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DECOLONIZING MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY:

The Lives and Letters of Ida, Benoy, and Indira Sarkar

Jessica Namakkal

This article takes up the issue of interracial marriage and interracial families during the time of decolonization to argue that, despite continued knowledge production on interracial social formations, interracial subjects continue to be obscured and marginalized in histories of decolonization, anticolonialism, and postcolonial nation making. Working with subjects from India and Austria, this article follows the trajectories of one family-in-the-making as the wars in Europe and anticolonial agitation in South Asia pushed them to come together in transit to the United States, marry in Germany, have a daughter in Italy, and settle in Calcutta. This article argues that in order to delink these subjects from the gender, racial, and caste norms of their historical time period, we need to take a decolonial approach that deconstructs coloniality and prioritizes the “pluriverse,” or ability to transcend state-based and colonial categories.

In the fall of 1914, Ida Stieler (1892–1962), a young Austrian student on an exchange program in London, found herself in a difficult situation. Young Ms. Stieler had already spent a year in London studying English and was expecting to stay another when the war broke out, rendering her unwelcome in England. Rather than travel back to Austria, a journey that posed many dangers after the onset of war, or stay in London and face internment, Ida contacted an aunt and uncle in the United States who invited her to come live with them. On November 14, 1914, she boarded the *Philadelphia* and set sail from the port of Liverpool.¹

Over the course of her ten-day journey, Ida became close friends with a handful of Indian nationalists, many of whom were traveling as exiles, pushed out of India for their anticolonial politics and actions.² Decades later, Ida wrote that she was initially seated with the Indians because she was “very uncomfortable” on a ship that was full of “Belgian and French refugees [who] were full of hatred and bitterness” at Germans and Austrians.³ The captain took pity on her and sat her with the Indians on board, whom he considered (perhaps naively) to be politically neutral to the situation in Europe. Ida wrote that prior to this journey, she knew very little about India and was greatly touched by the impassioned debates she witnessed on the ship between some of the most important Indian nationalists of the

time. Despite the European background Ida shared with other travelers, she felt most at home with the Indians.

The motions of decolonization—from the formation of independence movements to acts of formal decolonization—changed the meaning of “home” for many people deeply embedded in colonial geographies and imperial formations. By the time the *Philadelphia* docked in New York, Ida and a young Bengali professor and sociologist, Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949), had become very close.⁴ Although Ida and Benoy parted ways once they landed in the United States, they regularly corresponded through letters over the course of the war. On November 14, 1922, eight years after their first meeting, Ida and Benoy married in Vienna. In her memoir, written after the death of her husband, Ida reflected on her first days with Benoy on the *Philadelphia*, writing “destiny has a distinct role to play in life. And it did play its role with us. It brought an Austrian girl from the Alps together with a Bengali gentleman from the riverine plains. Here two worlds met, two continents came together.”⁵ Two contrasting yet interdependent worlds, brought together through the tumult of war and anticolonial exile, came together in the marriage of Ida and Benoy Sarkar. Together they had a daughter, Indira Sarkar, born in Italy in 1925. Shortly following her birth, the Sarkars were expelled from Germany along with other Indian nationalists at the request of British forces.⁶ They chose to return to India, where they remained as a family until 1947 when Indira left to attend university in Paris. After Benoy passed away in 1949, Ida moved to Europe, never returning to India.

Although Ida was not familiar with the details of Indian anticolonial nationalism before her voyage on the *Philadelphia*, the relationship between German intellectuals and Indian nationalists was increasingly common in the early twentieth century.⁷ The historian Kris Manjappa argues that the “entanglements” that developed between German and Indian intellectuals from 1880 to 1945 were codependent, though uneven, relationships brought together by the desire for liberation from the world order established by nineteenth-century British imperialism. Taking this into consideration, it follows that Ida and Benoy found common ground, despite the many cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, and national divides that existed between them. The entanglements between Ida and Benoy, however, were not solely intellectual; they were also deeply intimate. Benoy, Ida, and Indira made their domestic life public by living as an interracial family that studied, thought, and wrote together. In an India on the verge of decolonization, their actions challenged widespread ideas about the importance of maintaining “purity” in the realms of race, religion, nation, and caste that often undergirded the political imperative to create a strong postcolonial nation in India.⁸

Historical subjects are complex beings such that it is often difficult for historians to recreate them in all their complexities given the tools available for analysis. The Sarkars' marriage was simultaneously revolutionary and entirely common; despite the marriage itself, as well as the birth of Indira, openly challenging ideas of racial, religious, and caste purity, in many ways the Sarkars lived an ordinary, comfortable life together, typical of the educated, upper-class cosmopolitan Bengali families of the era. Radical acts in history, however, are not always instigated by people who performed radical identities. In other words, historical subjects who might not have been avowed communists, anarchists, or feminists involved in explicitly radical leftist projects of resistance to capitalism, the state, or the patriarchy may still have been resisting conservative politics and ideology, even when they themselves held conservative positions. Indeed, portions of Benoy's anticolonial nationalist thought were explicitly conservative; he was, for a time, an admirer of the authoritarian aspects of fascism as a potential means to overcome colonial rule and strengthen ethnic nationalism.⁹ Following the thought and action of his fellow anticolonial nationalist Subash Chandra Bose, Benoy believed that military strength would be important to expel the British from India and establish a strong state. Like Bose, Benoy's anticolonialism prioritized the construction of a strong nation state over the other priorities of, for example, caste liberation or communist internationalism, espoused by leftist anticolonialists.

Yet if we look beyond Benoy's published work to the life he led in conjunction with Ida and Indira, we discover new pathways of decolonial praxis that are sometimes at odds with the "official" record. Resistance in the form of anticolonial nationalism is easy to identify and classify, even when it runs along conservative lines, while the quiet subversion of performing interracial intimacies, what I call "decolonial living," is submerged, often dismissed as apolitical and unimportant to theory or politics. The anticolonial thought and actions of Benoy Sarkar are well remembered, recorded, and celebrated in numerous academic and popular books and articles.¹⁰ Yet Ida and Indira Sarkar, who were clearly important agents in the production of Benoy's texts, in addition to being writers and scholars in their own right, are barely visible in histories of him. This dismissal follows traditional gender norms that see women, children, and families as unimportant to the production of theory, save for a few outlier women theorists who have gained prominence in the recent past. In this article, I argue that in order to delink the dominant idea in postcolonial studies that intellectuals and scholars create theory in order to understand the practices of everyday life from the masculinist regime of theory production, we need to understand lived practices as a theory in itself.

