

# Live Cargo, Dead Ends: The German Wildlife Trade in Global Perspective

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In 1960, Hermann Ruhe, former director of the German animal trade company Ruhe, looked back on more than a century of his company's history and was very pleased with its accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> What had started as a small-scale trade in canary birds developed into one of the world's largest wildlife traders<sup>2</sup> in the first half of the twentieth century. The main business model of L. Ruhe KG or Louis Ruhe Inc. was to capture animals in various regions and ship them safely mainly to Europe

<sup>1</sup> In his memoirs published in 1960, Ruhe details the company's development, consistently praising his grandfather and father as well as himself. He reflects on their work with pride, see Hermann Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus* (Munich, 1960), 16.

<sup>2</sup> The dichotomy of "humans" and "animals" has been rightfully criticized in Human-Animal Studies (see Chimaira-Arbeitskreis, "Eine Einführung in Gesellschaftliche Tier-Mensch-Verhältnisse und Human-Animal Studies," in *Human-Animal Studies: Über die Gesellschaftliche*

*Natur von Mensch-Tier-Verhältnissen*, ed. Chimaira-Arbeitskreis (Bielefeld, 2011), 7-42). For simplicity, I will use "humans" and "animals" in this text, though "non-human animals" would be more correct. Additionally, I am using the term "wild" to describe the animals Ruhe traded, though the term – just as much as

"undomesticated" – is blurry. Ruhe did not only deal in "wild" or "undomesticated" animals, he also traded in domesticated animals such as camels or cattle, or those who are considered neither wild nor domesticated, such as elephants. I refrain from using the term "exotic," mainly for its othering quality, but also because

Ruhe dealt with animals that were not perceived as "exotic" either. I chose to use mostly the term "wild" since the main idea the company traded on was that of animals that were closer to nature than domesticated ones and that could be tamed and integrated into cultivated places.

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**3** Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 306. For more on the logistics behind the transport, see Smithsonian Institution Archives (hereafter: SIA): RU 326, Box 80, "OAM: Dorcas Gazelle, June 1960." Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German sources are the author's.

**4** The Alfeld animal trade was a local memory space ("Erinnerungsraum"), producing many personal accounts, see for example Hugo Busch, *Von Tafelmachern und Vogelhändlern: Heimat und Elternhaus* (Alfeld, 1993); Stadtarchiv Alfeld (hereafter: STA): Alfred Glenwinkel, *Zoodirektor Alfred Glenwinkel erzählt* (unpublished manuscript); or the series "Reisen und Abenteuer mit Tieren" in *Alfelder Zeitung*, starting May 14, 1937 and running infrequently until August 3, 1937. These reminiscences persist until today, see also "Die Geschichte der Tierhandlung Ruhe," *alt-alfeld*, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.alt-alfeld.de/gewerbebetriebe/s-z/tierhandlung-ruhe>.

**5** In many accounts they are actually emphasized, see (besides Ruhe's account) Julius Eduard Müller, "Reisen und Abenteuer mit Tieren," *Alfelder Zeitung*, July 13, 1927.

or North America in order to sell them to interested buyers such as zoological gardens and circuses. Ludwig Ruhe had established the enterprise in the small town of Alfeld in Northern Germany in the 1840s and passed it down to his sons and grandsons. Hermann Ruhe described the business as a story of continuous success that was achieved – and maintained even through times of hardship – through hard work and expertise. The crowning accolade, according to him, was the appointment by the Eisenhower administration to organize the transport of two gazelles that the U.S.-American president had received from the Tunisian government. Only a company that commanded "experienced staff, global relations, and collection as well as quarantine stations" could execute such a task.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, in his memoirs, accounts of his employees, and stories passed on to this day by citizens of Alfeld, Ruhe's development reads like the prime example of a successful enterprise.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that episodes of struggle and setbacks are glossed over. Rather, they become an aspect of momentary chaos that is eventually controlled thanks to the stamina and skillfulness of the people involved in the trade.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, Ruhe's success is the epitome of a supposedly connected world that is so tightly webbed that even untamed, wild animals can be transported between far-flung places. In that respect, the Ruhe company serves as a prime object to investigate through the lens of new imperial history, for it combines two core concepts on which historiography has focused in recent years: mobility and networks.<sup>6</sup> It also seem-

**6** For works that trace the nature of networks and their interplay with empires, see for example Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001); Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation:*

*Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2010); Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne, eds., *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana, 2009) and for a more-than-human approach:

James Beattie, Edward Melillo and Emily O'Gorman, "Rethinking the British Empire through Eco-Cultural Networks: Materialist-Cultural Environmental History, Relational Connections and Agency," *Environment and History* 20, no. 4 (2014): 561-575.

ingly portrays a case of connectivity that allowed for the trade to unfold. Taking the skepticism of this special issue towards these narratives of connectivity as a point of departure, I want to ask what other stories can be extracted from the activities surrounding the wildlife trade.

Approaching the history of Ruhe through key moments of rupture, I will zoom in on its business activities in the 1920s. I have chosen this period because it marks the height of the company's success. Having outposts in various locations around the globe, it was considered the biggest wildlife trader worldwide. Interestingly, this happened at a time when the German Empire had lost political control over its former colonies. Thus Ruhe is another example for a businesses' or individual's independence from political power, being able to draw on trans-imperial networks rather than national affiliation.<sup>7</sup> A closer look, however, reveals various uncertainties and disruptions that the company had to react to. Rough terrain had to be navigated, complicated bureaucratic paperwork administered, and the vulnerability of the animals to disease and death considered. After capture, one of the immediate problems was transport. Moving vastly different kinds of animals over a great distance by a variety of means, be it their own feet, trains, trucks or ships, offered all kinds of pitfalls. First, I will look at these challenges of movement. Since humans and animals had to make use of or cross spaces - some of which were only created in the context of the trade, such as specially designed ship decks or quarantine stations at seaports<sup>8</sup> - I will then examine what obstacles arose from the animals' crossing natural landscapes, national borders, or between companies. Lastly, I will argue that the biggest rupture was caused by the animals themselves. Their physical existence and needs posed the greatest challenges, affecting their movement as well as the overseas passage. It could potentially disrupt the entire flow. Excavating the fissures of the trade during a time when the company arguably was most successful will reveal the limits of its control and illustrate that the purported flow was not as steady as it may retrospectively seem.

<sup>7</sup> For the importance of trans-imperial networks, see Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk, eds., *Postkoloniale Schweiz: Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Bielefeld, 2013); Ulrike Kirchberger, "Between Transimperial Networking and National Antagonism: German Scientists in the British Empire during the Long Nineteenth Century," in *Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, ed. Andrew Gross (Abingdon, 2021), 138-147.

<sup>8</sup> I understand space as a relational, not only geographical category, with discursive as well as material characteristics. Humans and animals often shared spaces that were created through their relations, which is why both, the relational character of the space and of the interaction between the species, needs to be examined, see André Krebber and Mieke Roscher, "Spuren suchen, Zeichen lesen, Fährten finden," in *Den Fährten folgen: Methoden Interdisziplinärer Tierforschung*, ed. Forschungsschwerpunkt Tier-Mensch-Gesellschaft (Bielefeld, 2016), 11-28, 18-20.

**9** The Harz region east of Alfeld possessed a vibrant canary breeding scene. The birds were closely linked to mine workers and their families, who most likely took their feathered companions with them when they moved to the Kingdom of Hannover to work in glass kilns, see Busch, *Von Tafelmachern und Vogelhändlern*, 107; Karl August Tolle, *Lage der Berg- und Hüttenarbeiter im Oberharze* (Berlin, 1892), 65.

**10** Busch, *Von Tafelmachern und Vogelhändlern*, 101-105.

**11** For the mentioning of this trip, see Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 14; Busch, *Von Tafelmachern und Vogelhändlern*, 289. Ludwig Ruhe's brother-in-law, Hermann Müller, died in Peru.

**12** Passenger lists show that Ludwig Ruhe reached New Orleans on March 31, 1869 (I received this information by email on September 09, 2021 from Mary Lou Eichhorn, archivist at Historic New Orleans Collections). The branch he consecutively established existed as late as 1909, when he still had a shop at 117 Chartres Street in New Orleans ("Loss in Chameleons: New York's Rigid Law Cut Off Demand Here", *Times Picayune*, July 18, 1909).

