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Chapter 2

"Women of the World Unite": Frieda Hauswirth Das, Women's Education, and Feminist Knowledge Transfers between India and Switzerland

Claire Louise Blaser

Abstract: In the 1930s, the books of Frieda Hauswirth Das were some of the most popular publications on India in the Swiss public sphere. As a woman born in rural Switzerland who emigrated to the US and later to India, and who was married to an Indian man, Hauswirth's life fascinated audiences in Switzerland just as much as her writing. This chapter takes a closer look at how various experiences and encounters in Switzerland, the US, and India shaped Hauswirth's political consciousness and how she eventually translated her core beliefs around feminism as well as colonialism into her writing, presenting Swiss readers with an unusually candid and political image of India.

> Only the older generation would today know the name of the well-travelled Frieda Hauswirth of Saanen. [...] Frieda Hauswirth was a restless globetrotter and spent long periods of time in India, the United States, and in Mexico. [...] Her popular [*volkstümliche*] autobiographical description of her marriage to the Indian Sarangadhar Das in the book with the English title *A Marriage to India*, in particular, made her famous. [...] Frieda's book about the contemporary position of women in India, titled *Women in Purdah*, also caused a stir at the time. To this day, said book is considered a reference work on women questions in libraries across the world. [...] [She was] a woman of Saanen who ventured out into the wide world [and] advocated with total dedication for the rights of women at a very early period. [...] [A]lthough she travelled around the world for the most part of her life, her heart always remained in her native valley.[1]

With these words, the local newspaper of the municipality of Saanen, situated in a mountain valley in the canton of Bern in Switzerland, announced in 1991 the arrival of a set of "memorabilia" of Frieda Mathilde Hauswirth (1886–1974) from California that were to be given into the care of the regional museum and archive. The title of the small announcement referred to Hauswirth as a "significant persona of Saanen," yet only seventeen years after her death, the majority of the residents in the region apparently had no recollection of her name, let alone her significance. Similarly, Hauswirth did not appear in any major publications

1 *Anzeiger von Saanen* 1991. This and all subsequent translations are mine.

in the field of Swiss history until recently.[2] This despite the fact that this farmer's daughter from rural Switzerland sold tens of thousands of books in Switzerland, Britain, and the United States throughout the 1930s, exhibited her paintings (often with scenes from Indian life and culture) in galleries around the world, and was considered an authority on Indian women and politics in the Swiss public sphere well into the 1950s.

In this respect, Hauswirth shares a fate similar to the other remarkable protagonists whose histories this volume explores. One obvious reason for a widespread disinterest in these individuals' stories and legacies was the methodologically limited scope of vision in Swiss history, which has only recently begun to appreciate the effect that the innumerable Swiss actors and institutions who were active "abroad" had "back home." Hauswirth's life is much too "transnational" for a history framed by the physical territory of the modern nation state:[3] although she grew up in the Swiss village of Gstaad and received her primary education there, as well as her vocational training in a domestic school in the city of Bern, Hauswirth left Switzerland for the first time as early as 1903 at the age of sixteen. She lost her Swiss citizenship in 1910 "through marriage to an alien" and only regained it in 1960 after Swiss federal law was amended.[4] She returned to Switzerland many times over the course of her life, though she did not live continuously in a single place for more than five years again until 1965, when the seventy-nine-year-old Hauswirth finally settled in California for the last nine years of her life.

Despite all of this, as the *Anzeiger von Saanen* also remarked, Hauswirth never left Switzerland behind entirely, as evident not least in her decisions to reapply for Swiss citizenship at the age of seventy-four and to have her ashes and personal papers brought to Gstaad after her death.[5] It was also in Switzerland that Hauswirth's fiction and non-fiction writings on India enjoyed the most success, shaping popular imaginaries of contemporary India. Here she gained a certain level of fame as the Swiss woman who married an Indian man and lived with him as a "Hindu wife" in India. At the same time, Hauswirth's case underlines that the connected history of Switzerland and India cannot be fully unders-

2 The first academic publication that deals with Hauswirth, among other actors, appeared in 2015 in the edited volume *Colonial Switzerland* (Fischer-Tiné 2015). As of 2021, and thanks to the research I have conducted in the framework of my PhD project on her "Global Biography," Hauswirth has a dedicated entry in the *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (Historical Dictionary of Switzerland). See Blaser 2021.

3 For a theoretical and methodological framing of "transnational lives," see Deacon, Russell & Woollacott 2010.

4 Quoted from the dossier "Hauswirth, Frieda (1960–1962)" in the Swiss Federal Archives, reference no. E4264#2006/96#33737*. On the history of gendered citizenship laws in Switzerland, see Redolfi 2019.

5 *Anzeiger von Saanen* 1974, 1991; Blaser 2019.

tood if considered in a geopolitical vacuum; on the contrary, global moments and imperial dynamics were a constitutive element of this cultural history of exchanges and connections. This essay thus examines the transnational relations between India and Switzerland that were established and maintained through Hauswirth's biography, in particular her transnational feminist life and work, but also connections and influences beyond these two "national" spaces. In relating this history, I illuminate some of the strands of microhistorical interactions that weaved together the histories of India and Switzerland during the late colonial period. The focus of this volume on such microhistories of entanglement is essential because they make up the bulk of cultural, religious, and political transfers between the two countries during the first half of the twentieth century.

I begin in section 1 by outlining the sites of encounter that laid the ground for Hauswirth's spiritual, intellectual, and political engagement with India. These encounters eventually led Hauswirth to formulate her own project of transnational solidarity with Indian women, which I explore in section 2. In the third section, I address the transformations that Hauswirth's ideological and intellectual commitments underwent during her first and longest stay in India between 1920 and 1929. Finally, in sections 4 and 5 I turn to look at Hauswirth's career as a writer and India expert upon her return in 1929: Section 4 gives an overview of Hauswirth's writing on Indian women and the feminist as well as anti-colonial idea(l)s that guided her. In the fifth and final section, I explore the context of Hauswirth's reception in Switzerland by asking in which arenas Hauswirth presented "her" India to Swiss audiences and what "encounters" she created through her writing between India and Switzerland.

1 Sites of Encounter: Switzerland to India via California

Hauswirth's biography is the story of a young girl born into a family of farmers in the Bernese mountains who grew up to become a transnational political activist with deep spiritual, social, and political ties to India. A logical way to tell this story in the present volume is to start with Hauswirth's first encounter with India. Hauswirth herself places this moment in the early 1910s, when she was residing in Palo Alto, California, and studying literature at Leland Stanford Junior University (today's Stanford University). She had arrived in California three years earlier, in May 1907, with "a whole remaining fortune" of US$ 2.50 and a steadfast aspiration of enrolling in a bachelor's programme at the university. She spent the summer of 1907 working, first as a governess and then as a helper in a girls' student hostel, all while studying for the university entrance examinations.[6] When Hauswirth gained admission to Stanford in August that

6 Hauswirth 1916a, p. 190.

Figure 2.1. Hauswirth-Reuteler Family Portrait. Taken around 1900 by Rudolf Bichsel in Zweisimmen, Switzerland. Reproduced on cardboard, 30×30 cm.

year after scoring enough points in the university board exams, this symbolized the culmination of years of personal struggle for access to higher education.

Hauswirth was born as the ninth of ten children, but grew up as the youngest child of Maria Magdalena (neé Reuteler, 1849–1919) and Emmanuel Hauswirth (1844–1900) after their last-born child Karl Emanuel died at the age of six months. Figure 2.1 shows a portrait of the Hauswirth-Reuteler family taken around 1900, when Frieda Hauswirth would have been thirteen or fourteen years old. Her two oldest brothers, Carl Emanuel (1873–1889) and Armin Hauswirth (1876–1900) both died young and may be the two children missing from the portrait.

When she was a young teenager, Hauswirth's parents had dismissed her wish of continuing education beyond the state-mandated nine years of the

Volksschule (compulsory primary school, lit. "people's school"). Hauswirth felt that they considered it "all-sufficient" for her to learn how "to read, write, cook, sew, serve, marry and raise children in just the same way as our great-grandmothers had done."[7] Meanwhile, she "longed restlessly for unusual experience and for the broad educational field monopolized by men," but felt herself "absolutely without sympathy and champions, opposed and thwarted on every side."[8] Hauswirth initially pursued socially "acceptable" paths of continuing education for a woman from a rural family with severely limited economic means, such as moving to the capital city to complete professional training as a seamstress. In the long run, this did not satisfy Hauswirth, however, and she began to hatch plans to go to the United States, where it was easier to gain university admission without having completed a secondary school education.

That Hauswirth chose California as her destination was no coincidence. The north of the state, especially, was part of a larger region in North America – the Pacific Northwest – that saw, in the decades running up to the turn of the twentieth century, a steady flow of migrants from rural Switzerland. The agrarian sector provided the basic income for a vast majority of the population in nineteenth-century Switzerland, but many people's livelihoods were threatened by harvest crises and the increasing economic pressure emanating from rapidly growing competition with imported goods.[9] Many Swiss peasants, lured by previous emigrants' fables of lush, expansive, and cheap lands on the other side of the Atlantic, saw emigration as the most promising way out of this scarcity.[10] When Hauswirth came to the US Northwest for the first time in 1903 with her elder brother Hermann, the two siblings followed in the footsteps of thousands of other Swiss emigrants. As Hauswirth later remarked, "the fact that a young girl like her would leave her narrow native valley with her brother to try her luck in [the state of] Oregon, that was not something particularly extraordinary for the time." "Over there," Hauswirth added, numerous emigrants from the Saanen region "would always find each other again."[11] Hermann married a woman from among this expatriate Saanen community and settled with her in Salem, Oregon, where the couple founded a dairy farm. Frieda Hauswirth, however, went back to Switzerland in 1905. When she returned to the United States in 1907, she came on her own. This time around, she looked to a very different community for companionship and support: the "glorious band of free womanhood crowding to the fountains of knowledge" at Stanford University.[12] Among the female

7 Ibid., p. 184.
8 Ibid., p. 185.
9 Bopp & Affolter 2013, p. 96.
10 Holenstein, Kury & Schulz 2018, pp. 177–181.
11 *Heim & Leben* 1946.
12 Hauswirth 1916a, p. 190.

student community at Stanford, whom she admired for "their openheartedness and independence, their freedom and courage" and with whom she felt a deep "natural" sense of "solidarity," Hauswirth for the first time felt the comfort of "sisterhood [...] irrespective of national or other divisions."[13]

The same coastal region that Hauswirth chose as her new home in North America witnessed a growing South Asian diaspora during the early years of the twentieth century. This was a community deeply embedded in transnational circuits of social and political exchange. On the one hand, well-educated South Asians with upper-class and upper-caste backgrounds from the British provinces came to the United States in pursuit of higher education and enrolled in its universities in growing numbers from 1903 onwards. On the other hand, a significant number of peasants and labourers from the Punjab, fleeing the exploitative labour conditions under colonial rule in British India, arrived in the United States – especially the Pacific Northwest – given the growing US demand for foreign labour (and in spite of rising anti-Asian xenophobia). They were integrated into (mostly) Sikh community networks that spanned continents.[14] These and other flows of migration brought various non-American and differently marginalized populations in the Pacific Northwest together in a spirit of supranational solidarity. In this climate, Hauswirth was able to develop and nourish her political consciousness in conversation with other educated women as well as with the South Asian "long-distance nationalists" of the Bay Area that she would later meet.