The distinction between postcolonial theory and decolonial living is important because while the resistance to colonialism in British India formally ended in 1947, decolonial practices continue to subvert the colonial norms adopted by the postcolonial state and society. I thus propose in this article not a history of radicalism but a radical history that looks at how intimate relationships informed, inspired, and pushed against normative expectations and behavior throughout the tumultuous time of decolonization. In the case of the Sarkar family, this means taking seriously the works of Ida and Indira as decolonial thinkers and doers.

Decolonizing Marriage, Dwelling in the Borders

Marriage is a political act, whether the people getting married perceive it to be or not. Social and legal debates in colonial South Asia over enacting legislation to police the age of consent, polygamy, widow remarriage, *sati* (so called “widow burning”), and miscegenation were important to the maintenance of colonial rule as well as for Hindu reform movements that sought to delineate differences between, for instance, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians. Debates that dealt with deeply intimate matters often played out in the public sphere, making the regulation of bodies and sexualities a matter of politics, both at the level of the colonial state and regional religious or village councils. As the feminist studies scholar Mary E. John writes, in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries in South Asia, “the sphere of the home, family, and marriage relations were critical institutional sites for social reformers and the first generation of feminists.”¹¹ Even in late nineteenth-century South Asia, as the home and family became separate from the colonial state owing to the British commitment to abstain from interference in “personal laws,” marriages were political acts, some of which supported the interests of the state and others that defied them for a variety of reasons ranging from anticolonial politics to the consolidation of caste power.¹²

The Sarkar family was engaged in thinking about states, nationalities, race, gender, and anticolonial independence, and they lived transnational lives that evaded the strictures of people fully immersed in one, or even two, states. Part of this pluralism was a function of empire itself, for beneath conquest was interaction between people, although most often through uneven power structures facilitated by colonialism. Throughout the colonial era, white colonial men (typically British but also French, Portuguese, and Dutch) were encouraged to marry local (Indian) women.¹³ Several Indian princes married white women in the early years of European settlement on the subcontinent.¹⁴ Although marriage and reproduction between white and Indian persons had occurred for centuries, by the late nineteenth century

the practice was increasingly viewed as dangerous to the cause of Indian nationalism.¹⁵

The inequalities of these mixed relationships were revealed during the movement for independence, as emphasis was placed on the need for a strong postcolonial nation state to produce "pure" citizens. Anglo-Indians and Eurasians were increasingly viewed as essentially non-Indian, despite political organizing around the Anglo-Indian identity by such leaders as Frank Anthony and the inclusion of Anglo-Indians in the Indian constitution (1950). In addition, the maintenance of caste power depended on discourses of purity and pollution that separated caste Hindus from "subordinate" castes and religions (especially Muslims and Christians). As the historian Shefali Chandra argues, the consolidation of caste power in the late nineteenth century came to include rendering white women as untouchable, pollutants to the purity of the Brahmanical Hindu body.¹⁶ By the early twentieth century, the era of acceptance for the Anglo-Indian community was drawing to a close.¹⁷

Benoy Sarkar was deeply disturbed by the popular Western association of India only with a "great" past and worked actively to counter Orientalist stereotypes of "the East as the guru of the West."¹⁸ Intellectual histories of Benoy paint him as an important yet somewhat contradictory thinker: an anticolonial nationalist "out of step with mainstream nationalism," a cosmopolitan Bengali who advocated for active resistance to the colonial state as well as a strong military state post-independence.¹⁹ His thinking on race and nation was complicated, changed over his lifetime, and, according to a recent biography by Satadru Sen, tended to align with reformers working to create clear boundaries for identity-based political constituencies, an intellectual move that was critical of his own family formation.²⁰ One way to interpret this is that by living as an interracial family in India in the mid-twentieth century, the Sarkars predicted that independent India would not be a friendly space for interracial families and multiracial people. Without understanding Benoy's writing within the context of his lived practices and own experiences of race and nation, it seems Benoy could have been advocating for racial and ethnic purity, but a reading against the grain suggests the opposite.

Historians have consistently buried, or perhaps overlooked, the relationships between husband and wife, father and daughter, and mother and daughter, isolating Benoy from his family. While it is in line with the field of intellectual history to consider a person's intellectual production separate from their own subjectivity or actions, this approach has long occluded persons with less power—women, children, laborers, people of color—from historical narratives. We may think of this as a problem of the past, but it is still thriving in histories written well into the twenty-first

century. Some historians of (male) intellectuals, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have gone so far as accusing women of poisoning their husband's intellectual genius and legacies.²¹ Yet women, as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends, were "researchers, copyists, collaborators, editors, proofreaders, and ghostwriters" in a practice that often took place in the home.²² Indeed, before they were married, Ida typed "several thousand pages of [Benoy's] manuscripts written in China, Japan and America."²³ While Ida wrote that she relished the opportunity to type her future husband's manuscripts, as she "admired his depth of knowledge and his spirit of free thought," it is surely the case that Benoy relied on Ida for her labor and her feedback, a serious task that has gone unacknowledged in the historiography.

Although we could see the Sarkars as outliers and thus easily dismissed as unique products of their time, they are just one example of many who espoused anticolonial politics while living transnational lives.²⁴ The inability to consider the Sarkars as a family lays in the lack of a theoretical approach that would allow for the complexity of their formation. It is difficult to understand the importance of the Sarkars as a microcosm of larger trends in how families came together in the mid-twentieth century if we follow trends in the literature that separate the colonial from the postcolonial, a difference often demarcated by the power of the changing state. In the remainder of this article, I argue that the Sarkar family, by marrying and living as a multiracial family in the public eye, contributed to the project of decolonization that challenged the colonial structure of the family that was shaped both by and in reaction to the colonial state. I turn here to the notion of the decolonial as a way to work our way out of nationalist historiographies that insist on analyzing colonial and postcolonial subjects as products of particular and separate racial-casteist-nationalist origins.

