

GenCen Fall 2018 Colloquia Series

*New Research on Women and Gender,
Global and Local Perspectives*

Friday, September 21 1:30-3:00PM
International Center Room 303



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the Arts and Humanities



Re-Presenting the Indian Dancer: Gender, Sexuality and the New Orientalism

The figure of the 'Indian' dancer – depicted variously in the image of the devadasi, the tawa'if and the bayadere – has long captured imaginations on both sides of the colonial divide. In this paper, I historicize manifestations of the generalised figure of the Indian dancer in contemporary popular culture to examine its genealogy from the 18th century to the present. Drawing on examples from the visual and cinematic arts as well as from music and dance performances and literary texts, I analyse the ways in which this figure is evoked by different actors to varied effects. Moving beyond the dominant approach that centres the male Orientalist gaze however, I focus specifically on representations produced by women. So doing, I address the following questions: how is/has this figure been evoked by different women actors and to what specific effect? In what ways do representations of this figure converge and/or diverge with the identities of their producers? How do the tropes of female sexual agency and sensual femininity come to be attached to this figure by women, and what do they accomplish? My approach allows for a comparative analysis of Indian and Western constructions that sheds light on larger processes of gendered, sexual and racial-cultural identity formation. My paper thus presents an analysis of how gendered Orientalising discourses grounded in the colonial past are iterated in alignment with the gendered contingencies of the present.



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