

## **RICHARD GEHRMANN**

### **'Imagining the "Oriental" woman: Australian soldiers in Imperial India'**

This paper examines the representation of women by Australian soldiers in Imperial India. For many Australians, India is a part of Asia that is often forgotten, despite a long shared history under the auspices of the British Empire. In 1947 neutralist India gained independence from Great Britain just as Australia began to be increasingly identified with the Western Alliance in the Cold War. While Indian and Australian history have moved apart since 1947, in the colonial era significant ties existed between these two subordinate components of the British Empire. This is particularly noteworthy when the military dimensions of the relationship between India and Australia is examined. In the decades prior to Indian independence, several hundred Australian male and female soldiers lived and worked in India either as part of the long term British imperial military establishment, or on short term exchange postings to India. This paper explores the representation of women in India by these soldiers, concluding that unrealistic (and unattainable) "orientalist imaginings" of the exotic shaped Australian expectations and representations of women at this time.

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