In order to decolonize marriage and the family, we need to understand praxis as theory, particularly because theory does not often translate into the intimate spaces of family life. As decades of feminist scholarship has shown, marriage is a patriarchal institution legitimated by the sexual act that legislates the right of men to govern women through sexual control.²⁵ As formal acts of decolonization occurred, the legislation of sex and marriage was not ruptured but often continued on in colonial form. Colonial violence continues in the postcolonial state and by extension spaces of postcolonial intimacy, as colonial categories of race, sex, gender, caste, class, and nationality define the borders that dictate the movements of bodies in everyday interactions. Acts of formal decolonization reinscribed colonial ideology of race and nation, often in the form of mainstream nationalism. The continued practices of reinscribing colonial violence into the contemporary world of the postcolonial (in this case, meaning after the colonial)

is the state of "coloniality," in the words of the decolonial thinker Walter D. Mignolo.²⁶ Turning from the colonial to the decolonial worldview means adopting a "polycentric world in which no one civilization is imposed over all the rest."²⁷ This is a worldview that the Sarkars knew well, even if they did not articulate it as such. While it was common at this time for liberal reformers to argue for universal equality, the Sarkars walked the path of the "pluriverse," exploring a multitude of ways of viewing the world while also understanding and discussing the political reality of inequality.

In the remainder of this article, I move away from the intellectual histories that define the scholarship on Benoy Sarkar and towards a social and cultural history of the family to argue that the Sarkars performed a variety of multiracial familial intimacies that challenged the patriarchal, racial, and casteist marriage norms of the time. The Sarkars not only wrote to and about each other, they published their letters and memoirs, thus enacting a performance of their family intimacy and transnational geographies for public consumption.²⁸ The Sarkars offer us two approaches to thinking of the family decolonially: first, by delinking the race, caste, and gender norms that have typified modern understandings of Indian national identity and, second, by showing how one family lived and operated within a pluriverse of understandings for interaction with the world. Through a close reading of Ida's memoir that details her experience of marrying an Indian man and moving to India alongside a reading of the letters written by Indira as she navigated the world, we can see what struggles, limitations, and successes these women who straddled ethnic, racial, and cultural identities experienced in the tumultuous time of decolonization. By fleshing out the history of the Sarkar family through the additional study of Ida and Indira, we will see how the colonial state, and eventually the postcolonial state, has depended on the stability of heteronormative and patriarchal gender relations as a foundation for patriotism and national sentiment.²⁹ The collective experiences of the Sarkar family challenge the Manichean divides of the colonial world by acting as a decolonial family living in a time of decolonization.

Coloniality, Whiteness, and Interracial Marriage in the Age of Decolonization

After Ida and Benoy reached the shores of the United States in 1914, they went their separate ways: Ida to her great-aunt's home in Cleveland and Benoy to San Francisco. The war made it difficult to correspond, but the young couple managed to send each other letters anyway. Benoy spent several of the war years in China and Japan, as Ida moved between the homes of her relatives, primarily in Ohio. From her writing, it is clear that

Ida missed Austria and Benoy equally—she pined to hear people speak German and make tarts and cakes “in the Austrian way” and spent her time singing Austrian songs while waiting for letters from Benoy. While deeply homesick, Ida also found that “it was easy to get Americanized.”³⁰ She believed that if she had not met Benoy on that fateful ship from Liverpool, she would have been happy to marry an American and live her life in the United States. Her wealthy uncle in Ohio was eager to introduce her to young American men and help her settle in the United States. Yet Ida wrote, “When I thought of Prof. Sarkar and re-called those wonderful eyes then I knew that nothing in the world could separate me from him.”³¹

The section of Ida’s memoir that details the time she spent waiting for Benoy in America is the only moment that she acknowledges her family’s concern about her being involved with an Indian man. Despite her continued insistence that she was in love with Benoy, her uncle “could not understand [her] attitude.” She wrote, “He meant it good with me. He wanted to see me settled in life, well-off in a nice American home with a good husband and a still more brighter future. What could an Indian give me in the way of money, luxury and security? He knew that life in India was complicated and difficult. The climate was unfavorable to Europeans. America was one of the richest countries in the world. India on the other hand was one of the poorest. How could I choose for the latter? How could I throw away such a golden opportunity? Why could I not change my mind?”³² Ida’s uncle was not the only person concerned with her choice to marry a “foreigner.” Benoy himself wanted to wait until they could return to Europe before Ida made a choice to marry him. He “had doubts” whether Ida would be able to leave her bourgeois European lifestyle for the “life of hardship in India.”³³ Ida herself acknowledged his initial hesitation, writing “Prof. Sarkar could have married me in America. But he was very understanding. He wanted me to return to Austria, see my people again after the war and then make a decision. He did not want me to marry him due to loneliness, homesickness or any other reason. He wanted me to be sure that I would neither repent nor think that I had made a mistake.”³⁴

The discussion over whether or not Ida and Benoy should marry was highly racialized and gendered. Both Benoy and Ida’s uncle pointed to the economic, political, and social inequalities between India and the West, attempting to dissuade the “love-struck” young woman from making a decision she would regret. While Ida was reluctant to leave behind her mother and sisters in Europe, she wrote that she loved Benoy and thus loved India and did not consider the potential of living there to be hardship.³⁵ Ida fell in love with not only a man but also India, a love for a nascent nation that she and Benoy shared. Ida’s uncle clearly thought that her dedication to following “love” was naive, fueled by the irrational emotions typical of a

young woman. He encouraged her to think about her future in terms of access to resources and wealth, not to throw away her life by marrying a man who had neither great wealth nor, as a nonwhite man, the means to obtain power or fortunes that he recognized. Her uncle's understanding of the global racial order is an example of the global reach of coloniality, which is co-constituted with modernity. As a nonwhite man, Benoy, in the eyes of Ida's white, Americanized uncle, would never have the means to support Ida the way a white man could in the "modern" world, even if and when India did achieve independence. Marrying Benoy would be an entanglement that would strip Ida of her status as a modern European woman, transforming her into a member of the colonized class, a clear step backwards.