## I. From Trading Birds to "Human Zoos"

At first glance, it is easy to understand why the Ruhe business is swathed in a narrative of growth, connectivity and control. Originating from a small provincial town in Lower Saxony, it established branches in the United States as well as the United Kingdom and maintained farms and outposts in continental Europe, in east, west and southern Africa, India and Indonesia, and existed for nearly one hundred and fifty years until 1993, when the last Ruhe heir had to file for bankruptcy. Ludwig Ruhe, the company founder, first bred and traded canary birds,<sup>9</sup> a business he came to through marriage. His father-in-law, a worker at the local glass kiln, had been trading canaries to the east as far as Saint Petersburg.<sup>10</sup> The market proved lucrative enough that the family decided to venture further. In the 1850s, Ruhe and his brother-in-law took their German-bred canary birds and traveled to South America in order to offer them on the local markets in Peru and Brazil, most likely to profit from the growing mining industry.<sup>11</sup> Canaries had predominantly been used in mines as an early-warning system to detect carbon monoxide and other toxic gases before they became popular as pets. On his return journey, Ruhe disembarked in New Orleans, deeming the port city on the Gulf of Mexico a well-positioned location from where to enter the bird trade in the United States.<sup>12</sup> He established his first North American office in the Louisiana seaport, as New Orleans was supposed to serve as the gateway to transport the canaries inland to the mining communities in Alabama and Mississippi. The actual hub, however, was located on the East Coast in New York City, where German bird traders dominated the growing import of canaries.<sup>13</sup> Ruhe followed suit and set up a second office in Manhattan while maintaining the one in New Orleans.

**13** Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 240. The most dominant bird dealers were the German

brothers Charles and Henry Reiche, who were well known to Ruhe. They, too, originated from Alfeld and started to market their

birds in the United States already in 1844, branching out to New York City and Boston, continuously growing their business.

Soon, Ruhe started to transport larger animals captured in the wild, although it is unclear when exactly he first dabbled in this trade. A chronicler of the municipal history of Alfeld reported that the idea was born out of the “unused” return trip. As the handlers who had accompanied the birds to the United States had to travel back “empty handed,” having them bring back animals on their return trip would make use of their time and the costs.<sup>14</sup> This theory disregards the fact that transporting this kind of cargo, especially larger animals, required particular logistical as well as financial efforts. Consequently, capturing and transporting wild animals demanded an investment several weeks before they could be “cashed in,” and it posed a considerable risk of losing money, since they often died on the way.<sup>15</sup> The wildlife trade was essentially a high-capital and high-risk undertaking that Ruhe could participate in thanks to his lucrative bird sales. Despite the risks, the trade promised gains that outweighed the inevitably occurring losses.<sup>16</sup> Ruhe had seen its profitability in his Alfeld rival Charles Reiche, another bird trader who had entered the wildlife trade. Reiche’s example rather than just an unused return route most likely motivated Ruhe to start trading in wild animals. The favored region for animal traders such as Reiche and Ruhe became Nubia, which encompassed parts of present-day Sudan and Egypt and offered zoological variety as well as existing local trading structures. The route had been established in the early 1860s by German animal trader Carl Hagenbeck and his Italian business partner and hunter Lorenzo Casanova.<sup>17</sup>

The German Empire became one of the hubs in the international wildlife trade, with Reiche, Hagenbeck, and Ruhe

**17** Lothar Dittrich and Annelore Rieke-Müller, *Löwe brüllt nebenan: Die Gründung Zoologischer Gärten im Deutschsprachigen*

*Raum 1833-1869* (Köln, 1998), 206. Reiche had been in Nubia as well, see STA: Fa. Reiche Verschiedenes, book-

let “Reiche’s Karawane aus Nubien.” Apparently the Ruhe family tied in with the trade in the region.

**14** Julius Eduard Müller, “Reisen und Abenteuer mit Tieren,” *Alfelder Zeitung*, May 19, 1927.

**15** Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, 2002), 55. Reports of animals arriving dead to the shores or dying in quarantine show the high numbers of loss on the way. As an example of the loss that was to expect, note the surprise shown by Frank Baker Jr. when reporting on the successful transport of an animal collection with only one animal lost (SIA: RU 74, Box 86, “Acquired Animals or Collected from Africa, December 1909”, Frank Baker Jr. to A.B. Duirs, December 21, 1909).

**16** The expansion of the wildlife trade makes a good case for applying Jonathan Saha’s approach to examine these activities through the lens of accumulation. Capital had to be invested in the hopes of increasing its value, while new spaces had to be continuously incorporated, and knowledge transferred, see Jonathan Saha, “On Accumulation and Empire,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 50, no. 3 (2022): 417-442, 420-21.

**18** A fourth wildlife trader, Julius Mohr, was also a well-known dealer at the turn of the century (Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter: BArch): R 1501/117765, Abschrift III B.1016, c. 1900).

**19** For the zoological gardens as major factor in the increase of the wildlife trade in Europe, see Dittrich and Rieke-Müller, *Löwe brüllt nebenan*, 207. For the American market, see Richard W. Flint, "American Showmen and European Dealers: Commerce in Wild Animals in Nineteenth-Century America," in *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. R.J. Hoage and William A. Deiss (Baltimore, 1996), 97-108. The rise of the wildlife trade coincided with an upsurge of animal products in general, see Julia Hauser, "Global History," in *Handbook of Historical Animal Studies*, ed. Mieke Roscher, André Krebber and Brett Mizelle (Berlin, 2021), 213-226, 219.

**20** Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 52-54.

**21** Their contribution is seldomly acknowledged. While Ruhe mentions a variety of Alfeld employ-

ees by name, he only mentions one non-European employee, the Indian Mahut Sukla (see Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 197). Nevertheless, their work becomes visible in pictures in the municipal archive in Alfeld. For these types of knowledge transfer in general, see Sujit Sivasundaram, "Trading Knowledge: The East India Company's Elephants in India and Britain," *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2005): 27-63.

as dominant players.<sup>18</sup> Although non-European wildlife had been brought to Europe before by trading companies such as the Dutch East India Company or by individual seamen, these animals had not been systematically captured in order to be traded. Zoological gardens, first in Europe and then in North America, as well as rising demand from their regular customers (such as circuses and private collectors) spurred the rise of Ruhe and other wildlife traders.<sup>19</sup> With increasing frequency, the trade professionalized. Animal catchers began to travel into the regions of origin not only to get their hands on the animals that were offered on the local markets, but also to mount their own animal capture expeditions. As Nigel Rothfels has shown, they first worked with local traders, later tasking them to capture certain specimens, and finally began accompanying these expeditions, trying to capture the desired animals themselves.<sup>20</sup> This practice still relied heavily on the knowledge and physical support provided by a variety of non-European actors, whose assistance continued to play a vital role during the entire existence of the Ruhe company.<sup>21</sup>

Starting in North-East Africa, Ruhe expanded to other regions, among them Australia and Southeast Asia. By all accounts, the company continuously grew into the twentieth century, until its business was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>22</sup> Although trade was reduced, it did not cease entirely. Having an established branch in the United States proved to be a decisive factor in maintaining business flows. Even though

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**22** So much so that they were able to buy the competing business of Charles Reiche in 1910, see Felixarchief Antwerpen (hereafter: FelixA): C 4.4.1, 1 # 2416, Letter of Charles Reiche to the zoological garden in Antwerp, June 21, 1910.

the company's assets in New York City were confiscated by the U.S. government, the business itself remained in the hands of Bernhard Ruhe, son of Ludwig Ruhe.<sup>23</sup> This allowed Hermann Ruhe in Germany to keep sending canaries to his brother, while wild animals would also arrive from Indonesia. Coincidentally, one of the Alfeld employees, an animal catcher called Karl Kreth, remained in Java during the war years, where he had been surprised by its outbreak. It allowed him to continue to collect animals that he would then send to New York City as late as 1917.<sup>24</sup> Due to the confiscation, the Alfeld and New York offices became officially separated, a factor that turned out to be an advantage after the end of the war. While the financial resources of German zoological gardens and circuses to acquire new animals were dwindling, the North American market recovered faster, filling the void for both Ruhe businesses. Already in early 1921, Ruhe shipped 2,700 wild animals in one cargo to the port of Long Island and more charges followed in quick succession the following years.<sup>25</sup>

The close ties with Louis Ruhe Inc. in the United States allowed the German company L. Ruhe KG to do business beyond the European market. Its comparatively fast recovery after the plunge during the First World War allowed the Ruhe family to surpass even their main adversary, Carl Hagenbeck, and to become the biggest wildlife trader in Germany – and by extension the world.<sup>26</sup> In effect, the interwar years were the heyday of the company. It grew in reach as well as trade volume. Besides the growth in the wildlife trade, the trade in canaries remained an important business and con-

other traders such as Hagenbeck did, see Wildlife Conservation Society Libraries & Archives, Collection 1012, Box 33, Letter of William Hornaday to Lorenz and Heinrich Hagenbeck, July 3, 1919.

