see Brazil talking about resuming carnival. Those conditions are extremely likely to increase transmission" of the virus, World Health Organization official Mariangela Simao said this week.

President Jair Bolsonaro said Thursday he was against a resumption, a rare nod to social distancing measures from the far-right leader. "As far as I'm concerned, we shouldn't have carnival," he said. Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes, a self-declared carnival lover, said the event would go ahead "if conditions allow." That appeared to walk back earlier statements in which he vowed a restriction-free carnival, joking: "I'd be the first one to break the rules." An early test of the health situation will come in January, when Rio hosts its annual New Year's celebrations on Copacabana beach, a party that usually draws three million people - also canceled last time because of COVID-19. —AFP