Despite the warnings and hesitations, Ida and Benoy continued together. The couple was married twice: first in a "Catholic and civil ceremony" in Vienna and again after the honeymoon in a "Hindu ceremony" in Berlin.³⁶ Ida wrote that the ceremony in Berlin was "performed according to Hindu rites."³⁷ This description is incredibly vague and does not address any of the political, caste, or religious debates about what constituted a "Hindu" ceremony. Did a Hindu priest perform the wedding? Who recognized their union, and was there any dissent? It is probable that Ida was not aware that a great number of Hindu weddings at the time, particularly in Bengali culture, were in many ways a reaction to the overreach of the colonial state.³⁸ The "Indian traditions" that Ida writes about being important to their Hindu wedding address a community in exile more than anything else; she wrote that "all the Indians living in Berlin came to my wedding" and that "we had Indian food and Indian music. We all felt that we had been transplanted to India for a few hours."³⁹ Her experience of Hinduism was certainly cultural and, whether she acknowledged it or not, a political act.

As a prolific intellectual associated with the independence movement, Benoy was in the public eye even while he was abroad. His marriage to a white woman destabilized the nationalist approach to independence; by marrying a non-Indian and breaking with the dominant "tradition" in Bengali society of arranged marriage, Benoy severed his ties with the inner or private sphere of his birth and made his marriage and, with the birth of Indira, sexual life a matter of public knowledge. The power of coloniality includes the ability of imperialist and racist systems to define the "Other" of modernity; systems of patriarchy, implicit in marriage regulations, excluded Benoy and Ida from the mainstream discourse of anticolonial nationalism.⁴⁰ The pursuit of a "love marriage" over a "traditional" marriage arranged according to the needs and desires of the family to maintain caste and religious norms would have been seen as a "modern" or "European" move in direct contrast to a traditional Indian marriage.⁴¹ As the political scientist Partha Chatterjee has shown, anticolonial nationalism in India tended to

manifest in a need to “protect” tradition, especially in the domestic realm.⁴² Additionally, Shefali Chandra argues that beginning in the late nineteenth century, “it was the Brahman woman who was charged with embodying the transfer of contestations over race, sexuality, and caste.”⁴³ It could be that by marrying for love, Ida and Benoy were excluded from the pantheon of important nationalists.⁴⁴ Ida has been wiped from the national historiography, leaving a “purified” version of Benoy’s anti-imperial vision, free of the taint of miscegenation and the challenge to caste endogamy, of sullyng the national body. The marriage of Benoy and Ida was not simply an interracial marriage but a break with a cultural norm based on the exclusion of non-Hindu women from respectable Hindu society.

The “meeting of East and West” in pre-independence India was often romanticized as a cultural and intellectual meeting that preserved the “purity” of the races and the nation states that protected the interests of the racial subjects. Almost all the Anglo-Indian couples in India were a pairing of a European man and an Indian woman. However, there were several Western women—including the Briton, Theosophist, and one-time leader of the Indian National Congress Annie Besant; the Irish nationalist and follower of Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble); and the French spiritualist and companion to the nationalist freedom fighter turned yogi Sri Aurobindo, the Mother (Mira Alfassa)—who became well known in South Asia, Europe, and the United States for their transformation from Westerners into, at least in appearance, Indian women, albeit with a level of privilege in politics and the public sphere unknown to most Indian women.⁴⁵ These women have been written about, their lives dissected and sometimes glorified, partly because of their ability to transgress what many at the time saw as racial and cultural boundaries and construct long-lasting nonsexual relationships with South Asian men (Margaret Noble and Mira Alfassa) or simply remain single and chaste (Annie Besant).

Unlike these “remarkable” women, the lives of other Western women who married Indian freedom fighters have been left out of the narratives of Indian independence movements and Indian national histories.⁴⁶ Subash Chandra Bose was also married to an Austrian woman, Emilie Schenkl, although their marriage was kept a secret until after his death in 1945.⁴⁷ Evelyn Roy (née Trent), an American woman and the first wife of M. N. Roy, accompanied Roy all over Europe, from Berlin to Paris to Amsterdam, as he attempted to evade arrest; they were both detained in Paris in 1925. The entire time Roy and Evelyn were together, he was forced into exile, and they never lived in India together.⁴⁸ Roy’s second marriage to Ellen Gottschalk was more public, and they did live together in Dehra Dun, although Ellen was “murdered under mysterious circumstances in 1961.”⁴⁹ In some ways, it was easier for these couples to live together abroad, away

from the established Anglo-Indian culture that was very Anglo-centric and practiced conservative, pro-British politics. Ida and Benoy were not typical of the Anglo-Indian community but chose to live in India, the land Benoy devoted his life to. Ida went with Benoy to India and stayed there throughout his entire life. Their marriage was very much public knowledge, as they made their home and brought up their daughter Indira in Calcutta and often made appearances in public together.

While relationships between Indian men and white women may have comprised a minority of Anglo-Indian relations, there are important reasons why there has been limited discussion of the children born of a white mother and an Indian father. The pairing of a European man and an Indian woman allowed for the reification of imperial gender roles, allowing the European man to continue in his role of domineering patriarch, wielding power over the impoverished Indian woman, who had been subject to the poor sexual politics of Indian men. The Anglo-Indian relationship of a European man and an Indian woman were, in many ways, a cut and dry example of Western imperialism—a system where Indian women were the victims of European imperialism and *white* patriarchy. The few European or Western women who did marry or have children with Indian men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were largely portrayed as sexual deviants, frowned upon by colonialists who saw these women as traitors to their race and the colonial order as well as by some Indian nationalists who feared the demise of the “Hindu race.”⁵⁰ The chastity of the caste Hindu woman set her apart from the white woman.⁵¹ The perceived openness of white women’s sexuality in India during the late colonial period was seen as dangerous and worked to keep Indian men and Western women from forming families. By marrying into a colonial society, Ida faced the legacy and memories of the many white women who had come to India before her, despite her Austrian, and not English, heritage. Yet her whiteness also gave her geopolitical power that reinforced coloniality while she lived in India. Ida’s sexual relationship with Benoy was simultaneously disruptive of the colonial order and an example of how whiteness carried privileges that continued to oppress many other subjectivities in terms of caste, race, and religion. Despite her disruption of the caste order, her life remained mostly undisturbed, showing how whiteness carried power over caste hierarchies.