**26** Their world market leader position is mainly purported by advertisements of the business itself, but also supported by testimonies of contemporaries. While it is hard to check the figures, Ruhe definitely was

one of the best-known animal dealers in Europe and North America, the two main markets (see e.g., SIA: RU 74, Box 101, Ned Hollister to Joseph A. Humphreys, December 17, 1920).

**23** BArch: R 87/8602, Letter by Ruhe October 30, 1942.

**24** Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 57. Two of the elephants caught in Sumatra most likely found their way to the Smithsonian National Zoo, see SIA: RU 365, Box 22, "Elephant, Notes and correspondences, 1891-1976, 1978, 1980-1982," Record card on the elephants acquired by Ruhe.

**25** Short note on a boat arrival in *San Pedro Daily News*, February 24, 1921, 7; "Modern Ark Brings Rare Animals," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 04, 1922. The Louis Ruhe Inc. had a firm standing on the U.S.-American market, even during the two World Wars. Having their own branch (and not only representatives) as well as being naturalized U.S.-American citizens were clear advantages over Carl Hagenbeck's business. (While correspondence and payments to Hagenbeck cease entirely during the war years, the ties with Ruhe continue, albeit in very limited fashion, see SIA: RU 74, Box 70 "Animals Acquired, General.") Moreover, the Ruhe business was not perceived as "German", meaning they did not face the exclusion from economic relations like

**27** "German Liner Brings 20,000 Canary Birds," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 19, 1925, 1. According to their own account, the sale of canaries still contributed 40 percent of revenue in the 1920s, see Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 164.

**28** Lothar Dittrich, *Hannovers Zoo und Seine Tiere* (Hannover, 1965), 14.

**29** Jan-Erik Steinkrüger, "Kultur im Zoo: Von Menschenzoos und Völkerschauen," *Tierstudien* 7 (2015): 45-53.

tinued to grow as well. In 1925, one single shipment of over 20,000 canary birds arrived in New York, from Hamburg, on the liner "Deutschland," all cargo of the Ruhe company.<sup>27</sup> The third generation of Ruhe men, who had gradually taken over the company since 1923, expanded the company's reach even further. By the end of the 1920s, the company quietly owned so-called *Sammellager* (collection depots) for animals in Calcutta, Dakar, Swakopmund and Palembang, and it also owned a farm in Dire Dawa in Ethiopia. It had thus extended its influence to important regions in East, South and West Africa as well as in Southeast Asia.

Having effectively installed the business on the North American market and established connections and presences in different regions, Ruhe was a stakeholder on the German market as well. In the upswing of the early 1920s, the company was heavily involved in the re-opening of the zoological garden in Hannover, which had closed in 1917 and been liquidated due to financial shortages five years later. Initiated by its soon-to-be director, Otto Müller, public and municipal donations raised sufficient funds for the zoo to reopen on April 1, 1924, under the ownership of the city of Hannover.<sup>28</sup> Ruhe was instrumental in supplying the animals and in building some of the zoo structures. He also aided the zoo in other business ventures. In 1925, Müller decided to generate attention for the newly re-opened zoo by arranging a so-called *Völkerschau* ("human zoo"), a common practice of European zoological gardens.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1870s, groups of humans, mostly from European colonies, were "exhibited" in order to be observed by an interested audience. These shows were a form of othering par excellence, where the alleged difference between the people "exhibited" and the ones "observing" was an assumed prerequisite. *Völkerschauen* oscillated between scientific claims, entertainment, and self-assertion of superiority. Highly staged, their organizers claimed to offer authenticity and to pursue educational purposes. They were an extremely popular spectacle that was not only displayed



in zoological gardens, but at fairs, festivities, and world exhibitions, too.<sup>30</sup> Most importantly, they promised a high profit for the organizers and the venue.<sup>31</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Müller decided to organize such a show as one of the zoo's first bigger promotions.

Ruhe was ready to assist Müller in achieving his goal. It was not the first time the company engaged in "exhibiting" people. A few years earlier, the artist Franz Dubbick had approached Ruhe and suggested organizing a show displaying a group of Sami from Northern Europe.<sup>32</sup> This apparently started Ruhe's involvement, and several more of these shows followed, among them the "Somali-Schau" that Müller requested.<sup>33</sup> It was to be first exhibited at the Hannover Zoological Garden and then to travel to other places in the German-speaking world. Organized jointly by John Hagenbeck, the nephew of Carl Hagenbeck, and Hermann Ruhe Junior, the grandson of Ludwig Ruhe and author of the above-mentioned memoir, they tasked Müller to find a suitable group of persons to display the "authentic" way of Somali life. The show's purported authenticity was to be reinforced by local animals: according to the leaflet advertising the show, no village of Somalis could be imagined without the animals they kept.<sup>34</sup> Thus, to realize the exhibition of a "Somali" village, a combination of animals as well as humans were to make their way from North-East Africa to Germany.

**30** Alexander Honold, "Ausstellung des Fremden: Menschen- und Völkerschau um 1900," in *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen, 2006), 170-190; Anne Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde: Die Zurschaustellung „exotischer“ Menschen in Deutschland 1870-1940* (Frankfurt a. M., 2005). The shows had mainly lost their formerly purported scientific value in the 1920s, being deemed too "inauthentic" to allow any ethnographic knowledge.

**31** Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 13.

**32** Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 119; "Lappländer-Karawane im Lübecker Hafen," *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, March 25, 1925, 52.

**33** Staatsarchiv Basel (hereafter: StArchB): PA 1000a (1) R 5.2 17, L. Ruhe-John Hagenbeck-Schau, „Somali-Dorf aus Abessinien“, 1926. For an overview, see Claudia Andratschke and Lars Müller, "Menschen, Tiere und leblose Gegenstände: Die Alfelder Tierhändler Reiche und Ruhe als Ausstatter von

Völkerschauen," in *Völkerschau-Objekte*, ed. Lars Frühsorge, Michael Schütte and Sonja Riehn (Lübeck, 2021), 132-144. For Somalis involved in these types of exhibitions, see Bodhari Warsame, "A Brief History of Staging Somali Ethnographic Performing Troupes in Europe, 1885-1930," in *Staged Otherness: Ethnic*

*Shows in Central and Eastern Europe, 1850-1939*, ed. Dagnoslaw Demski and Dominika Czarnecka (Budapest, 2021), 77-100.

**34** StArchB: PA 1000a (1) R 5.2 17, L. Ruhe-John Hagenbeck-Schau, „Somali-Dorf aus Abessinien," 14. For the strong connection between exhibiting

people from the colonies next to (though not always together with) the animals from the same region, see Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 46.

**35** In the German sources, the region is called “Abessinien” (Abyssinia), which consists of the northern highlands and the historical center considered part of Ethiopia. However, the country stretched beyond the Abyssinia region and Ruhe hunted animals in the southern parts of Ethiopia, too. Furthermore, contemporaries living within the territory called the region Ethiopia. See Wolbert Smidt, “Geschichte und Geschichtserzählung in Äthiopien,” *APuZ: Äthiopien* 70, no.18 (2020): 26-33. Thus, I will use “Ethiopia” here.

**36** SIA: RU 74, Box 85, “Animals Acquired or Collected from Abyssinia, 1903-1904.”

**37** Wolbert Smidt, *Photos as Historical Witnesses: The First Ethiopians in Germany and the First Germans in Ethiopia, the History of a Complex Relationship* (Münster, 2015), 61.

**38** Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter: PA AA): RZ 207-244282, Rolf Ohm to the Foreign Office, April 22, 1921; RZ 207-247036, Reichsminister für Wiederaufbau to the Foreign Office, April 24, 1920.