Yet, before Hauswirth became friends with the "Hindusthanee" students at Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley), she "had already become interested in Hindu philosophy and literature, and had been drawn strongly to the ancient theory of karma."[15] Where would Hauswirth – a German and English literature student at a North American university – have come to read such works as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* that she cites as her first point of contact with Indian culture? The decisive clue to answer this question lies in her first marriage, which took place in August 1910, a few months after Hauswirth's graduation. The groom was Arthur Lee Munger, a US citizen from Nebraska and a medical student at Stanford. Even so, there was something "exotic" about their marriage – exotic enough, at least, for the press from Nebraska to Vancouver to report on it.

The wedding between Hauswirth and Munger was the second ever marriage performed by the Temple of the People, which newspaper reports struggled to explain as "an organization along occult and humanitarian lines, dealing with

13 Ibid., p. 190.

14 Sohi 2014, pp. 15–17.

15 Hauswirth 1930, p. 16.

mystical as well as practical side of religion, ethics and social science."[16] The Temple of the People was actually founded in 1898 as an offshoot of the Theosophical Society.[17] Theosophy's centring of the "ancient wisdom of the East" means Hauswirth most likely first encountered an imagined "India" through the mystical Orientalist scholarship of figures like theosophy founder Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891).[18] As a "syncretic religion," theosophy constituted one of the late nineteenth century's most prominent "contact zones," where relations between a supposed "East" and "West," as well as between "colonizer" and "colonized," could be negotiated and reframed.[19] To be sure, this syncretism remained deeply Eurocentric and reiterated an essentialist understanding of an East-West binary (even as it sought to overcome it). Nevertheless, the world of theosophical thought would have introduced Hauswirth into an understanding of India underwritten by anti-imperial philosophy, most explicitly in its rejection of "the claims of superiority made for Christianity and Western civilization"[20] and its criticism of the "spiritual repression practised by the British rulers."[21]

Under the presidency of Annie Besant (1847–1933), the organization's branches in London and India became increasingly explicit in their political support of Indian anti-colonial nationalism from 1907 onwards. At the same time, theosophical organizations throughout "the West" attracted dissenters of various heterodox orientations who "assumed an easy continuity between their spiritual attachment to India on the one hand and their disidentification from the spoils and circuits of imperialism on the other."[22] The North American theosophical section had split from the International Society by the time the Temple of the People was created as its offshoot in 1898, meaning some of the core political developments of the global Theosophical Society – such as centring more Indian actors or overt support for nationalist and anti-colonial projects – were not always as present in the North American theosophical branches.[23] It is also likely that Hauswirth was attracted by the openness to women (leaders) as well as feminist and suffragist concerns that most esoteric and occult organizations displayed.[24] This is further confirmed by the newspaper reports on her wedding

16 *Plattsmouth Journal* 1910.

17 Santucci [1998] 2002.

18 On Blavatskian thought, see Lubelsky 2012, pp. 118–131; Burger 2014.

19 Dixon 1999, p. 196.

20 Jayawardena 1995, p. 117.

21 Lubelsky 2012, p. 101.

22 Gandhi 2006, p. 115.

23 Lubelsky 2012, p. 223.

24 For a detailed study on the relationship between feminism and the theosophical movement in England, see Dixon 2001. For an insight into the role of, and also competition between, women leaders from the North American and International Theosophical Societies, see Selander 2021.

ceremony, which reported that "ancient heirlooms smacking of the inferiority and submission on the part of the bride [were] omitted."[25]

Hauswirth's engagement with the cause of Indian (cultural) nationalism was thus initially mediated by a philosophical (and perhaps feminist) interest in the "Orient" of theosophical thought. According to her own account, it was only once she encountered and befriended actual South Asians in North America that her interests gradually shifted "from Indian philosophy and literature to the social and economic aspects of Indian life, to history and politics."[26] Hauswirth met most of her "Hindu friends" in the internationalist, cosmopolitan circles that she began to move in during the final year of her studies.[27] She joined the Cosmopolitan Club at Stanford and began to attend the many lectures organized by the Indian student community in North California or "by prominent Indians who passed through San Francisco."[28]

One of those "prominent Indians" was the scholar and later revolutionary Lala Har Dayal (1884–1939), who served as a lecturer at Stanford during the spring semester of 1912, also joining its Cosmopolitan Club soon after his arrival.[29] Har Dayal stayed in the Bay Area from 1911 to 1914. He soon became notorious both within and beyond South Asian circles there, for being a founding member and vociferous proponent of the militant anti-British Ghadar Party and newspaper on the one hand, and for advocating anarchism, anti-capitalism, and "free love" on the other hand.[30] Hauswirth attended some of his lectures on "Indian Philosophy" at Stanford, which led to the two of them striking up an

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25 *Plattsmouth Journal* 1910.

26 Hauswirth 1930, p. 15.

27 Both "internationalism" and "cosmopolitanism" are terms used by Hauswirth herself, seemingly interchangeably. I understand internationalism in the way Hauswirth and her contemporaries in the first decades of the twentieth century did: less as a discreet ideology than a shared "spirit," "which tied together the struggles of oppressed peoples (of various varieties) around the world." (Raza, Roy & Zachariah 2014a, p. xx) See the full edited volume (Raza, Roy & Zachariah 2014b) for an overview of this kind of internationalism from a global South Asian perspective; and Fischer-Tiné 2015 for an exploration of internationalism in the context of Switzerland.

28 Hauswirth 1930, p. 15.

29 *Stanford Daily* 1912a, 1912b. For details on Har Dayal's life and thought, see Brown 1975; Zachariah 2013; Elam 2014.

30 The Ghadar Party as an organization succeeded in mobilizing and uniting the numerous but variegated South Asian immigrant communities of the Pacific Coast under the banner of resistance to British colonial oppression at "home" in India and to anti-Asian racism "abroad" in North America. The cross-continental revolutionary movement sparked by the Ghadar movement is widely regarded as a defining moment in the transnational history of Indian anticolonial resistance. See Ramnath 2011 for a now classic account of the movement; Sohi 2014, pp. 45–81 and D'Souza 2018 consider the movement in somewhat different transnational frameworks.

intense intellectual and intimate friendship that was, however, riddled by interpersonal frictions and ended with Hauswirth cutting off all contact with Har Dayal in 1914. Hauswirth built more harmonious and long-term friendships with other (less) prominent expatriate nationalists in the United States, among them in particular Sarangadhar Das (1887–1957) and Taraknath Das (1884–1958). Both hailed from eastern India, had emigrated to the US by way of Japan, and studied at universities in the Pacific Northwest.[31] Both were also active in the Hindusthan Association of America (HAA), an organization that attempted to unite the Indian students and "further [their] interests" in the United States.[32] Hauswirth also became a member of the HAA and took on a leadership role in the "women's auxiliary" of its California branch.

After graduating from Stanford, Hauswirth had "dreaded to work just for the sake of living" and instead "hungered" for "useful true work […] into which I could throw all the hot enthusiasm of my soul and the loneliness of my heart."[33] She had, at that point, developed broad knowledge of contemporary social and political issues across the globe. Her rich political consciousness encompassed commitments to educational reform, socialism, heterodoxy in religious matters, transnational feminism, anti-racism, and solidarity with the push for political independence in India. Hauswirth thus still "was, in theory at least, an internationalist" – "intellectually," however, she had become "more preoccupied with India than any other land."[34] India had slowly become the focal point around which Hauswirth's search for "useful, true work" began to revolve.

In this pursuit, Hauswirth grew increasingly vocal about Indian issues in a way that soon went beyond "intellectual preoccupation": Apart from joining and working for the HAA, she helped establish her native and self-declaredly neutral Swiss soil as an organizing ground for Indian anti-colonial activists. In Zurich, Champakaraman Pillai (1891–1934), a Tamil man from South India who was in Switzerland for education, founded the International Pro India Committee (IPIC) in 1912.[35] Har Dayal put Hauswirth in touch with the circle of Indian anti-colonialists in and around Switzerland after he fled arrest in the US by escaping to Europe, where he made Switzerland his first stop. Hauswirth joined the IPIC and helped Pillai to edit a German-language paper that was to serve as its mouthpiece, called *Pro India*. She wrote a short news piece for the paper[36]

31 On Taraknath Das, see Sohi 2014, pp. 33–38; Framke 2016; Bose 2020. On Sarangadhar Das, there are no rigorous academic publications; see contemporary accounts in Hauswirth 1930, pp. 13–15; *Times of India* 1957; more recent (largely hagiographic and often inaccurate) accounts can be found in Patra 2012; Panda 2014.

32 "Constitution and By-Laws …" n.d.