Benoy and Ida left Europe for an indefinite stay in India shortly after the birth of Indira in 1925.⁵² While Ida’s remembrances of assimilating to daily life in India are very positive, it is also clear that there was a sphere of the private life of Indian women that Ida could not access because of her whiteness. She desired to learn about Indian women and their ways of life, and several of the Indian women she met in Europe, before she came to India, helped her by dressing her in saris and telling her things about

Indian women.⁵³ Still, when the family first arrived in Bombay, Ida wrote that “everything was new to me—the people, the clothes, the languages, the manners and customs, the daily life, the food, etc.”⁵⁴ She noted that although her husband and other Indians she had met had told her about life in India “theoretically,” she took some time to get used to a new way of living and tried her best to “not criticise anything that was different and strange.”⁵⁵ She was encouraged that the Taj Hotel in Bombay, usually reserved for Indian nationals only, allowed her to stay because she was “now an Indian by marriage and the colour did not count anymore.”⁵⁶ For Ida, her whiteness was overshadowed by her husband’s brown skin, rendering her an Indian by marriage.

Despite her open mind and stated desire to live as an Indian wife, Ida found that while the doors of the Taj were open to her, many others were closed. As the family traveled the country, they were always given a separate kitchen and cook to prepare their “European” meals, a signal that while marriage had transformed Ida in some spaces, Benoy was also transformed into a less Indian subject than before his travels and marriage. Ida remained curious about how Indian women prepared food, but she “was never allowed to go to the kitchen.” The raja who owned the palace that the Sarkars were staying in told her that he was also not allowed to go into the kitchen “ever since his return from Europe” and that “this rule applied to anybody who had been in the West.”⁵⁷ As she pursued discussions with Indian women in these homes, she found herself engaged in conversations that compared the lives of European women with those of Indian women. She was surprised to learn that “just as we have false ideas about the women in India so they had wrong notions about western women.”⁵⁸ The Indian women told Ida some of the most common stereotypes of Western women that circulated in India at the time: that they had loose sexual morals, cheated on their husbands, and would eventually get divorced, all ideas that had circulated widely in colonial India to separate white women from Indian women.⁵⁹

The fact that Ida never explicitly wrote about caste, her own relationships to caste, or caste in her Indian communities points to the ways in which caste privilege and whiteness reinforced each other. Ida was prevented from accessing certain spaces, including kitchens, because her whiteness was equated with impurity and thus untouchability. While this was confusing to Ida, it did not really affect her life in any major ways, as the Indian men around her made light of these restrictions and reassured her that her position of privilege was intact. Building on Shefali Chandra’s work on whiteness, patriarchy, and caste power, we can see from this incident that Ida’s whiteness worked with caste power to reproduce structures of power and coloniality.⁶⁰

Despite not always recognizing the systems of power she was complicit in, Ida was sensitive to prejudices and stereotypes and, with her husband, believed deeply in the right of India to be independent of colonial rule. Yet in her writing, she falls into some common tropes of colonial women writing about living in India. She tellingly remarks several times throughout her memoir that she was “the first Western woman” who a variety of people had seen—in a market in Calcutta and in the palace of Raja Shivaprasad Gupta in Benares (Varanasi). It is fascinating that so many Western women believed that the attention paid to them on the streets and in the homes of India was because those people had never seen a Western woman before. Curiosity certainly played a role in the alleged fascination that local women had for Ida, but it is highly probable that most people in the colonial city had many interactions with Westerners throughout the year.⁶¹ By failing to acknowledge the history of Westerners in India, Ida continued to live outside of the realm of Indian political society, both privately and publicly. Ida dwelled in a border zone defined by her whiteness and her entanglement with Benoy; she was both complicit in imperial rule and resistant to it, a complicated position that was often without anchor during the times of decolonization, as states were in flux and colonial knots became loose in the struggle for independence. While marriage did not actually conceal Ida’s whiteness, her daughter Indira had access to different Indian spaces than Ida, both in India and within the diasporic community in France, and experienced a further destabilizing of herself as a subject dwelling in the space of decolonization.

The Pluriverse of Indira Sarkar

Indira Sarkar was born into a world that was undergoing paradigmatic changes in the realm of nationalist politics and culture, which she came to challenge through publishing personal essays in the form of letters detailing her life as an Indian student in Paris. Moving through and beyond her predetermined identities—as an Indian, a woman, and a daughter—Indira held a pluriversal view of the world and argued in her letters that widespread adherence to belief in organic national and ethnic identities had stymied intellectual opportunities for many non-Western thinkers. She challenged the dichotomy of East/West by seeking out the commonalities between her life as a woman in India and the lives of the European women that she met in India, France, and across Europe and by questioning the stereotypes and assumptions that guided their interactions.⁶² She challenged binary distinctions not only through her ideas but also by writing letters that, while ostensibly addressed to her parents, were regularly published in two Calcutta-based English-language journals, *The Calcutta Review* and

Eur-Asia, between 1947 and 1949. Perhaps inspired by the letters written by Jawaharlal Nehru to his own daughter named Indira, published as *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* in 1929, Indira Sarkar reversed the paternal role of a father imparting wisdom to his daughter by detailing her travels and studies to her father and mother as she moved throughout Europe.⁶³ As the sociologist and scholar of the epistolary form Liz Stanley has written, “letters are *dialogical*. They are not one person writing or speaking about their life, but a communication or exchange between one person and another or others.”⁶⁴ The dialogue initiated by Indira through her letters signified her intention to make her studies, travels, and reflections a tool for others to break from the “traditions” of colonial governance that continued to rule the lives of Indian women, an example of decolonial living.

Indira left India in 1947 to pursue her studies at the Sorbonne. Her academic interests were primarily in the field of French literature; she had completed a master’s degree in French at the University of Calcutta in 1946. Additionally, like many young women of her class and education, she was interested in social work as a means towards women’s uplift. Before Indira left for Paris, she wrote a curious little book that brought together her interests in “social work and women’s activities” and women in literature.⁶⁵ *Social Contacts of French Women in Calcutta* is split into two sections: the first half devoted to telling a narrative of Indira’s interactions with a group of young French women who were in Calcutta during the final years of the war (1943–1945), employed in the work of *assistance sociale*. The second half of the book is comprised of short literary essays focused on “two heroines of French drama,” the character of Chimene in Pierre Corneille’s *Cid* and Roxane in Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*, to explore “some more ideas about French women.”⁶⁶ The first half of the book gives great insight into the seeds of Indira’s interest in how people from supposedly different cultures came to (mis)understand each other.

