

Book Note

***Paris Savages* (Katherine Johnson), *Cast Among Strangers* (ABC documentary by Daniel Browning), a recent auction in Paris and a new publication of *L'Exposition coloniale de 1931, Paris* (Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre).**

Author Katherine Johnson writes that *'Paris Savages* was inspired by news of the discovery of the full-body plaster cast of a young Aboriginal man in a museum basement storage area in Lyon, France. The man was Bonangera (Boni/Bonny), who had journeyed to Europe in 1882–83 with a German engineer by the name of Louis Müller. Bonny travelled with two fellow Badjiala people, Dorondera (Borondera) and Jurano (Jurono). There in Germany, France and Switzerland they were exhibited as ethnographic exhibits—they danced and sang, the men threw boomerangs and climbed trees, only vaguely reminiscent of the giant satinays that grow on Fraser Island, K'argi, where the group were from'.

In 2012 Katherine Johnson travelled to Lyon and saw the cast of Bonny. 'In many ways, it was like travelling back in time, to the heights of colonisation and massacres in Queensland. What had brought this man to Europe? What was it like there for him? What did the human exhibitions, which some refer to as "human zoos", say about the European people looking on, and the scientists who studied the visitors to Europe?' These questions led to a Creative Writing PhD from which grew the novel, *Paris Savages*.

The author also travelled to Germany and France and followed in the footsteps of the Badtjala trio, visiting places such as Hagenbeck's old Thierpark/Tierpark in Hamburg, the Berlin Panoptikum and waxworks site, and the Dresden Zoo. She saw other casts of Bonny and Dorondera in Dresden. She also visited the primary site of human exhibitions in France, the Jardin d'Acclimatation, where it is likely the trio were shown, given Hagenbeck's connections with the Jardin's director, St Hilaire. It is not certain that members of the group went to Paris, but Bonny was certainly in Lyon, and Johnson wanted the novel to touch on the key sites of 'human zoos' in Europe, for this was a form of mass entertainment in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, an exhibition in Paris in 2012 stated that 35,000 Indigenous peoples from around the world were seen by a billion spectators

in Europe and America from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. ‘Human zoos’ had lasting impacts on views of race, and many of the enduring stereotypes still need contesting.

Katherine Johnson travelled to Hervey Bay and met with Dr Fiona Foley, a Badtjala artist and academic, to fact check some of the material in the book and subsequently she agreed to read a draft. Johnson also contacted Badtjala elder Glen Miller, who gave permission to quote from *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*, a book Dr Foley had recommended. She also contacted the Korrawinga Aboriginal Corporation to check the Badtjala language used in the book, as she felt it was important to employ and recognise this language where appropriate.

For more on the story of Bonny, Dorondera and Jurano, see ‘Cast Among Strangers’, the ABC AWAYE! documentary that inspired the book. Producer Daniel Browning did extensive research including a visit to the Musée des Confluences in Lyon—the programme’s web-page contains some extraordinary photographs of Bonny’s cast and other images relating to ‘human zoos’.

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/cast-among-strangers/3889520>.



The Colonial Exhibition, Paris, 1931. On the left is the French Somali Coast pavilion. Jean (Marie) Ribéry/Creative Commons

In June 2021 the Gérard Lévy gallery (Paris) offered in their auction sale catalogue a large collection of artefacts under the heading 'zoos humains/villages noirs'. The 3,100 artefacts acquired by collector Gérard Lévy included memorabilia (brochures, photographs, postcards) from colonial expositions of touring shows of non-European people. As described in *Paris Savages* and *Cast Among Strangers*, these people were deceived into leaving their countries, badly treated and poorly paid. A number of Australian historians, including members of the George Rudé Society, sent a letter expressing their concern and calling for the withdrawal of these materials from sale and 'for progressive alternatives to be explored'.

Nevertheless, the sale went ahead and the collection, lot 367, was sold for 58,500 €, according to the following Drouot website:

<https://www.millon.com/lot/115485/15217305?refurl=Depuis+la+venue+de+la+V%C3%A9nus+Hottentote+en+Europe+au+d%C3%A9but+du+XIXe+si%C3%A8cle%2C+une+fascination+scientific> .

French academic Catherine Hodeir, author, with Michel Pierre, of *L'exposition coloniale de 1931* (2011, 2021), has written extensively on the exhibition of Indigenous peoples from the French empire. *L'exposition coloniale de 1931* was republished in April 2021 with additional comments and is highly recommended for readers wishing to know more about this subject.

Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre, *L'Exposition coloniale de 1931, Paris*, Archipoche (Archidoc series), April 2021, 280 pp., rrp 10,00 €, ISBN 978-2-37735-948-6.

Available in pocket-book, paperback and e-book formats.