33 Hauswirth 1916b, p. 282.

34 Hauswirth 1930, p. 17.

35 Fischer-Tiné 2015, p. 229.

36 Hauswirth 1914.

and translated William Jennings Bryan's famous article-turned-pamphlet "British Rule in India" into German.[37] But the paper, just like the IPIC, were short-lived, because by the end of the summer of 1914 – at the outbreak of World War I – Berlin became the new epicentre of Indian anti-colonial organizing in Europe.[38] Pillai, Har Dayal, and even Taraknath Das (also by way of Switzerland) established their new base in Germany, while Hauswirth boarded a ship back to California in August 1914.

Although she had long decided to throw the "hot enthusiasm of [her] soul" into working for the "Indian cause," Hauswirth was still unsure in 1914 how exactly she could best contribute to this cause. She had even reached out to her South Asian friends to ask them for advice. Har Dayal wanted her to stay in Europe and work with the "revolutionaries"; that is, the militant wing of Indian anti-colonialism abroad. Taraknath Das, on the other hand, suggested she should commit herself to "educational matters" and get a PhD in education so that she could go to India "as somebody," and then "they will appreciate [her] sacrifice more":

> Our Arabinda [*sic*] Ghose was so much reviewed [*sic*], why? Because he gave up a high educational position to take up national educational work; but there are many who have sacrificed more but accomplished very little. You should be a Queen, leader, powerful magnate and inspirer and for that purpose one or two year college is nothing.[39]

However, it seems Hauswirth was impatient to go to India and did not want to wait any longer. In retrospect, she also recalled having become disillusioned with the "efforts of the Indian patriot in voluntary or involuntary exile" whose "life in the States was rather pathetic" and whose work could never equal "in intrinsic value the quietest work of even a village schoolmaster in India."[40] Hauswirth eventually concluded that she wanted to work on the ground in India, and she wanted to work among Indian women, where she believed she could have the biggest impact.

In the transnational anti-colonial networks Hauswirth was part of, Indian women were far and few between. Her first "encounter" with them was likely mediated through her male Indian friends as well as some of the nationalist social reform literature they would recommend her to read – such as Vivekananda

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37 Bryan 1914a, 1914b.

38 See, among others, Oesterheld 2004; Manjapra 2006, 2013; Kuck 2014; Brückenhaus 2017, pp. 42–72; Jenkins, Liebau & Schmid 2020.

39 Quotes from a letter sent by Taraknath Das to Frieda Hauswirth on 18 October 1916 and reproduced in *United States of America v. Franz Bopp et al. Defendants*, vol. 16, pp. 1352–1354, British Library, MSS EUR/C138/16.

40 Hauswirth 1930, p. 17.

or Margaret Noble (a.k.a. Sister Nivedita).[41] Hauswirth herself initiated an exchange (which, presumably, remained a one-sided venture) with these women by writing an "Open Letter to the Young Women of India" for the influential reformist journal *Modern Review*, published from Calcutta in 1916:

> Dear Sisters – You do not know me; I have known and wished you well for a long time, and this because of the admiration and high esteem I feel for the brave struggle for education and the integrity of the Hindusthanee Students I have met in America, and because of my love for and study of all things Indian.[42]

It is unclear how many of its addressees the "Open Letter" reached beyond the narrow upper-class and well-educated segment of women who would have access to reading such a journal. The fact that a contact by the name of Munshi Ram reportedly translated the two-part article so as to publish it in "several vernacular papers"[43] points to a possible larger audience, albeit one that remains amorphous and largely untraceable. This Munshi Ram could refer either to a man from India involved with the Ghadar revolutionaries in California, about whom not much is known apart from the fact that he was implicated as a defendant in the Hindu-German Conspiracy trial of 1917–1918; or it could refer to Swami Shraddhanand (1856–1927), one of the period's most eminent Arya Samaji figures in North India and a leading proponent of national as well as girls' education in India.[44] Hauswirth reported having reached out to her contact Munshi Ram in search of employment opportunities in education in India, meaning it is likely she was referring to Swami Shraddhanand. Although he had never travelled outside India and belonged to an older generation, Hauswirth might have been introduced to him by his son Harishcandra, who was in Switzerland at the same time as her in 1914, and then again in San Francisco in 1915 and 1917–1918.[45] Either way, what is clear is that by 1916, Hauswirth had made up her mind and "found" her purpose; she was going to combine two causes closest to her heart: working for the "Indian people" and fighting gendered forms of exclusion in the field of education.

Through personal exchanges with personalities like Har Dayal, Taraknath Das, and Sarangadhar Das, as well as through the attendance of public lectures and membership in pro-Indian organizations in the West, Hauswirth became

41 Ibid., p. 16.

42 Hauswirth 1916a, p. 183.

43 Hauswirth 1930, p. 17.

44 The foundation of the Gurukul Kangri, an experimental educational institution that promoted "native" national education in place of the colonial system, constituted the height of his educational activities. See Fischer-Tiné 2003.

45 Jordens 1981, pp. 96–97. I thank Harald Fischer-Tiné for drawing my attention to this connection.

firmly embedded in a transcontinental exchange of ideas on contemporary politics in India, mediated to her by way of the cosmopolitan, intellectual South Asian diaspora in North America and Switzerland. Hauswirth's path to political association with the "Indian cause" that I have explored in this section illustrates starkly how the Swiss-Indian encounter goes beyond a bilateral "meeting" of two neatly delineated geographic and cultural entities. Rather, such exchange was made possible and shaped by a range of migratory and diasporic geographies, geopolitical configurations, supranational forms of community and identity, and intermediaries between knowledge cultures such as syncretic philosophies or transcontinental print culture networks.

2 "Some Constructive Gift from the West": Hauswirth's Vision of Feminist Educational Exchange

Hauswirth presented a vision of a transnational community of educated women to the "Young Women of India" in her "Open Letter." She encouraged Indian women to follow in the footsteps of their Indian "brothers" and come study abroad in the US so that they might acquire the knowledge and the independence needed "to help establish in India a great system of women's education" which would "not be unwisely patterned after a system which answers only to another country's needs or the needs of men."[46] Given her personal history of struggling against gendered obstacles in accessing higher education, is not surprising that Hauswirth chose education as the grounds on which to envision a global community of exchange and solidarity between women. She also called out to cosmopolitan North American women for sisterly mobilization in an article titled "Women of the World Unite," which was published in *The Hindusthanee Student.*[47] In it, she proposed establishing a regular programme of correspondence between girls in Indian and North American schools, as well as "a system of correspondence between individual Indian women and ourselves."[48] This exchange was the cornerstone of this vision of transnational feminist community-building. Hauswirth envisaged this community to function as the "maternal" foundation for a subsequent worldwide process of universal community-building:

46 Hauswirth 1916b, p. 283.

47 The magazine was established in 1914 as the official organ of the HAA, whose Indian members were overwhelmingly – though not exclusively – male. On the other hand, the HAA had a well-established network of "women's auxiliaries," composed mostly of US-American women who stood in solidarity with the Indian cause. It can be assumed that these women were the primary intended readership of this and another article on transnational feminism that Hauswirth published in *The Hindusthanee Student:* see Hauswirth 1917a.

48 Hauswirth 1917b, p. 28.

> Knowing the sympathy, closeness and inspiration of just such correspondence between some women of other countries and myself, I urge the value of this means of breaking down the barriers of ignorance, distance and separatedness. [...]
>
> Let us, American and Indian women, consciously nourish our sense of sisterhood; let us broaden our sense of motherhood until it includes the children of our town, our country, the children of the world. Let us use our power to foster a true sense of brotherhood of man.[49]

Notably, in the encounter that Hauswirth calls for here, she understands herself as part of a sisterhood of "American" and "Indian" women, specifically. And even though she begins the article with an anecdote about classroom practices in Switzerland – schoolchildren in Zurich exchanging letters with schoolchildren in Argentina – she does not bring up her Swiss identity; instead, she is one and the same with her "American," and, by extension, *all* her "sisters" across the world.

Encounter, education, and exchange thus lay at the core of Hauswirth's vision of and search for global sisterhood that would build solidarity between "Western" and Indian women. In graduating with a bachelor's degree from a university in the US, Hauswirth successfully completed her first, personal, feminist project of transnational education. Following the long-winded search for purpose described in section 1, she embarked on her second project of transnational feminist education. Hauswirth began preparing to leave for India from 1915 onwards. As detailed above, she reached out to people who were either themselves active in educational reform in India or well-connected in that world in search of employment opportunities. The most promising lead came from an encounter Hauswirth had in San Francisco in 1915: Abala Bose (1865–1951) was touring the US with her husband, the botanical scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858–1937), and, upon meeting her, invited Hauswirth to come teach at and help "modernize" the Brahmo Girls' School she was running in Calcutta.[50]

However, Hauswirth's hopes of finding fulfilment in working for feminist sisterhood and nationalist liberation in India through education were quickly dashed: her application for a teacher's visa to India in the midst of World War I was denied by the British representatives in the US. One of Hauswirth's references stated that

> she had been associating with and interesting herself in young Hindoos, that he would not regard her as a Christian in the ordinary acceptance of the term and that he thought it would be as well to treat with extreme caution any statement she might make as regards the purpose of her visit to India.[51]

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49 Ibid., p. 29.

50 Hauswirth 1930, p. 18.

51 Quoted from a letter on file in "Government of India Refuses Swiss American Teacher Frieda M Hauswirth Entry into India," (1916), British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1467.

Hauswirth's close affiliation with the Indian diaspora in North California had made people suspicious. It fell far outside what constituted socially acceptable intercultural "encounters" in the eyes of mainstream society – a society where anti-Asian racism, with a fear of "miscegenation" (transposed from US-American anti-Black racism) at its very core, continued to reach new heights during the early decades of the twentieth century.[52]

Given that there is no mention of it, it seems that the British representation dealing with Hauswirth's visa request was unaware that Hauswirth had even been under surveillance by British intelligence for her activities and involvement with the Indian revolutionaries in Switzerland and the HAA months earlier.[53] Even so, all travel flows from the Pacific Northwest to India were regarded with intense suspicion and anxiety by British authorities since the rise of the Ghadar Party. The colonial government of India eventually moved to formally restrict the entry of all "foreigners" – including Indians who had lived abroad – into India during the war by issuing the Foreigners Ordinance.[54] In this climate, the mere mention of Hauswirth's "association with" and "interest in" "young Hindoos" would have been more than enough to raise alarm with the British representative in Washington.