Upon meeting a group of young women from France in Calcutta, Indira was quickly challenged on her assumption that European women had much greater privilege and control over their lives than the typical Indian woman. Before meeting them, she had “felt how poor Indian womanhood was today in regard to these [European] aspects of modern culture and vocation.”⁶⁷ Yet as she continued to spend time with the women and have more in-depth conversations, she was shocked to learn that the women were planning on marrying and having many children. She wrote, “French girls especially are held up as the enemies of married life and the apostles of freedom from family burdens. And here I was walking alongside of three young French women, 22 to 26—all representing middle-class intellectual families—all with high University education—and all engaged in social work. And their immediate wish was marriage, motherhood, and raising

six to eight children."⁶⁸ The supposed modernity of the European woman was shattered when Indira learned that the desires of the French women were in line with the decidedly "non-modern" traditions she had witnessed in India. Indira continued, "These young women . . . simple, God-fearing, home-loving, family minded—were they children of Paris, gay, cosmopolitan, up to date Paris? It seemed to me I had just said adieu to a number of unsophisticated village lasses but endowed with high academic qualifications and equipped with serious personality."⁶⁹ Disarmed by this encounter, Indira prepared herself to leave for Europe with new questions about the invention of national cultures.

A key component of decolonial thinking is exposing the constructedness of coloniality and blurring colonial binaries, a project Indira undertook through writing letters to her parents that were subsequently published in India. The letters, in a way, are one-sided; I have not located in any archive the responses that Ida or Benoy may have sent to Indira. Yet the letters are also what Liz Stanley calls "open," by way of publication, thus occupying a space somewhere between public and private "as well as between here and there, now and then, presence and absence."⁷⁰ Indira was, through writing from Europe for publication in India, both located outside of India and read within it. She was a Sarkar, a name strongly associated with Bengali nationalism, yet she was, in her words, "Italian born" of an Austrian mother. The letters were for her family, both in the form of her biological family and her national family, but were written in English (not French, not Bengali) and therefore were accessible to a reading public that stretched well beyond India.

While Indira does direct some personal information to her mother and father in the letters (for example, "as for the song, I shall sing your favorite" and "in Swamiji's library there was a copy of your *Creative India*"), none of the printed letters include salutations or the simple sentences inquiring about health or well-being that one would expect from a letter between a daughter and her parents, suggesting they were edited for publication.⁷¹ The same editorial note printed above each letter in the journals designates Indira's letters as being of particular interest to women and "Indian families" that "had no contact with foreign countries." Her tales of living on her own in Paris and traveling throughout Europe were meant to show other Indian women that they could safely venture outside of India and allow those who were not able to travel the opportunity to live vicariously through her.

Indira began her journey believing her identity was flexible and found great joy in the seemingly endless possibilities her family makeup provided. She was determined to sample new identities while in France. She wrote that her first task was to be "Frenchified" by becoming fluent in French and spending time with others who considered themselves French. Indira

was also curious about her Italian roots—although neither of her parents were Italian, Indira was born in Bolzano, a town that had been Austrian before it was ceded to Italy after the First World War. She wrote in a letter in 1948 that “people call me *nata Italiana* (Italian-born girl) because of my *città di nascita* (town of birth).”⁷² She was also eager to meet other people with mixed backgrounds, which she quickly did. Indira boarded at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, an international campus for students, artists, and researchers founded by André Honnorat after the conclusion of the First World War. The residence halls of the Cité were sponsored by individual nations, and while it was not required that students from that particular country live in their home country’s pavilion, they often did. India did not build a house at the Cité until 1968, so Indira was placed in the College Franco-Britannique, where she met many young people from around the world. Her letters detail the many different friends she made who had similar mixed backgrounds: two sisters, Raia and Suzanne Perez, had a Spanish father and a Turkish mother, while her friend Huguette Balzola came from a family with a Mexican father and a French mother.⁷³

Despite her connections with other interracial women in Paris, after she began her studies in France, Indira realized that people’s perceptions of her and of India shaped what spaces she could actually access. Indira knew where her family came from, but people often questioned her about her own skin color and national identity, which had a destabilizing effect. Throughout her writings, Indira openly discussed the backgrounds of both her mother and her father, taking great pride in the rich heritage of her Austrian family. Still, she primarily identified with other people originating from India. When in India, she discussed Europeans as if separate from herself, as the “them” in the “us and them” dichotomy, while in Europe, she identified other Indians as belonging to the same group as herself. When, for example, she befriended the French women in Calcutta, they asked to take a picture of her as a “souvenir of their first Indian friend.”⁷⁴ While she was quick to reference her aunts, uncles, and cousins who were European and lived in Europe, she also noted that when returning to Paris from a trip to Italy, the French girls told her “how brown you have become!” while others “can’t understand how anyone can become so dark in Europe when the sun in India is so much hotter.”⁷⁵ At a function at the Maison Internationale, Indira spoke with an Austrian economist, Mr. Lavandowski, who told her that he found it quite hard to believe she had an Austrian mother because “my colour was quite Indian to him.”⁷⁶ Indira’s identity was subject not only to her understanding of herself but also to the comments and questions of the people around her. In some ways, similar to the experience of the colonial subject portrayed in the theorist Frantz Fanon’s decolonial text *Black Skin, White Masks*, Indira had to learn that there were limits to the identities she

could perform, depending on how certain eyes viewed her; her subjectivity was created not by herself but in response to the gaze of, for both her and Fanon, whiteness and the French Academy.⁷⁷ Indira was both Indian and not Indian, a subjectivity that brought her both privilege and dismissal, freedom and constraint.

In Paris, Indira found a network in place for connecting Europeans interested in India with the three dozen or so Indian students who were living there. As a representative of India, Indira met many Europeans who were deeply devoted to certain spiritual ideals they associated with India. Indira became acquainted with the Société des Amis du Bouddhisme in February 1948 and was taken to meet several active members of the center who told her "India is their *mère spirituelle*."⁷⁸ At one point during her stay in Paris, Indira was invited to the house of Mme. Sauton, a follower of Swami Siddheswarananda, who was at the time residing in this French woman's house. Two French women accompanied Indira to dinner, both "disciples" of the Swami and very interested in visiting India. Indira remarked that the dinner party guests "made me sing Tagore's *Jana-gana-mana* and Dwijen Roy's *Dhana-dhanya-pushpe*." She continued, "I find that without these two songs, it is impossible to associate with Europeans. They are our very 'capital.' Shall I call it spiritual capital or material capital?"⁷⁹ Her presence at social functions was tied to her ability to perform a well-known Bengali identity, hardly the prime interest of a young woman attempting to be "Frenchified."

