



## *Circus Histories and Theories*

**21-22 June 2018**

*We add our own stories, each visitor, each visit, each night spent at the circus.  
I suppose there will never be a lack of things to say, of stories to be told and shared.*

- Erin Morgenstern, 'The Night Circus', 2011

Subaltern histories, popular cultures, animal studies, and transnational experiences have been gaining momentum in academia over the past decades, yet the circus remains more or less at its periphery. In recent years the few scholars working in this marginal area have made initial, but remarkable, attempts in organizing conferences and the anthology *Routledge Circus Studies Reader* which came out in 2016 is a breakthrough in introducing circus studies.

The conference, *Circus Histories and Theories* hosted by the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa will be a follow through of such pioneering efforts. It has a striking significance since this is the conference of its kind happening in the Global South and focusing on hitherto unexplored terrains such as India and Africa. The conference aims to explore an array of ideas such as subalternity, body and performance, spectatorship, itinerant entertainments, animal subjectivity, representations, children, various indigenous and contemporary technologies, emotion, legality and ethics of human-animal relations, transnational migration, global economy and the structural power of race, gender and caste.

The conference, *Circus Histories and Theories* will be held at the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (CISA), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa on 21-22 June, 2018. Both veteran and young research scholars from around the world will be presenting their work on diverse themes ranging from the representations of Africans in the nineteenth century American Wild West shows to the contemporary social circus. The presentations focusing on Asia will discuss Chinese acrobats in Latin America and the watershed moments in Indian circus such as the State ban on the performance of children and animals. This multidisciplinary

conference will be an important opportunity to discuss current scholarship relating to circus within the humanities and social sciences. The themes are broadly defined under the following panels:

## **Humanities Graduate Centre, Seminar Room**

---

Page | 2

**21 June 2018**

### **Registration**

**0900** Arrival and Coffee

**0930 to 0945**

### **Welcome**

Prof Dilip M. Menon (Director, Centre for Indian Studies in Africa)

**0945 to 1045**

### **Keynote**

Nisha Poyyapraph Rayaroth (SSRC Transregional Research Fellow at CISA)

**1045 to 1245**

### **Panel 1: Body, Physical Cultures and Nationhood**

**1045-1145**

Tracy Y. Zhang (Queen's University)

Contested Chinese-ness: Acrobatic Diplomacy in Cold War Latin America.

**1145-1245**

Sabine Hanke (University of Sheffield)

Exoticising the Foreign: Making Imperial Identities in the German and British Circus, 1912-45.

**Lunch Break: 1300-1400**

**1400-1715**

**Panel 2: Human and Nonhuman Performances and Questions of Ethics and Legality**

**1400-1500**

---

Page | 3

Peta Tait (La Trobe University)

Economic Opportunism, Morality and Technologies of Colonialism: Early Twentieth-Century Circus Touring Asia.

**1500-1600**

Eleonore Ribault (Chicago University)

Jumbo Stardust: Thoughts on Innocent Beings, Deviance and South Indian Circuses as Arenas for Moral Debates.

**Coffee Break: 1600-1615**

**1615-1715**

Aastha Gandhi (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Negotiating Laws: Animal, Child and Woman Performers of Indian Circus.

**Conference Dinner (only for conference participants) at 7 pm (venue TBA)**

**22 June 2018**

**0900-1200**

**Panel 3: Transnational Migration, Race and Contemporary Circus**

**0900-1000**

Robert W. Rydell (Montana State University)

Staging Representations of Africans at America's World's Fairs and Wild West Shows.

**1000-1100**

Jessica Kendall (SOAS, University of London)

Training Like a 'Native': Alternative Acrobatic Practices of Sudanese Circus Performers on Cultural Exchange in China.

**Break: 1100-1115**

**1115-1215**

---

Page | 4

Roy Gomez Cruz (Northwestern University)

*Los Cabaret Capricho: A study case on the Development of Contemporary Circus in Mexico under Transnationality.*

**Lunch Break: 1230-1330**

**1330 to 1530**

**Panel 4: Subalternity, Leisure and Spectatorship**

**1330-1430**

Janet M Davis (University of Texas at Austin)

'The World's Grandest, Largest, Best, Amusement Institution': Spectatorship, Community Formation and Conflict at the American Tenting Circus, 1825-1956.

**1430-1530**

Kim Baston (La Trobe University)

The Celebrated Circus Tunes: Music in the Early Modern Circus.

**Coffee Break: 1530-1545**

**1545-1645**

**Screening of Documentary Films Followed by a Discussion**

**The Flip Side: A Global Circus Story** (2018) directed by Val Wang and co-produced with Tracy Zhang

**El Circo en Rapa Nui [The Circus in Rapa Nui]** (2010) directed by Francisco Bermejo and produced by Pilar Ducci.

**1645-1715**

## **Concluding Remarks**

Prof. Dilip M Menon and Dr Nisha Poyyaprath Rayaroth