

**Photographs, Railways, Partition:
domiciled Europeans in the late Raj**

**By
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degree of
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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Deborah Nixon

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‘But our beginnings never know our ends’ (Eliot 1963, p. 21)

Perhaps when I began my project I thought I knew my ‘ends’ in terms of the thesis as an artefact but I could never have predicted the unquantifiable ends that accompanied it. Not only have I gained an understanding of the research process through my peregrinations in India, Australia and Britain but I also made friends as I went. The hospitality I was shown as I travelled helped to transform the unfamiliar to the familiar and eased my journeying.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on an analysis of a family narrative that is imbricated with the development of two significant technologies of modernity: photography and the railways. Originally both were a product of and complementary to the colonial project which brought with it new experiences and, through the consequences of Partition, fashioned national identities. The subjects created by these technologies were represented in images captured in vernacular photographs. However, over time as technologies were deployed into everyday life their effects reflected the changes taking place in the wider context of colonial India. My account of this time weaves the core biography of Leslie Nixon into a wider historical context to create a narrative that is derived from texts, semi-structured photo elicitation interviews using vernacular photographs (taken between 1910 and 1947) of the domiciled European and Anglo-Indian communities who lived along the Great Indian Peninsula Railway line in late colonial India. During my research I found little or no mention of photography practiced at an everyday level by long term ‘settlers’ that recorded life outside major cities. My combined reading of family photographs acts as an articulation of and between private, less authorised discourses against (but not counter to) those of the colonial bureaucracy. This raised questions and challenges around how to use family photographs in interviews to elicit accounts of personal experiences of public and very traumatic events like the Partition. I interrogate the stories people tell when presented with an image that resonates with the past and unsettles the present. Through my account I argue that photographs, to some degree, reflect the increasingly unstable colonial boundaries of the day. In addition various accounts by Gurkha soldiers and British officers in the last part of British rule during the Partition contribute a different perspective to the Partition narrative. Engagement with new technologies reflects the way physical space was experienced and managed during the late Raj and the inevitable outcome of colonial rule in the mayhem of Partition.