Indira was well aware of the divide between herself and Europeans. She consistently observed in her letters that Europeans were allowed much more freedom to draw from and study a multitude of cultures and identities than Indians. Considering the Indians who were studying in Paris at the same time as her, she noted that while Western students in Paris "make it a point to carry on investigations into topics of French culture," "that is the exact opposite of what we Indians as a rule study in France. Indian scholars generally avoid French themes and do a doctorate in Indian themes . . . it appears that up till now virtually every Indian scholar who has obtained doctorate at Paris wrote on one or other Indian subject."⁸⁰ This observation very clearly describes the colonial system of knowledge production—Western scholars and academics produce a body of knowledge on any area or peoples of the world that they may choose and then turn around and teach that knowledge to the few upper-class bourgeois colonial subjects who may be able to travel abroad for education. As Indira noted, it was not generally accepted for an Indian to become an expert on French topics—this was not how the academy worked. She, on the other hand, believed that "as I am in France it should be my interest to know French civilisation as intimately as

possible. Hence my choice of lectures relating to the great makers of French literature and thought."⁸¹

By rejecting the dominant culture of traveling to the cosmopolitan centers of Europe to learn from the foremost "experts" on all lands, peoples, and strains of intellectual thought, Indira engaged in a decolonial project. She did not outwardly dismiss French academic interpretations of Indian history, literature, and philosophy, but she did not privilege it over the work on the same subjects by scholars in India. In this way, she opened her mind to multiple understandings of the same subject while acknowledging and taking account of the position of the producer of the knowledge; she expressed her interest in "trying to make myself familiar with the French interpretations about Indian" subjects as well as wishing to "understand a little bit something of French interpretations of European literature and culture" by attending lectures on German literature as well.⁸² Like her father, she was suspicious of the idea of fixed culture and worked to break down these epistemic borders in both her private life and in the public space of her published letters.

Conclusion

After Benoy died in 1949, Indira secured a post in the Office of the Legation of India in Bern, Switzerland.⁸³ Instead of Indira moving to India to be close to her mother, Ida came to Europe to live with her daughter until her death in 1962. Indira married Dr. Basanta Bihari Palit in 1963.⁸⁴ Palit was an engineer who lectured at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich; they had a son, Orun Kumar Palit, in 1965. Until her marriage, she worked as a translator and interpreter for the Indian Embassy in Switzerland, translating documents, letters, and memos from French, German, and Italian into English. She also published several books on topics ranging from Bengali poets to French literature.

The Sarkars were both a cosmopolitan and transnational family who often defied the cultures and traditions of their respective social environments. The work of Benoy and subsequently Indira questioned those same norms by showing that you can overcome seemingly static traditions by the "practices of everyday life." Ida, as partner, mother, and friend, was an essential member of this project, devoting her life and mind to envisioning what a family could accomplish together. By living, working, and studying as a loving family and showing that nationality did not define individual relationships, the Sarkars set an example for the possibility of transnational, decolonial families and communities. The exclusionary nature of nationalist discourse discouraged people from different nations from being together,

and the histories of these families have been pushed into histories of diaspora, seen as separate from those belonging to and representative of the nation state. Exploring the history of a transnational family mired in colonial politics and social relations, of an Austrian mother, an Indian father, and a multiracial, transnational daughter allows us to push the boundaries of national gendered histories, which have tended to focus on the history of women *qua* women and, more recently, the history of men *qua* men or the history of families within one national context. For the Sarkars, what mattered more than anything was working and studying collectively, an act that brought them, as Ida noted, enough happiness and wealth to sustain them.

While the Sarkar family did not “decolonize” marriage, their lives do show one example of how marriage and family formation can be a part of the decolonizing project. The “decolonial option” pushes us to think about how local histories help the “relentless project of getting us all out of the mirage of modernity and the trap of coloniality.”⁸⁵ Decolonizing marriage and the family allows for the histories of a multitude of familial intimacies that exist contrary to the logic of states and nationalisms. Acknowledging the gender norms that have obscured histories of women’s labor and agency and delinking masculinity from anticolonial thinking is an important step in exploring the plural anticolonial worldviews developed in the twentieth century. They have been forgotten because there is little room in the historical record for subjects who actively defy accepted norms.

The family is often a site of politics, although one states prefer to ignore because they are difficult to control. As a move from postcolonial critique, which has in many ways become intertwined with regional histories, exploring decolonial histories of South Asia offers the possibility of widening the postcolonial to understand the many lives dwelling on the borders of national histories. The Sarkar marriage and family were intimacies simultaneously engendered by and in defiance of empire, both possible and impossible at the same time. They dwelled in borders created by empire, living lives that questioned the stability of colonial and postcolonial categories. It is in these borders that we can glimpse everyday resistance to empire, one example of many towards living a decolonial life.

NOTES

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¹Ida Sarkar, *My Life with Prof Benoy Kumar Sarkar*, trans. Indira Palit Prabhat (Calcutta: Prabhat, 1977), 3–4.

²Passengers on the ship included Lala Lajpat Rai, Jagadish Chandra Bose and his wife Abala Bose, and Raja Shivaprasad Gupta, among others. See *ibid.*, 6–7.

³*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁶In 1925, Germany expelled twenty Indian nationalists from Berlin. See Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 102.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Kris Manjapra, “The Impossible Intimacies of MN Roy,” *Postcolonial Studies* 12, no. 2 (2013): 169–84, 172.

⁹Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 209.

¹⁰Satadru Sen, *Benoy Kumar Sarkar: Restoring the Nation to the World* (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2015); Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1461–85; Swapan Kumar Bhattacharyya, *Indian Sociology: The Role of Benoy Kumar Sarkar* (Burdwan, India: University of Burdwan, 1990); and Subodh Krishna Ghoshal, *Sarkarism: The Ideas and Ideals of Benoy Kumar Sarkar on Man and His Conquests* (Calcutta: Chucker-vertty Chatterjee & Co., Ltd., 1939).