On the other hand, Hauswirth's objective of going to India to "help" was seen as an illegitimate undertaking based on the assumption that because Hauswirth was not an "ordinary Christian," her motives in such an undertaking could not be pure. The equation which was drawn between Western women departing the United States to work for women's education in India and missionary motivation is exemplified in the fact that the application form Hauswirth filled out was intended for persons "other than British Subjects desiring to undertake Missionary or Educational work in India," yet did not ask the applicant to specify the category for which they were applying. Seen in historical context, this conflation – which contributed to the British authorities' rejection of Hauswirth's application – is not particularly surprising.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, many decades prior to Hauswirth's arrival in India, female education had become the primary field for white women's salaried work in India. Unmarried, educated middle-class women signed up with missionary organizations in their (predominantly Anglo-Saxon) home countries to contribute to the "mission of sisterhood" by working for the

52 Horne 2009, pp. 31–39. Solidarities that developed between African-American and (South) Asian populations in the USA on the basis of a shared experience of discrimination and racist violence are explored in Slate 2012.

53 The "Weekly Reports of the Director, Criminal Intelligence" reported on Hauswirth in relation to the former issue in June and October 1914, then again in April and May 1915 with regards to the latter.

54 Sohi 2014, p. 154.

emancipation of Indian women – both from "heathenism" and "oriental" patriarchy.[55] They found a "secular" counterpart in (mostly British) feminists and other liberal reformers that began to promote female education in India through lobbying the metropolitan government as well as by working with organizations on the ground in British India.[56] The distinctly Victorian women's education advocated by these maternal missionaries and imperial feminists (to rephrase Barbara Ramusack[57]) sought to refashion "the Indian woman" in the image of the modern moral subject so that she could herself be a civilizing force within the confines of the family household.[58] Women's education "abroad" in the empire's colonies provided the locus for the *public* participation of these women – whose ideal agency "at home" was confined to the private sphere – in nation- and empire-building through their contribution to the project of "imperial domesticity."[59] When Hauswirth came to India to become active in girls' and women's education, there was thus a long lineage of white Western women she – perhaps unwittingly – inserted herself in.[60]

The influx of "foreign" women into female education in India contributed to transform the latter into a site of contestation between the colonial state, transnational missionary organizations, and nationalist-reformist forces in India to define the "new" Indian woman and reform the domestic sphere.[61] Hauswirth's statement, cited earlier, that she wanted Indian women to work towards the establishment of a female education system that was neither "unwisely patterned after a system which answers only to another country's needs" nor modelled after "the needs of men"[62] shows that her vision of female education in India was both distinctly feminist and anti-colonial: women's education should be formed by Indian women to answer to their needs, and not to those of the patriarchal heads of their community or the colonial government. It also illustrates that Hauswirth indeed possessed at least some understanding of how highly embattled the field of female education was in British India before arriving there herself.

With this in mind, it becomes particularly salient how Hauswirth framed her contribution to Indian women's education. Hauswirth later stated that, at the time, she held the conviction that "[t]he only sane thing I, an outsider, could do was to bear to India some constructive gift from the West, such as knowledge

55 Haggis 1998.

56 Burton 1990, 1994.

57 Ramusack 1990.

58 Tschurenev 2018, p. 247.

59 Burton 1990, p. 296.

60 For a fuller overview and examples of both of these and more "types" of white women with a "gendered" burden active in colonial India, see Jayawardena 1995.

61 Tschurenev 2018, p. 248. For an overview of these debates, see Basu 2005.

62 Hauswirth 1916b, p. 283.

of sanitation, child psychology, and educational methods."[63] If India was to be the destination and eventual recipient of Hauswirth's "constructive gift from the West" in this exchange, it was Switzerland that was understood to be the resource from which to draw expertise. Hauswirth repeatedly stated that when she resided in Switzerland in 1913–1914, it was primarily to "study the educational situation"[64] there and, more specifically, to "investigat[e] the school system of Zurich, Switzerland," which included her visiting classroom settings and observing teaching methods.[65] Thus Hauswirth explicitly framed her "constructive gift from the West" for Indian women's education as a knowledge transfer between the Swiss and Indian educational systems – perhaps in an effort to circumvent the more imperial dimensions of her undertaking.

Hauswirth never explicitly says why she chose to go to Switzerland for her "study" of educational methods. The school setting she describes in her 1917 article in *The Hindusthanee Student*, however, gives some clues. It carries the characteristics of the "child-centred" approach to learning and curriculum representative of early twentieth-century *Reformpädagogik* (reform pedagogy). The fact that she refers, in the same article, to the work of John Dewey (1859–1952) – one of the major proponents of pedagogical reform in the US at the time – supports the claim that Hauswirth's primary interest lay in learning the methods of reform pedagogy and contemporary "progressive education."[66] It is easy to imagine that one of Hauswirth's motivations for returning to Switzerland was that the schools and thinkers of Germanophone Europe enjoyed an excellent reputation in the global circuit of reform-pedagogical knowledge. Hauswirth may have sought to learn these particular "educational methods" in Switzerland for that reason. Interestingly, the New Education movement in Germanophone Europe also had a tradition of Indophilia and several reform-pedagogical institutions in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland would regularly interact with Indian trainees or guests. Moreover, many women critical of patriarchal society and/or with alternative ideals of womanhood were active in the field of reform pedagogy in Germanophone Europe. Outside of missionary schools, female European educators in India were predominantly active in theosophical or New Educationist schools.[67] All of these factors would likely have appealed to Hauswirth and made her consider Germanophone reform pedagogy as an ideal starting ground from which to launch her work in education reform in India.

63 Hauswirth 1930, p. 17.

64 Quoted from Hauswirth's court testimony in *United States of America v. Franz Bopp et al. Defendants*, vol. 16, p. 1317, British Library, MSS EUR/C138/16.

65 Hauswirth 1917b, p. 28.

66 See Knoll 2018 on Dewey's pedagogical thought.

67 See Horn 2018.

On the receiving side of this transnational pedagogical knowledge transfer lay India. As Hauswirth's exchanges with the likes of Munshi Ram and Abala Bose suggest, she was primarily interested in contributing to reform efforts within the "modern" and declaredly "national" types of education promoted by influential communal organizations like the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj in the British provinces. Both organizations were at the forefront of social reform efforts from within the Hindu community in colonial India, to which education was central. Adherents of both movements established a variety of indigenous schools that undertook a broad range of educational experimentation in an effort to impart a respectable combination of community-centred and "Western" sets of knowledge so as to provide a sustainable nationalist alternative to the colonial and missionary systems of education.

Hauswirth eschewed working with, or through, the educational institutions established by "alien" rulers or Western missionaries in what can be considered an avowedly nationalist or also Indophile stance to education. Nevertheless, the transfer of "educational methods" from Switzerland to the nationalist social reform movement in colonial India as laid out by Hauswirth is quite evidently framed within a colonial context of power hierarchies in the field of knowledge. Insofar as she understood herself as someone who could "bring" useful "modern" methods of education to her "Indian sisters," Hauswirth studied the reform-pedagogical methods developed by European and North American educationists and psychologists with the idea that this would provide her with the necessary authority to help shape educational reform in India. The framing of this knowledge transfer presumes a universality and desirability inherent to "Western," "modern" knowledge.

Hauswirth did not make a crudely imperialist argument that Indian women were per se uneducated and in *need* of "foreign help." She rather saw herself in the unique position of having the necessary access and abilities to learn the most "progressive" educational science in Europe and then use this knowledge to contribute to the "modernization" of women's education in India. Moreover, as her study trip to Switzerland and her familiarity with the latest pedagogical and psychoanalytical ideas show, Hauswirth did actually prepare for this mission. She did not fall back on the idea of an inherent authority invested in her based solely on a "Western" culturalization and education. The presumption that her amateur expertise would be useful and welcome knowledge in India, however, is still deeply indebted to the coloniality of modern knowledge. Instead of an assumed civilizational superiority, the authoritative power of Hauswirth's so-called rational and scientific knowledge is located in the idea that it is supposedly *unmarked* (i. e. not culture-specific). Hauswirth reinforced this assumption in framing her efforts to accumulate and transfer pedagogical and psychological knowledge as a "constructive gift from the West" to Indian women. In this educational "exchange," Hauswirth is positioned as representative of mobile, "modern," and

supposedly universal knowledge, whereas India is placed in the role of the passive, "provincial" recipient of this "gift."

3 "What Was I in India For?": Disillusionments and Recalibrations in India

All of this changed once Hauswirth finally fulfilled her long-held dream of moving to India. She arrived at the port of Bombay in 1920 – not on her US-American passport, but as a British subject. In 1917, Hauswirth (who had divorced her first husband in 1915) had married her close friend Sarangadhar Das on the island of Maui in Hawaii. There, at the Paia sugar mills, Das – a chemistry graduate of UC Berkeley – was working to gain practical experience and learn the tricks of the sugar production trade in preparation for his return to India. In his native region of Odisha in East India, Das planned to promote "reconstructive" agriculture, leading by example with his very own sugar plantation-cum-factory that would run according to socialist and ecologically sustainable principles.[68] He had apparently proposed marriage to Hauswirth several times over the years and "tried his best to instill the thought that [she] might get closer to India's life and India's needs as the wife of one of her sons than as an alien sojourner."[69] After a long period of indecisiveness regarding her future plans, and especially following the disappointment of the visa rejection in 1916, Hauswirth eventually came to agree with Das.