## II. The Infrastructure of the Wildlife Trade

It was no coincidence that Ruhe, Hagenbeck, and Müller decided to recruit people from Ethiopia<sup>35</sup>. The country had become one of the main regions for animal capture for the Ruhe company in the 1920s. When Nubia to the North had become inaccessible after the start of the Mahdist War in 1882, the company’s live supply was cut off, so it needed to find new areas to capture animals. The bordering regions offered a nearby solution for the wildlife traders as they promised a similar fauna. While Ethiopia had seen regional upheavals as well, its sovereign independence was recognized by Italy in 1896, and a German embassy was established in 1904. It is unclear when exactly Ruhe ventured into the region, but by the beginning of the twentieth century the company frequently imported Ethiopian animals.<sup>36</sup> After the First World War, Ethiopia became an even more sought-after export and import area for German businessmen, who were particularly interested in raw materials.<sup>37</sup> Since Egypt, Sudan and the former colony of Tanganyika had become temporarily inaccessible for German entrepreneurs, “neutral Abyssinia” held promise.<sup>38</sup> By 1922, the Ruhe animal dealership, too, chose Ethiopia as one of the main bases for its endeavors, and acquired a farm in Dire Dawa that they nicknamed “Alfeldia-Camp.”<sup>39</sup>

Apart from making use of a pre-existing building, the company also built on social structures by connecting to German communities that were already present in Ethiopia. Those ties helped to extend business ventures. The German Legation for Abyssinia (*Deutsche Gesandtschaft für Abessinien*) helped German traders to connect on site, supporting them when establishing offices in Ethiopia, when looking for suitable

**39** They made use of a pre-existing

structure built by another hunter, see

Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, see

business partners, or when tensions arose.<sup>40</sup> Besides the legation, Ruhe worked closely with Hall & Co, a well-established import-export business that was involved in the cattle trade, thus allowing for overlapping interests to be served. It was run by David Hall, a German-Ethiopian businessman with ties to the Ethiopian royal dynasty.<sup>41</sup> The support seems to have been extensive. When one of Ruhe's German employees died of typhus in 1924, Hall & Co. advanced money for the death certificate and assisted with the burial.<sup>42</sup> It is likely that they also aided in obtaining permits for weapons, a prerequisite to hunt animals. The commercial import of guns had been forbidden by the Ethiopian government and was allowed for personal use only with appropriate certificates.<sup>43</sup> These certificates required good ties to the royal house, which Ruhe could draw on thanks to Hall & Co.<sup>44</sup>

It was also at the instigation of Hall & Co that, on April 14, 1925, the North German Lloyd (NDL), one of the biggest German shipping companies, sent their steamer "Schlesien" to the port of Djibouti. It was the first German ship in 14 years to arrive at the most important entry point of access to the Ethiopian market. While the yield turned out to be meagre (only eighty units of deck cargo had been issued), the NDL was urged to establish regular service between German ports and Djibouti.<sup>45</sup> Maritime traffic was one of the foundations of successful business transactions – and for German businesses in Ethiopia, the service was lacking. Although the NDL started to call on Djibouti from April 1925 onwards, it did so unidirectionally and just once a month: only their East-Asian liners stopped in Djibouti on their return to Europe. For the

**40** When the wildlife trader Hagenbeck encountered difficulties because the Ethiopian government forbade the export of some animals, Hagenbeck approached the German Legation for help, see PA AA: RZ 207-244284, German Legation to the Field Office for Hamburg and Lübeck, March 16, 1931.

**41** Toby Berger Holtz, "The Hall Family and Ethiopia: A Century of Involvement," in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Tefera and Shiferaw Bekele (Trondheim, 2009), 109-117, 113; Smidt, *Photos as Historical Witnesses*, 92.

**42** For the correspondence between Hall & Co., Hermann Windhorn Junior, and the German Legation concerning the death certificate for Hermann Windhorn Senior, see PA AA: RAV 2/402, e.g. Hall & Co. to the German Consulate, August 13, 1924.

**43** PA AA: RAV 2/128, "Waffenpässe, Jagdscheine, Inlandspässe, Einreiseerlaubnis," 1934-37.

**44** As part of an expedition organized in 1928, employees of the company were invited to visit the Ethiopian stakeholders,

see BArch: B /115713, "Im Schatten des Goldenen Löwens" (film by JAM Borgstädt), 1934/35.

**45** PA AA: RAV 2/267, Letter to the NDL, April 24, 1925.

**46** PA AA: RAV 2/267, Letter to the NDJ, April 24, 1925.

**47** PAAA: RZ 207-244282, German Legation to the Foreign Office, December 24, 1926.

**48** PAAA: RZ 207-244282, German Legation to the Foreign Office, March 06, 1926.

businessmen this frequency was too low, but the direct line to Germany was nevertheless a welcome starting point. It reduced the journey to approximately 28 days and was seen to open the market for more export.<sup>46</sup> To some extent, this hope was met. Two years after the NDJ had begun their service, the German shipping line HAPAG mirrored their competitor's approach and started calling on Djibouti on their return journey from Indian ports.<sup>47</sup>

To the dismay of the German business community, however, the NDJ and HAPAG steamers served the Ethiopian market only from an exporting standpoint. A direct access from the German Republic to Djibouti, and by extension Ethiopia, was still missing in the 1920s. This was a thorn in the side of the German businesses, for it hampered the potential growth of their sales so much that the German Legation appealed to the German Foreign Office to support the establishment of direct shipping lines from Hamburg or Bremen to Djibouti.<sup>48</sup> They expounded the disadvantages that German businesses had to face, especially compared to their European competitors: German goods had to be shipped via Antwerp, and transshipped in Marseilles or Port Said, thereby passing two or sometimes even three ports where the freight had to be reloaded. In contrast, French freight was directly shipped from Marseilles to Djibouti. The multiple transshipping points not only meant a delayed delivery but posed a threat of mishandling along the way. Therefore, direct lines were not only a necessity to save time, but they also reduced the points where the cargo would be inspected and exposed to potential damage.

This issue was important for animal traders especially. Both the duration of the journey and the transshipping points were crucial factors in their business. Loading live animals onto the ship deck was complicated and laborious, as can be seen in photographs depicting the process.

Technological tools and labor provided by several men were necessary to execute the task. All these services had to be



**Figure 1.** Several men and a crane were necessary to unload this zebra from a ship. Stadtarchiv Alfeld, Collection Ruhe, Photo Album "Red. Niemeyer" 34, photographer unknown, c. 1930.

available at the stopover, too, where the freight was to be loaded onto another ship. Moreover, the crates that contained the animals had to be handled with care, and failure to do so could mean the death of the animal – and therefore the loss of the entire charge. In addition, the animals had to be attended to and fed during shipment; since many animals were quite young, they were particularly vulnerable. Caretakers often did not know how to adequately care for them and experimented with nutrition.<sup>49</sup> While caring for wild animals was always a delicate issue, it was especially difficult during transport

<sup>49</sup> One of these examples is Carl Eiffert, see Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 128.

**50** As can be seen in the hasty requests for export papers, see e.g. PA AA: RAV 2/126, Steininger to the German Legation, April 28, 1932.

**51** PA AA: RAV 2/267, Answers to the AKOTECH Survey regarding seaports, c. 1925. Certainly, not all these animals were wild ones.

**52** PAAA: RZ 207-244282, German Legation to the Foreign Office, December 24, 1926.

**53** PA AA: RAV 1/126, Carl Steininger to the German Legation, March 23, 1932.

**54** PA AA: RAV 2/267, NDL to the German Legation, December 10, 1926.

(specifically while at sea). The longer the time on the ship, the longer they were exposed to the risk of harm. Direct lines shortened travel time, and faster journeys enhanced the likelihood of the animals' survival. The calculation for wildlife traders was easy: direct lines were highly favored as they minimized the factors that could endanger the life of the animals.

While the decision of HAPAG and NDL to stop at Djibouti on their way from Asia to Europe facilitated easier transport opportunities, the frequency was still limited. As the animals' well-being had to be considered when planning the transport, animals could not as easily be adjusted to shipping times and delays as other freight.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, shipping companies could not easily dismiss the demands of animal traders, because living animals were a frequent deck cargo on the way to Europe. Consequently, animal traders were important customers. Even before German liners serviced the region, approximately 6,800 animals had been transported by non-German shipping lines via Djibouti in 1924.<sup>51</sup> Aside from live animals, other animal material such as skins and fur were in great demand, too. The interests of animal traders were thus supporting the arguments made by the German Legation and Hall & Co, who saw frequent lines as a precondition to help increase the share of German businesses on the Ethiopian market.<sup>52</sup>

Ruhe had an interest in direct lines from German ports to Ethiopia, too. His "goods" only had to leave Ethiopia, but the people accompanying the animals did have to make their way back. One of them was Issa Moudé, an Oromo who worked on the farm in Dire Dawa. He had taken several trips to Europe, making sure that the animal cargo arrived safely at the European ports.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, he had to return to Ethiopia to tend to his work on the farm and to potentially care for another shipment. In much the same way, people who were part of the "Völkerschau" exhibitions had to travel back to the Horn of Africa. Indeed, the NDL had sent their liner "Pfalz" to "return a number of Somalis to Djibouti,"<sup>54</sup> and thus offered



**Figure 2.** Mahuts accompanied elephants to Germany and kept training them in Alfeld. Sammlung/ Archiv alt-alfeld, Ruhe Photo Collection „Elefanten,“ photographer and date unknown.

a direct connection this time. However, they decided against establishing a permanent direct route because the requested capacity had been too low, so they did not see a profit potential. These infrequent connections complicated the wildlife trade. Moudé or the group of the “Somali-Schau” were not the only ones who had to return to the hunting regions. As several contemporary photographs illustrate, non-European actors frequently traveled to the German Republic and cared for the animals while staying in Alfeld.<sup>55</sup>

They were instrumental in the delivery and survival of the animals. Together with the German employees, they had to return to the region of capture, for which a regular shipping line in both directions was necessary.

