

Welcome to the **Winter 2017 Speaker Series** of the **Indian Ocean World Centre**

Speaker: **Ms. Elizabeth Dyer**

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26 January 2017

5:45 pm, Peterson Hall, Room 116

World War II and African Variety Shows on Tour in the Indian Ocean World, 1939-1950



East African soldiers did more than labour and fight for the British Empire during World War Two. As the starring actors in variety shows that toured the Indian Ocean World, they issued creative challenges to the military's racialized hierarchy and criticized the colonial world order. In 1944 and 1945, three Nairobi-based all-African performance groups traveled to African, Middle Eastern, and Asian theatres of war that included Kenya, Egypt, Ceylon [Sri Lanka], India, and Burma [Myanmar]. This talk introduces previously unstudied scripts, photographs, and films of these performances, for which soldiers developed original songs and skits. The topical and site-specific qualities of these variety shows offer contemporary scholars of the Indian Ocean World access to an historical East African perspective into the variable social dynamics that underpinned the war. How did East African colonial subjects understand their transformation into salaried soldiers traveling and training in differently administered corners of the British Empire where war raged in the name of Democracy? East African performances reproduced American and European variety show structures and aesthetics, but their content challenged the British Empire's authority in East Africa and may have encouraged local spectators to do the same.



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