Following their marriage and several years together between Hawaii and San Francisco, they moved to India in 1920. The first place they settled in was Bombay, where they stayed for only a few months. In the seven years of their joint life in India, Hauswirth and Das lived in various regions of the country and moved more times than they would have liked to in pursuit of employment in the sugar industry for Das, and with the ultimate goal of realizing Das's vision of a modern, socialist sugar plantation in his native princely state of Dhenkanal – a vision which both ultimately had to give up on. Hauswirth left their last shared household – located in the middle of the jungle on the outskirts of the town of Dhenkanal – in late 1927, when it became clear to her that her presence was more of a hindrance than a help to the sugar plantation project. She spent a few more months travelling alone, in particular to the Ajanta and Ellora caves in Central India, and finally departed on a ship back to the USA in 1929. Although Hauswirth and Das parted on amicable terms and did not officially separate at the time, they did become estranged. In 1938, Hauswirth filed for divorce from Das in California. Neither of them ever remarried, and when Das died in 1957, a

68 Hauswirth 1930, p. 18.

69 Ibid., p. 19.

newspaper obituary still referred to Hauswirth as his wife.[70] As Hauswirth saw it, what connected the two were "tried friendship, sustained affection, and mutual aims and interest" more than "love."[71] Hauswirth had a miscarriage in 1918, when still in the US with Das. Later, and especially once they had moved to India, she did not think it right or sustainable to have children with him, for she "realized that a child of mixed blood is not wanted in present-day society," as she explains at length in her autobiography.[72] It is unclear what Das's stance on the subject was; either way, the couple never had any children.

Considering the very concrete "mission" with which she departed for India, it is striking that Hauswirth ultimately did not engage in any form of direct political action or educational activities during the entire nine years of her residence in India. This is remarkable yet never explicitly addressed in her autobiographical writings. What can be gathered from reading between the lines of her writing is that by virtue of living in India, Hauswirth arrived at a new understanding of the webs of power within which she was unavoidably enmeshed there, regardless of whether or not her political vision included their abolition.

Following what she calls her "intimate beholding" and "actual experiencing" of the "character" of Indian women and their social context, as Hauswirth tells it, she came to "the deep conviction that the education of India's girlhood and womanhood is safest in, and will be most fruitfully directed by, Indian hands."[73] Hauswirth not only observed that there were already scores of "eminently capable Indian women leaders in educational reform"[74] to be found in India in the 1920s. She also began to believe that no matter how much she studied the "actual local conditions" of Indian women, her "Western blindness" and the fact that her actions would be perceived as "external" interventions constituted essentially insurmountable handicaps to her ability to help.[75]

This change in viewpoint and attitude is best exemplified in the story of Hauswirth's encounter with Vimala, an Odia teenage *purdanashin* (woman/girl observing purdah, i.e. communal rules of veiling), which Hauswirth describes as a turning point in her autobiographical work *A Marriage to India.* Without her family's knowledge, Vimala (likely not her real name) had come to Hauswirth's house in Cuttack, Odisha, asking for help in leaving her husband to pursue higher education instead. Hauswirth was deeply impressed by this woman, who had learned to read and write Bengali (and some English) and even published an article about women's *swaraj* (self-rule): "I looked at her in admiration. I had

70 *Times of India* 1957.
71 Hauswirth 1930, p. 19.
72 Ibid., pp. 132–134.
73 Hauswirth 1932b, p. 181.
74 Ibid., p. 165.
75 Hauswirth 1930, p. 64.

never dreamed that such aspiration, independence of thought and longing for free play could possibly spring up behind the strict seclusion of the veil."[76] Hauswirth decided she needed to "do all in my power to help her get away and go on with her education,"[77] only to realize the impossibility of fulfilling this promise: the extremely risky fate (of potentially being socially ostracized or disowned by her family) she would lead Vimala towards in doing so, as well as the social and economic jeopardy such actions on her part could mean for Sarangadhar. Deeply disturbed, she is ultimately left with the question:

> If I could not stretch out my hand to help this Hindu girl who was caught in the meshes of custom and struggling to get free; if I, a free Western woman who disbelieved with her heart and mind and soul in the continuance of purdah, was not to lift a finger, then what was I doing here? What was I in India for?[78]

The idealistic encounter Hauswirth had imagined between reform-pedagogical methods learned in Switzerland and Indian nationalist-reformist women's education did not hold up against the experiences she herself had in India. During these nine years in India, Hauswirth saw her Swiss and US-American identities fade in importance. Instead, she learned that what defined her in the eyes of most (Indian and British) residents of British India was, for one, her wifehood and womanhood. This identity hampered her efforts to find employment in the educational field because people did not expect her to want to be paid a salary for her work.[79] On the other hand, and more significantly still, her whiteness inescapably symbolized a perceived proximity to the culture of superiority that the colonial elites and missionary organizations as a whole were associated with in nationalist circles – even as this same society mostly shunned Hauswirth, who reported that "once in India they [English fellow travellers] had no more use for a white woman who had torn down their carefully constructed barriers of race-isolation" by virtue of marrying a brown man.[80]

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76 Ibid., pp. 60–61.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., pp. 64–65.

79 During their joint married life in India, Hauswirth and Das constantly struggled to find a reliable means of income to support themselves. Hauswirth went to Bombay at a particularly desperate moment during the autumn of 1922, when Sarangadhar Das had been out of employment for eight months, to seek a teaching position for herself without success: "In this town [Bombay] where Sarang had held such a high position, people considered it a mere whim on my part." As a woman and the wife of a seemingly well-off upper-caste Hindu man, her trying to obtain work was interpreted as Hauswirth merely looking for "something to do" and she was only offered a non-salaried professor position with the explanation that it would count as "service to India." Hauswirth 1930, p. 82.

80 Hauswirth 1930, p. 9.

Other white women active in nationalist, reformist, or feminist causes offset this default association by embracing and elevating everything they understood to be part of ("original") "Indian culture." Hauswirth, however, explicitly rejected what she saw as a romanticization of "Indian traditions" and thus refused to follow in the footsteps of white women who had come before her, like Margaret Noble, for whom she nevertheless had great sympathy:

> [Noble] retained in India, for India, the quaint notion that the old ideas of liberty and self-determination might equally apply to a "coloured" race; [….] [but she] generally went to the extreme of viewing everything Indian through the rosiest of spectacles. Even child-marriage, forced widowhood, and purdah, received from her an appreciative pat on the back. For it had come to her as a powerful realization that at this period India's worst enemy was the utter hopelessness of her subjection, her slave mentality; her greatest need a revival of faith in herself, of pride and self-esteem.[81]

Her own experiences in India led Hauswirth to discard the unbridled cosmopolitan optimism that the internationalist community-building on the Pacific Coast had fostered in her. Her vision of a syncretic universal sisterhood and a world devoid of race, class, and sex "barriers" was replaced by a sense of an insurmountable difference between her and her "Indian sisters;" this was not a difference rooted in civilizational essentialism, but in an understanding of the pervasive unequal basis that undergirded her every interaction with Indian women. If we follow this self-conception, Hauswirth's "failure" to engage in anti-colonial activism or social reform efforts on the ground in India can be read as hesitation to establish dominance as a foreign woman over an indigenous context, a refusal to *know better* simply because she was in a position to *know more powerfully.*

So what did Hauswirth actually *do* during these years in India? Apart from the domestic labour – the household management – that Hauswirth engaged in to support Das during the periods of time when he was employed in sugar mills or factories, she devoted most of her time to *observing* rather than *intervening:*

> During the years of my stay in India, from 1920–29, my main interest and occupation was sketching and painting, as you know. I found my sketching in the bazaars, the temple courtyards, in homes – unaccompanied as I generally went – an unsurpassed means of establishing barrier-free, sympathetic contact with all classes and kinds of people. […] It is all a question of approach; the "mysterious East" turns very humanly confiding eyes to anyone seeking it in simple, direct, kindly contact free from religious, race, or imperial bias.[82]

In her artistic practice Hauswirth found the kind of encounter she longed to have: encounters that happened, according to her, on (more) "equal" basis,

81 Hauswirth 1932b, pp. 194–195.

82 Hauswirth 1932a, pp. vii–viii.

where religious, racial, or colonial difference could be forgotten for a brief moment. This type of encounter had been impossible in the fields of education and women's reform, given how irrevocably mired they were in communal, racial, and imperial politics. The way that Hauswirth describes her sketching and painting in the quote above also romanticizes the encounter between the painter's gaze and the scenes or people being drawn. It neglects to make explicit, for example, how the balance of power (to see, to represent) in the relationship between (white, foreign) observer and (racialized, "native") observed is evidently tipped in favour of the former. Similarly, painting "exotic" scenes while travelling constituted an established colonial bourgeois praxis and thus may not be as free from political significance as Hauswirth would have imagined and wanted it to be. All of this notwithstanding, as the above testimony clearly shows, venturing outside to spend hours immersing herself in everyday sceneries of Indian life as a painter constituted a meaningful avenue of interacting with her environment for Hauswirth. After her subsequent return from India, her paintings and drawings of India also provided an important means of income for Hauswirth, who held various exhibitions in the US, Britain, France and India throughout the course of her life. One of her later books, *Leap-Home and Gentlebrawn*, also included illustrations by her, which were based on the sort of sketching described in the above quote and some of which are pictured in figure 2.2.

4 Amplifying the "Direct Voice of Protest": Indian Women in Hauswirth's Writing

After many years of trying, and failing, to establish a joint life and agricultural business together in Odisha, Hauswirth eventually left Das and their fledgling sugar estate behind to return to the United States. There, she moved into an apartment in New York City at the height of the Great Depression. She exhibited her oil paintings in a mid-sized solo exhibition, but the times were such that people had very little surplus money to spend on art.[83] Hauswirth found herself in desperate need of a more reliable stream of income. So, in late 1929, she began to write down the story of her experiences in India in what was to become her first book, *A Marriage to India* (1930). The book was picked up by Vanguard Press, a leftist publishing house based in New York City, and launched Hauswirth's career as a writer and India expert not just in the US but later also in Britain and Switzerland.

Hauswirth's writing was unmistakeably a means of political mobilization directed at a Western readership. Her target audience was "the ordinary person

[83] *Heim & Leben* 1946, p. 15.