Evidently, the needs of the traders did not always resonate with the shipping companies. They did not increase the frequency, nor did they establish a permanent line from German ports to Djibouti. The pleas of the businessmen remained unanswered. In the early 1930s, David Hall made another attempt. He urged several shipping companies to increase the frequency of their journey to Djibouti, to no avail. Some could not identify a need to do so, others even reduced the service: passenger ships would now only service Djibouti in case of a pre-announced need, and a guaranteed minimal passenger revenue.<sup>56</sup> Instead of advancing the projects of the German communities in Ethiopia, the market had become even more disconnected.

**55** Several photographs in the collection of the municipal archive in Alfeld document the presence of these caretakers in Alfeld.

**56** PA AA: RAV 2/267, Woermann-Linie to Hans B. W. Bohnenberger, March 07, 1933; RAV 2/267, Transcript of the letter by NDL, May 04, 1933; RAV 2/267, Association of German Ship-owners to the Imperial Minister of Transport, August 07, 1934.

**57** While in 1844 the journey from Alfeld to Hamburg alone had taken the bird dealers twelve days by foot, by the turn of the century the entire journey from Alfeld to New York was covered within a fortnight. Before, the birds had to be carried to the port in so-called Reffs on the back of tradesmen and -women; a method that took several days and limited the number of birds that could be transported. For all these, see Charles Reiche's account cited in Busch, *Von Tafelmachern und Vogelhändlern*, 105.

**58** Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (hereafter: OeStA): AdR, HBbBuT, Schönbrunn 1Rep, Tieranbote 1932, Letter to Ruhe, November 17, 1932.

**59** OeStA: AdR, HBbBuT, Schönbrunn 1Rep, Tieranbote 1932, Letter to Ruhe, October 25, 1932.

**60** Dire Dawa was already connected to the port in Djibouti before (Smidt, *Photos as Historical Witnesses*, 30), but the railway line was completed in 1917, when it connected Addis Ababa to the port (via Dire Dawa) as well.

Sea transport was not the only challenge. Moving animals over land was just as important, with trains becoming one of the main means of transport. It had already been a significant factor in the early days of the canary trade. With the extension of the railway network in the Kingdom of Hanover, Ruhe was able to considerably shorten the journey to the ports in Hamburg or Bremen. This mode of transport was gentle enough on the fragile animal cargo, and combined with the increasing usage of steamships, transport time was significantly reduced.<sup>57</sup> Just like shipping lines, railway companies became important partners for wildlife traders. However, they also were additional variables that had the potential to cause disruption. As transnational transport of animals to zoological gardens in Europe became frequent, the Austrian railway service allowed for carriage paid transport of animals who were destined for the Tiergarten Schönbrunn in Vienna – provided a waybill was requested and attached at least a week beforehand.<sup>58</sup> Following proper procedure and adhering to the administrative requirements was a recurrent struggle for Ruhe. While saving costs was important, the shipping of animals often happened hastily, as space in holding pens was needed for new arrivals or the accompanying caretaker was only available in a certain time period, or the health of an animal seemed stable only in a certain time window. Much to the dismay of Schönbrunn's director, Ruhe often cabled that an animal was on the way without having requested a waybill beforehand.<sup>59</sup>

Railroad networks were equally important in the hunting regions and one of the reasons why Ruhe based their farm in the recently built town of Dire Dawa. Since 1917 a rail line connected the town with the port in Djibouti as well as with the capital Addis Ababa.<sup>60</sup> While these connections were important, they were not extensive enough to cover all movement. The Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway line certainly connected important points with sea transport, but the animals still had to be caught further inland in areas that were located



a multi-day trip away from the nearest railway station. Targeted hunting had additionally pushed the wildlife back into regions further south, requiring that Ruhe's animal catchers cover even larger distances.<sup>61</sup> As there was no available transport immediately after capture, the restrained animals had to be herded over long distances to the next hub. This mirrored nineteenth-century practice, where hunters and captured animals had to walk the entire distance to the port.<sup>62</sup> As I will detail below, the exhausting marches were one of the biggest threats to the business of wildlife traders.

### III. Border Crossings and Bureaucracy

In addition to the pre-existing farm structure and railway station, there was another advantage to establishing the company's base at Dire Dawa. The town was situated midway between two important points. To the east, the port of Djibouti was easy to reach, while the capital Addis Ababa lay a similar distance to the west. If it were only for the proximity to sea transport, a location closer to the port would have been more favorable. However, wildlife traders had to factor in that most of the paperwork (for example export permissions and hunting licenses) had to be approved in Addis Ababa, where many important business connections such as Hall & Co and the German Legation were located, too. The position of the farm underlines that not only transportation, but also permits were necessary to facilitate movement. Some of these requirements were set neither by the Ethiopian nor the German government since France controlled the port of Djibouti from 1896 on and was therefore one of the authorities that wildlife traders had to negotiate with as Ethiopia did not have its own sea access. Although Djibouti's port was not the only one in the area (others being Zeila in British Somaliland or Assab in the Italian colony of Eritrea), its direct connection to the railway made it the most convenient. Trying to maintain good business relations, the German community reassured

<sup>61</sup> Steven Kaplan, "Hunting," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 91. In the hunting expeditions that the company commissioned in 1927/28, they travelled as far as the Omo River (BArch: B /115713, "Im Schatten des Goldenen Löwens" (film by JAM Borgstädt)).

<sup>62</sup> „Hunting Beasts in Africa," *San Marco's Free Press*, October 26, 1878.

**63** PA AA: RZ 207/244282, German Legation to the German Foreign Office, March 6, 1926.

**64** PA AA: RAV 2/124, Copy of Letter to the Foreign Office, June 17, 1922.

**65** PA AA: RAV 2/124, Robert Hesse to the German Legation, October 31, 1928.

**66** Susanne Heyn, *Kolonial bewegte Jugend: Beziehungsgeschichten zwischen Deutschland und Südwestafrika zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Bielefeld, 2018), 133.

**67** PA AA: RAV 2/126, Steininger to the German Legation, August 22, 1928; RAV 2/126, Answer of the German Legation, August 24, 1928.

**68** PA AA: RAV 2/126, Steininger to the German Legation, March 23, 1932.

**69** As for the answer of the German Legation, see PA AA: RAV 2/126, Transcription of telegram by Steininger. For the request to send the passport directly to Alfeld, see PA AA: RAV 2/126, Steininger to the German Legation, April 28, 1932.

interested businesses that they did not have to fear any disadvantages from the French authorities.<sup>63</sup>

Yet German businesses complained about delays in administrative processes and arbitrary treatment by French officials, which they saw as designed to potentially harm their prospects.<sup>64</sup> One German engineer wrote to the German Legation that he had to procure several documents, among them financial guarantees and health certificates, to access the port of Djibouti while his accompanying Ethiopian employee could enter without any papers.<sup>65</sup> This difference in treatment was considered an affront and interpreted as humiliation, intensified by the dependence on French goodwill. It may have especially hurt German colonialists, who felt that the seizure of Germany's former colonies after the First World War had been a deliberate move to expel the German Empire from the ranks of "civilized" nations and erode its power by excluding it from imperial projects.<sup>66</sup> Being treated disadvantageously compared to Ethiopians added insult to injury. Certainly, it did not simplify matters for German exporters.