¹¹Mary E. John, “Feminist Perspectives on Family and Marriage: A Historical View,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 8 (2005): 712–15, 712.

¹²Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹³Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁴William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: Penguin, 2004).

¹⁵Kumari Jayawardena, *Erasure of the Euro-Asian: Recovering Early Radicalism and Feminism in South Asia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2007).

¹⁶Shefali Chandra, “Whiteness on the Margins of Native Patriarchy: Race, Caste, Sexuality, and the Agenda of Transnational Studies,” *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 1 (2011): 127–53.

¹⁷Lionel Caplan, *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Postcolonial World* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Sathoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the “Domiciled Community” in British India, 1858–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Alison Blunt, “‘Land of our Mothers’: Home, Identity, and Nationality for Anglo-Indians in British India, 1919–1947,” *History Workshop Journal* 54, no. 1 (2002): 49–72.

¹⁸Goswami, "Imaginary Futures."

¹⁹Sen, *Benoy Kumar Sarkar*, 1.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 51.

²¹Bonnie Smith, "Historiography, Objectivity, and the Case of the Abusive Widow," *History and Theory* 31, no. 4 (1992): 15–32.

²²*Ibid.*, 17.

²³Sarkar, *My Life*, 20.

²⁴The early twentieth century was a time of global movement for anticolonial thinkers and organizers who created movements for independence. The *Ghadar* movement, instrumental in independence efforts, was based largely in the United States. See Maia Ramnath, *From Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California, 2011). The great Marxist thinker and one-time student of Benoy Sarkar, M. N. Roy, spent significant amounts of time in France, Germany, the United States, and Mexico and was the co-founder of the Mexican Communist Party. See Kris Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Routledge, 2010). As Harald Fischer-Tiné has shown, Switzerland was an important contact zone for anticolonial nationalists, including Shyamji Krishnavarma, in the early twentieth century in his work "The Other Side of Internationalism: Switzerland as a Hub of Militant Anti-Colonialism, c. 1910–20," in *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, ed. Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 221–58.

²⁵Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

²⁶Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸Kris Manjapra has argued that M. N. Roy's published letters that he wrote from prison to his lover Ellen Gottschalk are a "document of revolutionary intimacy." I believe this extends to the realm of the family in the case of the Sarkars. See Manjapara, "Impossible Intimacies," 173.

²⁹On the important relationship between gender and the Indian nation, see Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectres of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

³⁰Sarkar, *My Life*, 14.

³¹*Ibid.*, 16.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Bhattacharyya, *Indian Sociology*, 76.

³⁴Sarkar, *My Life*, 20–21.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 16.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 27–29.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity*.

³⁹Sarkar, *My Life*, 30.

⁴⁰For an elaboration on the intersections of race and gender in the definition of “coloniality,” see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 240–70.

⁴¹Perveez Moody, “Love and the Law: Love-Marriage in Delhi,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): 223–56.

⁴²Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁴³Chandra, “Whiteness on the Margins,” 141.

⁴⁴Many thanks to Saiba Varma for this insight.

⁴⁵On Annie Besant, see Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001). On the question of Western women in India, see also Barbara N. Ramusack, “Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865–1945,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990): 309–21; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Rule* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1995); and Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴⁶Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden*, see especially “Part V: Comrades in Arms” on the lives of Agnes Smedley, an American socialist and author who was married to Virendranath Chattopadyaya, and Evelyn Roy (née Trent). Jayawardena shows how these women have been expunged from the history of the Indian Communist Party and the biographies of their husbands (both couples were eventually divorced) despite the important roles they played in European operations of the Indian freedom movement and the first years of the Indian Communist Party.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁸Manjapra, *M. N. Roy*, 75.

⁴⁹Manjapra, “Impossible Intimacies,” 173.

⁵⁰Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden*, 3–4.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Indira was born on April 14, 1925. The Sarkars left for India in July or August 1925. Sarkar, *My Life*, 33.

⁵³Ida attributes her crash course in Indian women to two princesses she met in Berlin: Princess Shakuntala of Baroda and Princess Indira Bhagwat of Indore. Sarkar, *My Life*, 30.

⁵⁴Ibid., 36.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 37.

⁵⁷Ibid., 47.

⁵⁸Ibid., 46.

⁵⁹Chandra, "Whiteness on the Margins."

⁶⁰I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of Women's History* whose comments helped me make this point clear.

⁶¹This is, notably, less true for people in small villages.

⁶²Indira Sarkar, *Social Contacts of French Women in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Chuckerverty Chatterjee, 1947).

⁶³Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters from a Father to His Daughter* (Allahabad, India: Allahabad Law Journal Press, 1929).

⁶⁴Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/Biography* 12, no. 3 (2004): 201–35, 202.

⁶⁵Sarkar, *Social Contacts*, ix.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., 6.

⁶⁸Ibid., 9.

⁶⁹Ibid., 11.

⁷⁰Stanley, "The Epistolarium," 209.

⁷¹Indira Sarkar, "The Fourth Month in France," *Eur-Asia*, 1948, 1–6, 4–5.

⁷²Ibid., 2.

⁷³Indira Sarkar, "The Indian Colony at Paris," *Eur-Asia*, May 1948, 383–87, 384.

⁷⁴Sarkar, *Social Contacts*, 37.

⁷⁵Indira Sarkar, "Academic and Cultural Tidbits from Cité Universitaire (April–July 1948)," *The Calcutta Review*, November 1948, 97–112, 98–99.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

⁷⁷Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; rev. ed. London: Pluto Press, 2008).

⁷⁸Indira Sarkar, "Getting Frenchified," *Eur-Asia*, 1948, 1–4, 2.

⁷⁹Sarkar, "The Fourth Month in France," 4–5.

⁸⁰Sarkar, "Getting Frenchified," 2.

⁸¹Indira Sarkar, "Student Life at the Sorbonne," *Eur-Asia*, 1948, 1–7, 5.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³Swami Sambuddhananda to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, 9 August 1951, in *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents: Presidency Period*, ed. Valmiki Choudhary (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1991), 91.

⁸⁴Frank Raj, "A Diaspora Love Story: Meet Dr. Orun Palit—Private Swiss Banker," *The International Indian* 21, no. 1 (2014): 22–24, http://theinternationalindian.com/desh_aur_diaspora014.html.

⁸⁵Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity*, 17.