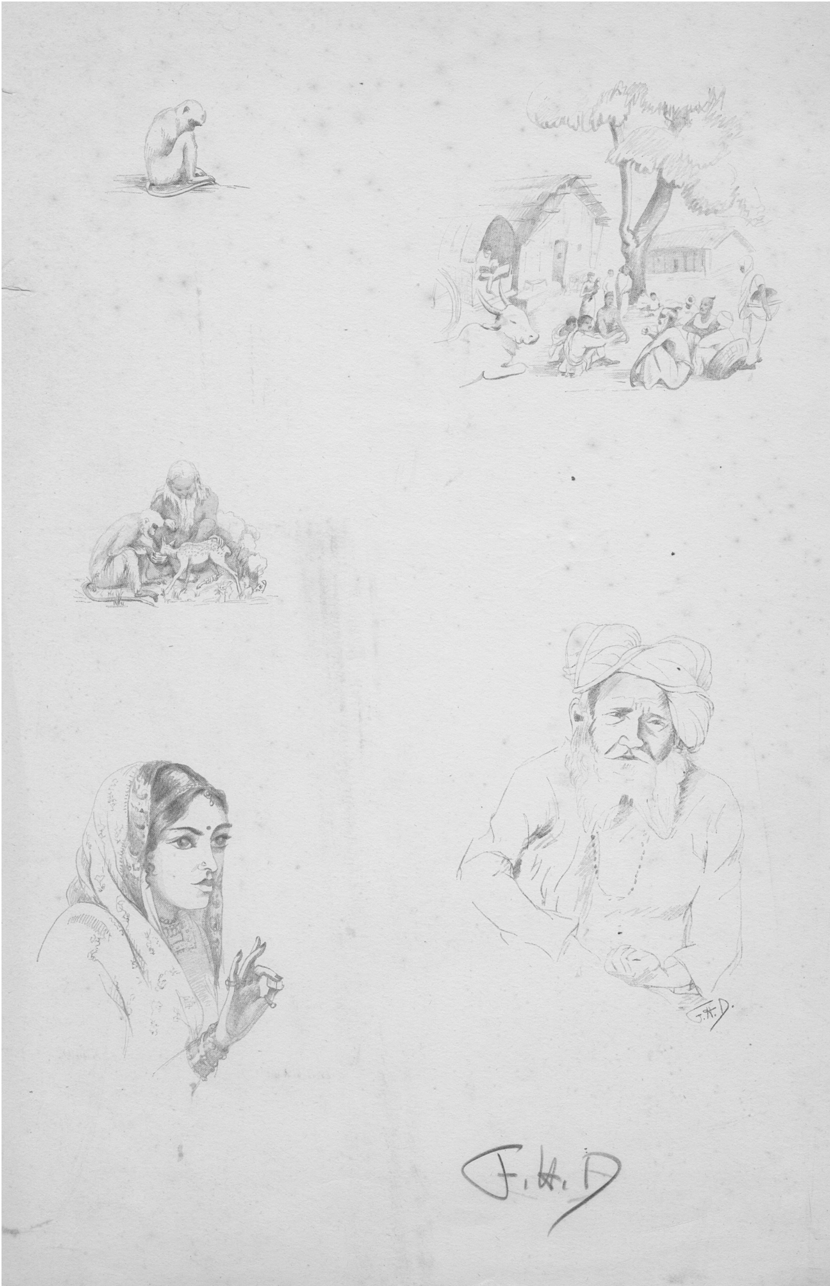

Figure 2.2. Drawings for *Leap-Home and Gentlebrawn* (published in 1932 by J.M. Dent and Sons in London), based on sketches from life in India between 1920 and 1929 by Frieda Hauswirth Das. Pencil on paper.

in the West with a mild interest in India."[84] At this stage in life, Hauswirth had given up on her erstwhile project of transnational feminist educational exchange. Marked by what she perceived as her inability to "help" women in India, Hauswirth changed directions and was now bringing the "constructive gift" of her knowledge to "ordinary people in the West:"

> For where a person genuinely sympathetic to India, as I had been before ever seeing her shores, could so misunderstand, how much more liable to misinterpret must be observers who come to India with a racial bias, a feeling of superiority, or an imperialistic trend of ideas.[85]

As a newspaper article aptly captured this shift years later: "Mrs. Das, who two decades ago went away to reform just such 'benighted' notions, has returned, herself reformed."[86] And, one might add, ready to reform in turn the "benighted notions" of the society she had returned to.

Hauswirth's writing about India, then, is translational in a political sense: it seeks to make the imagined Western reader understand the ethical shortcomings of colonial rule, as well as the logical flaws of the arguments used to justify it. Her writing reframes the standpoints, arguments, and demands of the Indian independence and women's movements in the language of modern liberalism that her readers were expected to be familiar with. Nowhere is this more evident than in Hauswirth's treatment of the Indian "woman question" and its relation to colonial rule.[87]

In her contribution to the debate around this "question," Hauswirth sticks closely to the established discourse of Indian women's movements and social reformers themselves. In colonial India, the demands of women had, for many decades during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, been articulated as part of a nationalist social reform agenda, which was most often inflected by religious community. In India, through contact with social leaders like Lady Abala Bose and Urmilla Debi (sister of the prominent Swarajist C. R. Das) in Bengal, or Malati Chaudhury and Sarala Devi in Odisha, Hauswirth lived in

84 Hauswirth 1932b, p. 149.

85 Ibid., p. 217.

86 *Tennessean* 1938.

87 The "woman question" in colonial India was a cacophonous debate held on several planes at the same time – local, regional, national, sectarian, communal, colonial, (trans)imperial, and, not least, global. It revolved, roughly, around the status of women in Indian society – their rights within the different religious communities, how these stood in tension with their rights in the colonial state, as well as the desirability and necessity of their education and "emancipation" along Western lines. For an idea of what women themselves wrote on these issues at the time, see Minault 1988; Shukla 1991; Orsini 1999; Bhattacharya & Sen 2003; Sreenivas 2003; Nijhawan 2008. For an overview of the prevalent scholarly debates, see Sangari & Vaid 1989; Sarkar & Sarkar 2007.

close proximity and intimate exchange with many women's activists of her generation. Hauswirth explored many of the debates around the "woman question" from a similar vantage point as these popular reformists and the movements in which they were active; in the process, she reproduced many of their Hindu- and upper-caste-centric arguments in her own work.[88] She focused quite a bit on the Brahmo Samaj in her writing, for example, lauding it for offering opportunities for "liberation" to both men and women by allowing them to defy engrained norms and harmful practices without having to sacrifice the security and support of community.[89]

On the other hand, Hauswirth tapped into a new, emergent feminist sentiment that had begun to reshape the Indian women's movement in the aftermath of the global outrage caused by Katherine Mayo's infamous book on Indian women, *Mother India* (1927), which Hauswirth also discusses in her 1932 book *Purdah.* As Mrinalini Sinha has convincingly argued, the aftermath of 1927 was a crucial moment because South Asian women brought forth *public* critiques of the *political* argument underlying Mayo's book; that is, that colonial rule was necessary for the "modernization" and secularization of Indian society, and thereby also for the emancipation of Indian women. This new public presence and political positioning on the part of women who had been predominantly active in "social" reform targeted at the "private" realms of women's lives led to the emergence of a new feminist consciousness in India: an "alternative understanding of the relation between women and the state *independently* of the mediation of the collective identities of communities" that reimagined women's activism as decidedly political because it had come to constitute the core of a global debate about the justifiability of colonial rule in British India.[90]

Hauswirth was well aware of the stakes of this debate, and in her writing on Indian women she adopted an argumentative stance diametrically opposed to that of her imperialist US-American contemporary Mayo. She focused on repeating the demands made by Indian women, and laid out to which extent the arguments presented by Mayo and other pro-imperial liberals and feminists did not correspond or even stood in direct opposition to those demands. When, in *Purdah*, Hauswirth describes, for example, a large women's protest march taking place in Bombay, she points out to her readership that it was not the "Male Tyrant of India" but rather the "Broad Protecting Western Hand" against which they were protesting. But "while millions in the West had listened to the kangaroo's [= Mayo's] resounding indictment [...] hundreds only were reached by

88 For a classic critique of upper-caste bias in Hindu social reform for and by women, see Chakravarti 1989. For the contested relationship between Hindu and Muslim women's reform, see Everett 2001. For a contextualization of both, see Sinha 2006.

89 Hauswirth 1930, p. 54.

90 Sinha 2006, pp. 9–11 (emphasis in the original).

the direct voice of protest of these Indian women themselves."[91] Hauswirth understood that even her own work would be capable of reaching a great many more readers in the West than any Indian woman's writing could hope to do; that is why she recounted in great length and detail the opinions and lived experiences of Indian women in both her fiction and non-fiction writings – as an amplification of their "direct voice of protest." Specifically, Hauswirth wanted to dissolve the myth of the "helpless Indian woman" pushed in imperial feminist discourse. In her writing (and presumably also her public talks), she provides examples of Indian women (real and fictional) who know how to help themselves – detailing their achievements, their visions, their demands and needs, their support of other women, and, above anything, the enormous courage they displayed as well as the risks they took in advocating for change.

Finally, two noteworthy characteristics of Hauswirth's work are, first, the attention she pays to regional differences across the Indian subcontinent with regard to gendered issues, and secondly, how her work offers a multi-fronted critique: She declares open sympathy with the struggle for self-government in India and rejects the British "occupation" of India for imposing itself as an alien power while failing to live up to its proclaimed role as harbinger of societal modernization. At the same time, she traces the roots of social oppression for most segments of society to Brahmin domination and caste structures. In one instance, Hauswirth discusses the struggle for female suffrage in British India – a struggle that happened at a time when Indian men were still busy advocating for political representation in colonial Indian legislature generally. After detailing the strides that were made in this regard in different provinces throughout the 1920s, Hauswirth concludes that Brahmin and colonial oppression go hand in hand and need to be addressed simultaneously:

> It points to the fact that women at the present day profit socially in proportion to the progress of Indianization in the administration *and* to the defeat of Brahmin power.[92]

In a similar vein, Hauswirth points to the hypocrisy of some "progressive" Indian reformers who enjoyed education and social development for themselves in the name of "modernization" while remaining complicit in oppressive or abusive customs towards the marginalized in their communities. Persistently throughout her writing, Hauswirth picks up the chain of argument where she imagines the average reader's knowledge of India to have left off; she acknowledges the dominant discourses around India and Indian (or more generally "Third World") women that her Western audiences would be familiar with, but then nudges them to think further by narrating examples from personal experience that contradict established tropes. While such an intervention in public discourse about

91 Hauswirth 1932b, p. 2.

92 Hauswirth 1932b, p. 226 (emphasis added).

India was received largely positively in the US and Britain (both with large pro-Indian segments in their educated populations), audiences in these regions were already quite familiar with this type of writing, not least because many Indian authors wrote in English and their books had circulated in Anglophone countries across the globe. In Switzerland, however, this was a different story.