The wildlife traders, too, had to deal with French authorities. Once obtained, a French visa was an asset, as it allowed repeated entry of the port without having to request new permissions, thus saving time. A new passport also required a renewal of the visa, meaning more time-consuming paperwork had to be dealt with.<sup>67</sup> When Issa Moudé was set to accompany a shipment of animals to Europe in 1932, Carl Steininger, who managed the Dire Dawa farm, requested a passport for Moudé at the German Legation in Addis Ababa.<sup>68</sup> He was in a hurry: the steamer that Moudé and Steininger wanted to catch was leaving in two weeks. And just as with the Austrian waybills, the company struggled to obtain the necessary documents in time. Steininger was admonished for having requested them too late, and the passport was not issued in time. Steininger and Moudé did not wait; the latter set off on the NDL steamer "Aller" towards Europe without a passport, and Steininger asked for it to be issued *ex post*.<sup>69</sup> In

this case, the regulations of the French government in Djibouti worked in their favor. Moudé was able to enter the French-controlled territory and board the ship without any passport, and he did not need a visa to enter the German Republic.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to entry permits for human caretakers, wildlife traders had to obtain the required documents for importing animals. Unlike other cargo, these were not limited to customs duties and quotas. They also had to be greenlighted by veterinary authorities. When the zoological garden in Hannover requested the import permits for the animals that were to be part of the aforementioned “Somali-Schau” in 1926, they had a rude awakening. Among the animals were zebus, a species of domestic cattle that had been collected in Ethiopia. Their entry was denied.<sup>71</sup> The Hannover city council, who supported the exhibition, was alarmed. If the zebus could not be displayed, “the effect of the show, which the director wants to present together with these animals, [would be] significantly impaired.”<sup>72</sup> On top of these concerns, their slaughter at the port would also have meant a devastating financial loss. Since Ruhe offered to give the zoological garden 5,000 Reichsmark from sales profits after the show, this was the minimum loss that the zoological garden had to face. Consequently, two senators travelled to Berlin to persuade the minister for agriculture to permit the import of the zebus, nevertheless. Their plea was unsuccessful. The representative of the minister explained that “it was quite impossible to grant permission, since pneumonic plague was raging among the cattle herds in Abyssinia, and the animals, even if found healthy on examination, were still carriers of the bacillus.”<sup>73</sup> The ministry worried that the zebus could transmit the disease as late as two years after import. Evidently, the fear of contagion was great. Authorities in both Europe and the African colonies certainly still remembered the devastation the Rinderpest disease had caused.<sup>74</sup>

Quarantine regulations were a consistent headache for importers of both wild and domestic animals. The animals

**70** I thank Wolbert Smidt (Mekelle University) for this information.

**71** Stadtarchiv Hannover (hereafter: SAH): 1. HR.10, Nr. 1540, Letter of the ministry for agriculture to the municipal authorities, March 3, 1926.

**72** SAH: 1. HR.10, Nr. 1540, Councilor Lindemann to the mayor Dr. Menge, March 17, 1926.

**73** SAH: 1. HR.10, Nr. 1540, Note for the file on April 1, 1926.

**74** See Amanda Key McVety, *The Rinderpest Campaigns: A Virus, Its Vaccines, and Global Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2018); Cornelia Knab, “Infectious Rats and Dangerous Cows: Transnational Perspectives on Animal Diseases in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011): 281-306. For health regulations and empire, see also Diana K. Davis, “Brutes, Beasts and Empire: Veterinary Medicine and Environmental Policy in French North Africa and British India,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 34, no. 2 (April 2008): 242-267.

**75** PA AA: RZ 207/244283, *Courrier d'Éthiopie*, December 14, 1928.

**76** SIA: RU74, Box 97, "Importation Permits & Quarantine Procedure, 1904-1926".

**77** This exemption had already been granted at the turn of the century, see BArch: R 1501/117765, Abschrift III B.1016, c. 1900. In the United States, animals meant for zoological gardens could equally be exempted from the quarantine in ports, see SIA: RU74, Box 97, "Importation Permits & Quarantine Procedure, 1904-1926."

**78** BArch: R 86/1485, Abschrift III B.6835, c. 1905.

**79** SAH: 1. HR.10, Nr. 1540, Letter of the ministry for agriculture, March 3, 1926.

had to be subjected to an examination when leaving Ethiopia, and all animals – whether dead or alive – had to be issued an official certificate before export.<sup>75</sup> These documents were in turn requested at the incoming ports as well, where another examination was due. Animals that were supposed to travel onwards to North America underwent another period of quarantine.<sup>76</sup> In fact, the livestock trade was far more affected by rules of export and bans of import. As the zebus were categorized as cattle and thus as productive livestock, this case was no different. By contrast, animals that were destined for zoological gardens were not subject to confinement at the port.<sup>77</sup> When contained in crates and separated from all other animals, they could be moved straight to the zoological gardens or the premises of the wildlife traders, where they had to be quarantined. When this law was introduced, in addition to recognized zoological gardens, only four animal traders – Ruhe among them – were allowed to sidestep the quarantine at the ports.<sup>78</sup> This exemption gave them a competitive edge over other traders and the seal of expertise.

In 1926, Ruhe was still allowed to transport animals from the port straight to their destination, where they then had to be quarantined. Sheep and goats had travelled with the zebus from Djibouti to Hannover and were also meant to appear in the exhibition of "Somali life". Unlike their travel companions, their import was permitted, and they were allowed to enter German territory as long as it could be ensured that they did not come into contact with another cloven-hooved animal during train transport. Isolation had to be strictly observed. When unloaded in Hannover, they continued their journey by truck to the zoo, where they had to remain in quarantine for 14 days. After that, a veterinarian was to check them once more. If they proved to be without disease, any quarantine measures could be lifted.<sup>79</sup>

The crates the animals were confined in played an integral part in these transports and exemptions. At first glance, they



**Figure 3.** Animals fought against their capture, as can be seen by the damage done to this freight car, which was caused by an elephant. Stadarchiv Alfeld, Collection Ruhe, Photo Album "Darnedde," photographer presumably Carl Darnedde, c. 1925-1935.

seemed to serve mainly one function: to limit the ability of the animal to move. Additionally, they offered another measure of control: that of contagion by means of keeping them separated from their conspecifics. These crates were spaces created through the human-animal relation, and the animal trade in the first place. In the eyes of the ministerial regulators, they were an important tool to prevent the spread of diseases. For the wildlife traders they meant that the animals would reach their destination faster. Just like direct lines that avoided transshipping, the crates made it possible to eliminate another transfer point. Instead of spending weeks in the provisional quarantine stables at the port, the animals could be kept in the new environment they were supposed to get used to. Serving such an important function in the trade, the crates were valuable objects and it was usually requested that they be returned to sender. Especially in times of scarcity, communication over their ownership often ensued.<sup>80</sup> Having the crates and being able to reuse them not only reduced costs but enabled the exchange to take place at all. For the animals, however, the crates meant a crass restriction of movement. It blocked their ability to see their environment and confined them to a limited space, often for long stretches of time. In

<sup>80</sup> For an example, see the repeated reclaiming of crates used by the Zurich Zoological Garden (Stadarchiv Zürich: VII.599 Zoo Zürich 1.5.2.1. (1942-43), Letter L. Ruhe to Zoological Garden Zürich, October 21, 1942).

**81** SAH: 1. HR.10, Nr. 1540, Minutes by Lindemann, c. 1926.

**82** SAH: 1. HR.10, Nr. 1540, Letter of the ministry, June 5, 1926.

**83** StArchB: PA 1000a (1) R 5.2 17, L. Ruhe-John Hagenbeck-Schau, „Somali-Dorf aus Abessinien“, 1926, 14.

consequence, they fought against their confinement, which often resulted in damage to the crates.

As for the zebus, no crate was big enough to allow them to enter the German Republic. The ministry of agriculture decided that their journey was to end before arrival. According to the city councilors, the Ruhe company was informed about the import ban and would try to market them elsewhere.<sup>81</sup> Either this information never reached Ruhe, the councilors misunderstood, or Ruhe actively decided to ignore it. Ruhe imported the zebus despite lacking the required permit. Two months after the initial correspondence, the Hannover Zoo received another letter from the ministry of agriculture. It contained the information that the ministry, not very amused by the circumstances, nevertheless had decided to desist from culling the zebus that had been illegally imported. The ministry was confronted with a situation that it had tried to avoid, however, now that the animals were already in Hannover, it granted their survival. The zebus had to be closely observed for over eight weeks before a supervised contact between two German cows was arranged. The group then had to quarantine for another few weeks. If any of the imported or exposed individuals were to show symptoms of disease, they had to be put down. The costs of the entire procedure had to be borne by the zoological garden and, as the letter informs, legal proceedings against Ruhe were initiated in Karlsruhe.<sup>82</sup>

While it is unclear what came of the legal case, it is significant that Ruhe ignored the import ban. By violating health regulations, Ruhe created a reality that could potentially prove financially beneficial for him. If the zebus remained healthy, not only could they participate in the *Völkerschau*, but also be sold later. And indeed, they were. Just like the zoo's director, Müller, had envisioned, zebus, goats and sheep were exhibited together with a group of people, forming a (highly staged) image of "Somali" life.<sup>83</sup> At the same time that Ruhe benefited from the illegal import, the ministry tried to follow their own interests in an originally unwanted situation. As the cat-

tle were now in Hannover, they took the opportunity to create an experimental setting. Exposing German cows to the zebus and observing the group afterwards could potentially create further veterinary knowledge, while their exhibition at the Hannover Zoo and at other places in Germany served the interests of entertainment and education for the public.<sup>84</sup>

#### IV. Impasses and Ruptures in the Wildlife Trade

As the example of the zebus illustrates, health regulations were a hurdle, but, as in this case, they did not always stop the flow of trade. Yet, animals are not inorganic material commodities, but somatic creatures. Precisely their corporality presented a business risk to Ruhe, for example when their entry was denied by authorities due to their ability to carry diseases. Moreover, the above mentioned fight against capture, confinement, and transport document the agency that animals had in their interactions with humans, which also influenced practices and outcomes of the trade. Indeed, the embodied agency of the animals thwarted many attempts to turn them into commodities.<sup>85</sup> Their reactions had to be factored into the logistics of the trade and affected movement as well as regulations. If an animal eluded the control of the wildlife traders by breaking free, dying or behaving aggressively, the entire transfer came to an end. Keeping animals alive and well was the main as well as the most challenging task of the wildlife traders.