5 "Something Peculiar, Something Unique": Hauswirth's India in Switzerland

Frieda Hauswirth arrived on the Swiss literary scene in 1933, three years after her first book *A Marriage to India* was published in New York. She wrote all her manuscripts in English, and her first couple of book contracts were all with US-American and British publishers. Eventually, however, a Zurich-based publishing house by the name of Rotapfel-Verlag (RAV) acquired the rights to the German translation of *Marriage* and its distribution throughout Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. Before taking Hauswirth's titles on, RAV's most successful publication was the German translation of Romain Rolland's biography of Mohandas Karamchand "Mahatma" Gandhi.[93] On the heels of this success, RAV made a name for itself in Switzerland during the late 1920s for publishing texts on or by Gandhi – likely the best-known public figure from contemporary India in Swiss popular culture at that time.[94]

By 1930, RAV's founder, Emil Roniger, was actively scouting for published titles from the Western and Indian Anglophone literary spheres to acquire the German and French translation rights to. These were to be published as part of a planned new series by RAV, the Eurasische Berichte (Eurasian Reports).[95] This series was envisaged as the cornerstone of a larger project of "Eurasian" collaboration that Roniger was pursuing together with Romain Rolland (1866–1944). The latter, a French national with permanent residence in Switzerland, held a profound interest in modern India and, in particular, envisioned modelling the resistance against rising authoritarianism in Europe on contemporary Indian political philosophy.[96] With the enthusiastic support of Roniger, Rolland sought to establish on "unspoilt" Swiss soil a *Weltbibliothek* (World Library) – "a collection of the most important works of the Orient as well as the Occident" – with an adjacent *Internationales Haus der Freundschaft* (International House of Friendship) modelled after Rabindranath Tagore's famous "World University"

93 Rolland 1923.
94 See Gandhi 1924, 1925; Rolland & Rolland 1925; Roniger 1925.
95 Meylan 2010, p. 10.
96 Harris 2013, p. 581.

at Shantiniketan in Bengal, India.[97] Roniger himself saw RAV in the role of a "meeting ground" for encounters between (South) Asia, Central Europe, and the cosmopolitan "World." Hauswirth and her writing on India fit perfectly into this vision.

Frieda Hauswirth herself would have been at pains to find a better-suited publishing house in Switzerland than RAV; it allowed her to present her writing to a captivated readership within German-speaking Europe interested in reading about modern India. Consequently, when her *Meine indische Ehe* was published in Switzerland in 1933, it received not just critical acclaim but widespread popular success, selling 10,000 copies within a year of publication, with the last reprint bringing the total number of copies to 17,000.[98] RAV went on to publish, in quick succession, the German translations of six out of the total seven books that Hauswirth wrote during her lifetime: *Meine indische Ehe* (1933; English original: *Marriage to India*, 1930), *Hanuman: Eine Erzählung von den heiligen Affen Indiens* (1934; English original: *Leap-Home and Gentlebrawn*, 1932), *Schleier vor Indiens Frauengemächern* (1935; English original: *Purdah: The Status of Indian Women*, 1932), *Der Sonne entgegen: Roman aus dem erwachenden Indien* (1935; English original: *Into the Sun*, 1933), *Die Lotosbraut* (1937; English original never published), and *Allmutter Kaweri* (1938; English original never published). By the time *Der Sonne entgegen*, her fourth book, came into bookstores, RAV was able to boast that the total number of copies sold of all of Hauswirth's books together had surpassed 30,000.[99] Crucially, even as Hauswirth failed to find any US or British publishers for the later novels, RAV continued to publish her work in German.

Hauswirth's "knowledge" arrived in Switzerland not just through her books but through her person. She moved back to her country of birth in 1934 and spent the following four years of her life, which coincided with the height of her literary fame in Switzerland, in Ronco sopra Ascona, a municipality near Locarno in the Italian-speaking south of the country. The area around the town of Ascona that she had chosen as a home from 1934 to 1938 of course had served

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97 Meylan 2010, p. 9. Tagore and Gandhi both visited Rolland in western Switzerland in 1926 and 1931, respectively. Roniger was present at both of these meetings, precisely to help sell the World Library idea to them. Both men did, in principle, voice their support, although neither the World Library nor the International House of Friendship ever manifested. See Meylan 2010 on the collaboration between Roniger, Rolland, and Rolland's sister Madeleine. See Harris 2013 for background on Gandhi's visit to Rolland in Switzerland.

98 In terms of comparative numbers, this is considerably less than the translation of Rolland's massively popular biography of Gandhi, which had reached a print run of 55,000 by 1930. On the other hand, compared to Rolland's subsequent publications with RAV – spiritual biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda (Rolland 1929, 1930a, 1930b) – the sales of Hauswirth's first book easily surpassed those of her much more famous contemporary.

99 See backmatter in Hauswirth 1935.

as a physical "meeting ground" for all sorts of encounters during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see chapter 1). There was no longer a *Lebensreform* movement to speak of on Monte Verità by the time Hauswirth moved to Ascona, but the area's history and reputation continued to attract an eclectic mix of bohemians and intellectuals – among them prominent figures like Hermann Hesse and Carl G. Jung – from across and beyond Europe, including India.[100]

Upon her return to Switzerland, Hauswirth confidently took up the role of a public expert on India. She held readings from her books all over the country, appeared in a radio show to speak about her book, and gave public lectures on subjects such as "India's Future" or the "The Women of India" before various audiences: student associations, literary and art societies, and even in the church of Gstaad, the village of her birth.[101] Public interest in "India" had grown considerably in Switzerland to extend beyond the social avant-gardes throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Gandhi's Salt March in March/April 1930 represented an unprecedented peak in public attention to modern India. It transformed Gandhi into a larger-than-life figure, and catapulted him to worldwide fame. Just as in other regions of Europe, in Switzerland, too, his "fame" was fuelled by the photographic visuals accompanying the tales of this modern-day Indian hero in the "illustrated presses," whose popularity had steadily increased in Switzerland from the early 1920s onwards.[102]

Although travel reports had long been a popular genre of European literature, the illustrated press and the concomitant rise of photojournalism contributed to a spectacular increase in, and popularization of, tales told by (white) Europeans venturing out into so-called exotic lands. Images of extra-European places, people, and "cultures" dominated these magazines, far outweighing visuals from within the actual region of publication.[103] As Patricia Purtschert has noted, the illustrated press was the most influential mass medium of the interwar period alongside the radio, and as such was crucial to the popularization of a colonial imaginary in Switzerland.[104] With Walter Bosshard (1892–1975), Martin Hürlimann (1897–1984), and Ella Maillart (1903–1997), three prolific European photojournalists reporting on South Asia between 1920 and 1945 hailed

100 See Schwab 2003 on the history of the radical Lebensreform community on Monte Verità. See Hakl 2015 on the later "Eranos" encounters in Ascona that sought to bring together "East" an "West" through intellectual and spiritual exchange.

101 Hauswirth compiled a list of the lectures she gave in Switzerland and also in the US and Britain; it is preserved as part of her private papers at Altes Archiv Gemeinde Saanen, 25.0.26 Nr. 604.

102 Müller 2019.

103 Ibid., p. 142.

104 Purtschert 2019, p. 15.

from Switzerland.[105] It was not uncommon for these magazines to publish written travel reports alongside the photo reportages, usually in a serial format spanning several issues. The autobiographical tale of Hauswirth's *Meine indische Ehe*, too, was picked up by the *Zürcher Illustrierte* (Zurich's Illustrated). It was published as a condensed and serialized version of the German translation in eight parts between September and December 1933. That same year the *Zürcher Illustrierte* reached the height of its influence, with a circulation of 83,000 that came close to matching the 100,000 figure of the country's largest illustrated magazine, the *Schweizer Illustrierte Zeitung*.[106] The illustrated press was the most popular arena in the Swiss public sphere to stage "encounters" between yet unexplored "wonderlands" of faraway places like India on the one hand and a Western world suffused by "modern progress" on the other. Through it, Hauswirth's work reached people far beyond the political and cultural intelligentsia (to whom it was most likely limited in the US, Britain, and India).

Within this arena of popular culture, Hauswirth's writing competed with an ever-expanding mass of literary and visual images of India available to Swiss publics. In light of the sheer volume of reports published on India, the *Zürcher Illustrierte* editors themselves acknowledged the possibility of a certain fatigue on the part of their readership with "Wonderland India" when they introduce Hauswirth's serialized novel in the 15 September 1933 issue:

> Excessive amounts of paper have been used up to write about India, and the books with and without images that seek to interpret the faraway land for us fill entire specialist catalogues.[107]

But Hauswirth, the editors explain, "enriches with her chronicles the entire body of literature on India with something peculiar, something unique."[108]

This "uniqueness" was attributed, for one, to the fact that Hauswirth does not reiterate tired tropes about India that readers of the illustrated press and travel tales would have been accustomed to. Angela Müller has shown in her analysis of German-language illustrated magazines that the photojournalists travelling through India in the interwar period generally followed and reproduced a fixed set of visual motives. This "iconography" of "Wonderland India" consisted of opulent maharajas and their courts (something between fairy-tale fantasy and despotic decadence), cross-legged sadhus or yogis that invited awe and suspicion in equal measure, and, finally, landscapes – untouched nature, exotic fauna and flora, and high mountain ranges that beckoned Swiss mount-

105 On Bosshard, see Pfunder, Münzer & Hürlimann 1997. On Hürlimann, see Müller 2019, pp. 33–85. On Maillart, see Borella 2006.