Great efforts were made to ensure their survival. The animals usually tried to escape capture by flight, and hunting them down sometimes raced them to death. Consequently, other methods had to be developed, in which they were outflanked or cornered.<sup>86</sup> Another serious problem were the long marches to the transport stations that were a strain on the captive animals. Even though a more comprehensive railway network connected important urban dwellings to the ports in the 1920s, it unsurprisingly did not connect to wildlife habi-

**84** For the experimental practices, see Joanna Swabe, *Animals, Disease and Human Society: Human-animal Relations and the Rise of Veterinary Medicine* (London, 2002); for the combination of education and entertainment of colonial-themed events, especially with regards to the interwar years in Germany, see Heyn, *Kolonialbewegte Jugend*, 101-108.

**85** For this understanding of „embodied agency,” see Gesine Krüger, Aline Steinbrecher and Clemens Wischermann, “Animate History: Zugänge und Konzepte einer Geschichte zwischen Menschen und Tieren,” in *Tiere und Geschichte: Konturen einer “Animate History”*, ed. Gesine Krüger, Aline Steinbrecher and Clemens Wischermann (Stuttgart, 2015), 31. Agency here does not entail intentionally motivated agency, but rather the ability to fulfil purposeful actions as well as to interact with humans and environments and thereby influence the outcomes of historical events.

**86** As described by Ruhe, for example: *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 128; and Julius Eduard Müller, “Reisen und Abenteuer mit Tieren,” *Alfelder Zeitung*, May 25, 1927.

**87** "Hunting Beasts in Africa."

**88** Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 86; Julius Eduard Müller, "Reisen und Abenteuer mit Tieren," *Alfelder Zeitung*, June 06, 1927.

**89** Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 128.

**90** Ruhe barely mentions them in his memoirs. If he does, they remain nameless except for Sukla, an Indian Mahut who worked for Ruhe and died in an elephant attack in the Hannover Zoo (Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 197). In Ethiopia, Müller needed the help of a translator and guide named Ahmed, who would bring him to the towns and villages where he tried to hire people for the *Völkerschau*, see Otto Müller, *Ringsum den Tschertscher: Wanderfahrten in Abessinien* (Hannover, 1926), 86.

tats. Thus, the expeditions had to venture inland in very much the same way as in earlier decades. In the nineteenth century, the captured animals were mainly young ones who often did not survive the journey to the port, dying of a combination of exhaustion, frequent mishandling, and malnutrition.<sup>87</sup> While Ruhe's animal catchers sometimes succeeded in capturing adult individuals, their main catches were still young ones, who continued to be prone to exhaustion due to the journey in often harsh weather conditions. Feeding the captured animals remained a rather experimental undertaking, too, with handlers trying to make use of what was available during the expedition as well as on the ships.<sup>88</sup> Regardless of the age of the caught animal, the risk of their health suffering due to the distances traversed was still real, and ideally, the marches were supposed to be kept to a minimum.

An episode in Southern Africa highlights the gravity of the problem. At the same time as Müller tried to find animals and humans that were to participate in the "Somali" show in Ethiopia, another Ruhe employee, Carl Eiffert, had caught an adult giraffe in Transvaal, today's Limpopo province. The location of capture lay a considerable distance away from the closest railway line. Instead of wrangling the giraffe there, she was confined in a crate which then was moved to the train tracks by rolling it over round-ground logs that were repeatedly placed in front. Over 120 people – who had previously participated in cornering her – were necessary for this endeavor, which took them over two weeks.<sup>89</sup> As this story strikingly illustrates, even more important than a speedy transport was minimizing the strain on the animal. To achieve this, major physical exertion was required – in this case by humans. This was carried out by workers who were employed on site. European employees, much lower in number, mainly reserved managing tasks for themselves or posed as hunters. Physically taxing work was carried out by African actors, who took part in the expeditions as guides, carriers, translators or hunters.<sup>90</sup> Their labor was also instrumental in loading the animals onto trains and ships.





While extreme efforts were made to ensure the wellbeing of some animals, the lives of others were not deemed valuable. On the contrary, most animals that the Ruhe expeditions encountered were likely to be killed. Since catchers only captured the youngest individuals of a group, they killed all the others to avoid parent animals interfering with the abduction of the juveniles. This could mean that while four offspring were taken alive, forty adult individuals were killed.<sup>91</sup> This practice was criticized by animal protection groups and media outlets at the turn of the century, and demands to save animals only increased in the twentieth century.<sup>92</sup> In 1926, Bernhard Ruhe, son of the founder and responsible for the branch in New York City, proclaimed that hunters “wait nearby [the dens] until the mother goes away in search of food. They then kidnap the little ones. [. . . The mothers] probably would [follow] if they could trace the kidnappers, but they never can.”<sup>93</sup> While it is highly unlikely that captures happened as Ruhe portrayed

**Figure 4.** Loading the fragile, live cargo onto ships and trains was a strenuous task and required the help of people recruited on site. Stadtarchiv Alfeld, Collection Ruhe, Photo Album “Darnedde,” photographer presumably Carl Darnedde, c. 1925-1935.

<sup>91</sup> Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 67.

<sup>92</sup> For the awareness of the critique, see *ibid.* For the discussion on hunting restrictions for protection, and hunters who present themselves as the protectors, see Bernhard Gißibl, “Das Kolonisierte Tier: Zur Ökologie der Kontaktzonen des deutschen Kolonialismus,”

*Werkstattgeschichte* 56 (2010): 7-28.

<sup>93</sup> “How Wild Animals Are Sold,” *Brooklyn*

*Daily Eagle*, August 29, 1926.

**94** As can be seen on photographs, their animal capturing expeditions were accompanied by hunting practices (STA: Collection Ruhe, Photo albums, especially the one made by JAM Borgstädt, 1928; and the one titled "Tschad," 1930).

**95** BArch: B /115713, "Im Schatten des Goldenen Löwens" (film by JAM Borgstädt), 1934/35; STA: Collection Ruhe, Photo albums, the one made by JAM Borgstädt Ruhe, 1928.

**96** The love for animals is a frequent claim made by members of the Ruhe family, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, see for example "Die Firma Ruhe gab Alfeld das Gepräge," *Alfelder Zeitung*, June 4, 1960, 13.

**97** It seems likely that they were killed, though Ruhe claims they were released. However, this may not mean that they lived much longer since their exhaustion may very well have meant that they would not survive in the wild again.

**98** Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 275. This was true for animals that had already been imported and a greater number was available in Europe.

them, wildlife traders were careful to paint a picture of care and concern for the wellbeing of their catch.

Yet killing animals was a big part of their business. As pictures show, white European members of the expedition continued to engage in big game hunting.<sup>94</sup>

The lives of domestic animals were sacrificed as well. The wildlife hunters were accompanied by several animals that all had roles assigned to them. While donkeys or horses were used to carry humans or baggage, other animals such as sheep were taken along as future food supply for humans as well as for the captured animals.<sup>95</sup> Animal catchers made clear distinctions about which species were deemed worthy of saving and their value was calculated according to their usefulness for the trade. As much as Ruhe employees, and especially Ruhe family members, purported their love for animals, which ones were deserving of protection was highly subjective and depended on the use assigned to them.<sup>96</sup> For many of them, their survival was never intended. This holds true not only for the species that were never of interest for the European market, but even for the ones that were supposed to become commodities.

One of the functions of the farm in Dire Dawa and the other collection depots was to winnow the animals that were "unfit" for sale. As the capture and marches were extremely tiring for the animals, they often did not recover or showed signs that they would not survive further transport. It is unclear what exactly happened to them if they were deemed unsuitable for sale.<sup>97</sup> Their health or likelihood of survival during transport were not the only reasons for rejecting them. A surge in trade and the consequent growing supply of wild animals allowed zoological gardens to become ever more selective. Those species that were no longer scarce on the market had to be "immaculate" to generate a profit.<sup>98</sup> Their physical char-

For very rare specimens, e.g. Okapis, the state of the animal

became less important (FelixA: C 4.6, 1 # 3211, "Le second okapi

actuellement au Jardin Zoologique d'Anvers," c. 1954).



**Figure 5.** Though the main task of the wildlife traders was to keep animals alive, there was great variation as to which animals' lives were deemed valuable. Some animals were never intended to stay alive. Stadtarchiv Alfeld, Collection Ruhe, Photo Album "Tschad," photographer unknown, c. 1930.

acteristics could thus also become a reason that prevented them from being sold. Others would simply resist integration into their designated places. Elephants especially repeatedly proved troublesome to animal traders, violently attacking their handlers and sometimes even killing them. In most cases, the elephants themselves were then killed.<sup>99</sup>

All these examples show that the live animals that constituted the Ruhe company's trade also had the potential to bring this trade to an end. Their very corporality could be cause for the most dramatic disruptions. The individual animal was dispensable to Ruhe, since it was viewed as a trading good that had to meet the customer's expectations. As such, they were exchangeable, but as living individuals, they still affected the company's plans. The animals' action or death meant a very real disruption – the chain of practices ended with their physical end, and time and money invested were lost.<sup>100</sup> Finally, their ability to procreate affected the trade in an entirely new way, requiring it to restructure. The success of breeding programs necessitated less restocking. Animals no longer came from their habitat in colonial spaces but were moved from one zoological garden to another – and attempts were sometimes made for them to be resettled in the wild.<sup>101</sup> These changes emerged even before

<sup>99</sup> Ruhe, *Wilde Tiere frei Haus*, 219.

<sup>100</sup> Dead animal bodies could be turned into taxidermy specimens, which sometimes allowed traders to profit even if the animal did not survive. Indeed, the number of deceased animals that found their way to museums is especially striking in the case of the Smithsonian's National Zoo (see SIA: RU74, Box 94, Acknowledgements of reception of specimen). Ruhe, too, sold dead animals to taxidermists, for example in Alfeld, where a collection of taxidermized non-European animals is exhibited in the town's municipal museum today.

<sup>101</sup> For one of these attempts, coordinated by Bernhard Grzimek, see Felix Schürmann, "Heimkehr ins Neuland: Die erste Auswilderung von Schimpansen und ihre Kontexte im postkolo-

nalen Tansania, 1965-1966," in *Vielfältig Verflochten: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge*

zur *Tier-Mensch-Relationalität*, ed. Forschungsschwerpunkt Tier-Mensch-

Gesellschaft (Bielefeld, 2017), 275-292.

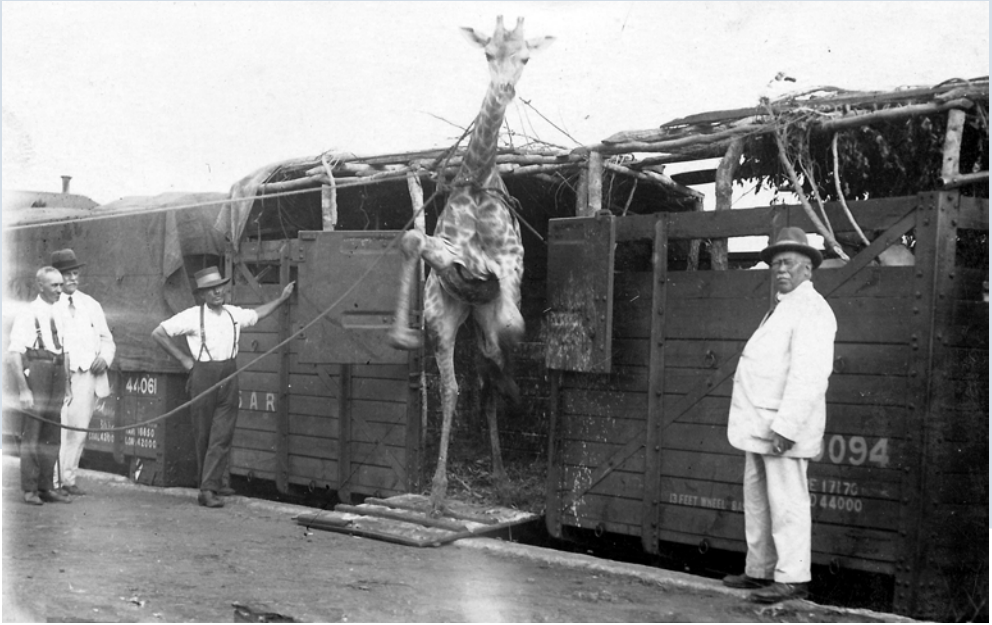
**102** Effectively, the international agreement CITES heavily restricted the trade in wildlife from the 1970s on. Animal dealers had to reorganize their businesses even before that. In Ruhe's case, the company increasingly became a transport and logistical partner, who also added touristic attractions such as safari tours to their portfolio.

international regimentation limited the trade and pressured wildlife traders to reorganize their businesses, offering administrative and logistical services rather than live animals.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

Having traced all the obstacles, diversions, and disruptions that the Ruhe company had to deal with, it is remarkable that the business thrived despite these challenges. For the better part of the company's existence, its success outweighed the adversities it faced. The example of the zebus shows how Ruhe flouted the government's import ban and managed to shape the situation according to their advantage. Even though the ministry had strictly prohibited the import, port and veterinarian control measures were permeable enough for the cattle to pass. Although thousands of animals lost their lives in the trade, Ruhe was still able to sell enough to run their business successfully. The ruptures often appear to be obstacles that they could shift by creating new realities – for instance when the zebus arrived in Europe regardless of the import ban. While animals sometimes actively resisted their capture or died, a large number were transported and sold. In effect, the Ruhe company benefitted from the imperial structures, albeit porous, that allowed them to profit from the lives of thousands of animals that they permanently extracted.

At first glance, the Ruhe company might appear as the embodiment of a connected, tight-knit world that is increasingly growing together. Yet, its undeniable success did not mean that the trade ran without friction. Closely following Ruhe's business dealings during its heyday in the 1920s, the multifaceted factors that seriously interfered with their objectives become apparent. Growth and expansion were interrupted by momentary disconnections and the need to adapt. Available means of transportation were a major cause of disruption. Despite the pressure of global players such as Ruhe, shipping companies did not establish a permanent route from Ham-



burg to Djibouti. Railway networks never spanned the whole of Ethiopia, and areas that were crucial for the capture of animals remained cut off. Consequently, even in the 1920s wildlife traders had to walk the captured animals on long marches to the next transport hub, which in turn increased the strain on the animals and jeopardized profits. Administrative requirements continuously challenged wildlife traders, be they extra costs because of absent waybills, delays in departure due to missing passports or strict quarantine rules and requested examinations by veterinarians that interrupted the flow. Arguably, the latter weighed most heavily. All these regulations had to be met – or circumvented – but the veterinarian regulations were designed to contain disease-causing pathogens, themselves living organisms which were hard to control.

The animals as living organisms that brought their own agency were the biggest unpredictability. By either resisting their capture or refusing to settle into captive life, their actions could derail the company's plan to sell them.

Perhaps the biggest rupture occurred when animals fell sick or died, permanently thwarting any effort to turn them into commodities. Precisely for that reason, significant yet often uninformed efforts were made to ensure their health – often in vain. In the eyes of the traders, it was not the individual

**Figure 6.** Even after capture, animals such as this giraffe actively tried to resist their handling. Sammlung/Archiv alt-alfeld, Ruhe Photo Collection "Tierfänger Krüger," photographer unknown, c. 1900.

animal life that deserved protection, but rather their assigned sale and exchange value. Animals were always a means, never the end. They were of interest to the wildlife traders as long as they fulfilled the purpose compliant to the trade, that is either to carry burdens, yield their own body as food, or be sold. Yet these individuals brought in their own ability to act that often ran against the aims of the traders.

Examining the practices and relations of the global wildlife trade, it becomes clear that growing connections were simultaneously accompanied by disruptions, and the trade itself riddled with fractures and unpredictability. Thus the wildlife trade as a wide-ranging network is an excellent way to illustrate the complexity and multi-layered nature of globalization processes and to think about them as fragile and fractured pathways rather than linear trajectories.

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