106 Müller 2019, p. 145.

107 Introduction to Hauswirth 1933, p. 1188.

108 Ibid.

aineers with their "virgin" peaks.[109] Hauswirth's presentation of the "realities" of India stands in contradistinction both to (visual) adventure reports that performed nothing but the by then well-rehearsed "spectacle of the 'other'"[110] and to the idea of an anti-rationalist, non-materialist Orient so prevalent in the Germanophone romanticist literary tradition at the turn of the century. The Indian "other" in Hauswirth's books is no "spectacle" to be observed but rather serves to facilitate alternative perspectives on the world to engage in dialogue with. The aim is for the reader to better understand the other's difference by becoming aware of their own bias(es).

On the other hand, like most other reviews of Hauswirth's work in Switzerland, the *Zürcher Illustrierte* introduction to *Meine indische Ehe* highlights in particular Hauswirth's marriage to Sarangadhar Das and her life in India with him among the "natives." Although it was often sensationalized and played on the societal taboo of interracial romance (without ever explicitly saying so), this aspect of Hauswirth's work was indeed a defining contrast to other "Western" authors whose literary and journalistic texts about India circulated in the Swiss public sphere at the time. Hauswirth's image as an author writing about India with authority, and more specifically as a "Hindu wife," was further underlined by the studio portraits of Hauswirth "in the Indian Sari" (as the *Zürcher Illustrierte* captioned it), one of which was printed alongside the first part of *Meine indische Ehe* in the *Zürcher Illustrierte,*[111] while another one adorned the dust jacket cover of *Meine indische Ehe*.[112] The portraits were taken during a stay in London in 1931, where Hauswirth travelled to negotiate the publication of *A Marriage to India* in Britain, and ended up receiving a commission from a different British publisher to write *Purdah.* Given this context, it can be assumed that the studio portraits of Hauswirth in the Indian Sari were commissioned by one of her publishers for the express purpose of depicting and marketing her as an "intimate" connoisseur of India. Figure 2.3 shows one of the two known portraits from Bassano Studio.

The image of India that Hauswirth conveyed to her Swiss audiences had been shaped by many decades of direct and intimate interactions with Indian political and social activists – first in cosmopolitan, anti-colonial circles in North America and Europe, and later during her repeated long stays in India from 1920. Through her texts, Hauswirth consciously took on the role of a broker of cultural and political knowledge between the people of South Asia on the

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109 Müller 2019, pp. 157–223.

110 Hall 1997.

111 Hauswirth 1933, p. 1188.

112 As can be gauged from the copy of *Meine indische Ehe* held at the Swiss National Library, which is reproduced in the entry for Hauswirth in the Historical Dictionary of Switzerland (see Blaser 2021).

Figure 2.3. Studio portrait of Frieda Hauswirth Das, by Bassano Ltd in London, England, dated December 1931. Bromide print. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

one hand and Swiss publics on the other. She spelled out this goal of transferring and translating knowledge through her writing in the foreword to her second book, *Purdah:*

> I hope that in *Purdah* the exceptional opportunities that I have had of seeing life in India from an unusual standpoint may put before the reader a few new considerations, new angles of approach to the complex question of the status of Indian women. If I have succeeded in this, I shall be satisfied.[113]

The extent to which Hauswirth succeeded in this remains an open question, especially with regard to relating the struggle of Indian women to Swiss audiences in general, and internationally connected Swiss feminist circles in particular. What is clear is that it was unusual for the Swiss public to hear and read

113 Hauswirth 1932b, p. viii.

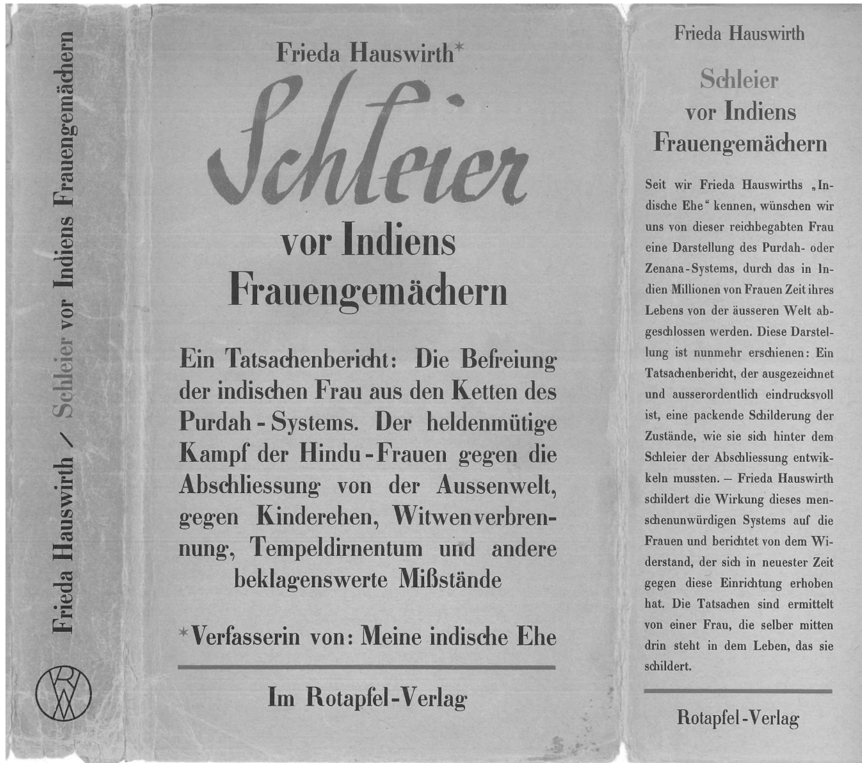

Figure 2.4. Dust jacket of *Schleier vor Indiens Frauengemächern,* the German Edition of *Purdah*, published in 1935 by Rotapfel-Verlag.

about the "conditions" of Indian women from an author who drew so directly and widely on women's activists' own words and experiences as Hauswirth did. Large dailies and weekly journals reported (sometimes at length) on Hauswirth's books. A close look at how her arguments were rehashed in those review articles, however, shows how even though the authors mostly praised Hauswirth's writing, they often reproduced her content in a decidedly more apolitical and paternalist or maternalist framing, as well as by falling back onto the kind of cultural and racial essentialism that Hauswirth took great care to avoid in her own writing. The following excerpt from a review of *Schleier* in the daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, as well as the text on the cover of *Schleier,* pictured in figure 2.4 below, illustrate this point:

> Only a large-hearted women could have sought to explore with such fervent knowledge the soul of the Indian woman, who is foreign to her in nature. With this book, the au-

thoress bridges a vast gap and solidifies the status of the Indian woman on a new level, from which she will take further steps toward freedom.[114]

6 Conclusion

The main notion that Hauswirth sought to dispel in her books is that of Indian women as "helpless" and "passive" victims in need of "saving.". As I have shown by following Hauswirth's trajectory of becoming a "transnational feminist" as she moved through variously gendered contexts in Switzerland, the US, and India, Hauswirth herself arrived at such insights only after extended periods of enthusiastic idealism, uncertainty, and disillusionment, each of which led her to recalibrate her feminist and other political commitments. Hauswirth's relationship to Indian women's activism changed drastically between the first time she "encountered" India as a student in Palo Alto in 1910 and the 1930s when she successfully built a career as an expert on Indian women and politics. During this time, she interacted with and learned from some of the most influential characters of both the "moderate" and militant wings of the anti-colonial movement in North America, Europe, and India, as well as with prominent women's activists and many "ordinary" people in northern and eastern India.

Throughout this period of Hauswirth's life, her Swiss identity often remained in the background or became ambiguous, not least by the loss of citizenship. In contrast to this, Hauswirth's reception in the Swiss public sphere was marked by a fixation on the exceptionality – the taboo – of a Swiss woman marrying interracially and "going native" in a country colonized by a European power. Within this discourse, both the national and the exotic are foregrounded as the most interesting aspects of Hauswirth and her writing. This emphasis reinserted the author and her work in a stark binary of self (a Swiss compatriot with a Swiss perspective) and other (writing about an exotic elsewhere), even as Hauswirth herself fascinated as someone who had breached that binary by virtue of her marriage and lifestyle in India, as well as her "global" life.

Both Hauswirth's path to India through various intermediaries – people, books, organizations, institutions – and the reception of her work in the Swiss public sphere speaks to how the historical entanglement of India and Switzerland is not only embedded in larger transnational processes like migration flows, non-territorial movements, or geopolitical alliances. The same encounter is also inevitably located within the tensions that underwrote Switzerland's relationship to European imperialism, given its self-conception as a "member" of the "civilized world" as well as the deep and broad pervasion of colonial imaginaries and tropes in Swiss public culture, as highlighted in the case of the illustrated press.

114 Otto 1935.

More specifically, this contribution has sought to make visible, as Mrinalini Sinha put it, "that neither feminisms nor women are ever articulated *outside* macropolitical structures that condition and delimit their political effects."[115]

In contrast to most of the other actors in this volume, Hauswirth openly discussed British colonial rule in India in her written work and took an explicit stance on the question, repeatedly arguing for the Indian right to political independence. The political goal that underwrote Hauswirth's activities between India and Switzerland lay not in a vision for a better European future but for a better future for India – and for Indian women in particular. The India that Hauswirth described in her writing is an India that exists for its own sake and its own goals; this India does not serve as a metaphorical cradle or practical resource for Hauswirth's European reader to find solace or solutions in. Moreover, there is no "outside" of European modernity that the India of Hauswirth's books is relegated to. On the contrary, the reader is constantly reminded of their relation to the phenomena they are reading about: Hauswirth interpellates them through candid admissions that she herself held certain stereotypically "Western" ideas of India, and then subsequently presents evidence in the form of lived experience or "deeper understanding" she arrived at, which serves as corrective to the clichés of the dominant discourse. By talking about contemporary social and political issues in India, Hauswirth delivered an India to her European audience that existed in an interlinked world and a shared present.

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115 Sinha 2000, p. 1078.

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