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## *Reimagining Asia: Indian and Australian women crossing borders\**

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### **Abstract**

The decades from the 1940s to the 1960s were ones of increasing contacts between women of India and Australia. These were not built on a shared British colonial history, but on commitments to visions circulating globally of equality between races, sexes, and classes. Kapila Khandvala from Bombay and Lucy Woodcock from Sydney were two women who met during such campaigns. Interacting roughly on an equal footing, they were aware of each other's activism in the Second World War and the emerging Cold War. Khandvala and Woodcock both made major contributions to the women's movements of their countries, yet have been largely forgotten in recent histories, as have links between their countries. We analyse their interactions, views, and practices on issues to which they devoted their lives: women's rights, progressive education, and peace. Their beliefs and practices on each were shaped by their respective local contexts, although they shared ideologies that were circulating internationally. These kept them in contact over many years, during which Kapila built networks that brought Australians into the sphere of Indian women's awareness, while Lucy, in addition to her continuing contacts with Kapila, travelled to China and consolidated links between Australian and Chinese women in Sydney. Their activist world was centred not in Western Europe, but in a new Asia that linked Australia and India. Our comparative study of the work and interactions of these two activist women

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offers strategies for working on global histories, where collaborative research and analysis is conducted in both colonizing and colonized countries.

### **Introduction: reimagining a new Asia without war**

An imagined 'Asia'—the 'Far East'—has been a metaphor for racial difference for the West in the past and current centuries. The settler colony of Australia was regarded as outside the closed scope of 'Asia' despite its geographic proximity. Yet, in the mid-twentieth century, activists—and particularly women—were making new links across the previously impenetrable borders between Asia and Australia.

We trace these shifts by following the interactions of two women active in the international women's movement: Kapila Khandvala (1906–82) from a middle-class Bombay family and Lucy Woodcock (1889–1968) from working-class Sydney. Both were teachers in leading educational roles in their respective countries. They both subscribed to the powerful ideas that were circulating internationally but their practices were shaped by local conditions, leading at times to striking differences. Both nevertheless opened up new ways to view relationships between activists across borders. In doing so, they saw Asia as a wider space that included Australia and in which ideas and movements circulated across borders, languages, and ethnicities. What brought these two activist women educators together? Why were they interested in each other's countries? What generated differences and tensions in their lifelong relationship?

Their contact did not emerge from a vacuum. There had been some contact between women from Australia and India from the mid-nineteenth century, but these interactions had been limited to three types. First, there was a long-established link between teachers and nurses from metropolitan powers to colonies. Often these were associated with the proselytization of religion (Christianity in India) or cultural imperialism, which compromised the confidence of colonized peoples.<sup>1</sup> Even when marginalized groups like Dalits and Adivasis converted to Christianity in a challenge to local Indian social

<sup>1</sup> Some European and settler women working in India had become more attentive to Indian women's concerns, as Margaret Allen demonstrated in her 2011 article about Eleanor Rivett. These women were, however, few in number. Margaret Allen, 2011: 'Eleanor Rivett (1883–1972): Educationalist, Missionary and Internationalist' in Fiona Davis, Nell Musgrove, and Judith Smart (eds), *Women Leaders in Twentieth Century Australia*, eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, pp. 45–63.

structures, the association with Christianity appeared to outsiders to be strongly colonial. From the later nineteenth century, there was a smaller number of teachers involved in such interactions who were motivated by other philosophies, notably Theosophy, and this formed an important precursor to the post-Second World War contacts. However, such non-Christian interactions were in the minority.<sup>2</sup>

Second, there were nominally non-political organizations like the Girl Guides and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)—which were clearly associated with Christianity though separated to some extent from the governing colonial power. These organizations had established local structures often appropriated by Indian women and offering a base for some of the earliest women's networks. The YWCA, for example, remained a site for organizing solidarity between Indian women of all religions and progressively lost its strong links to the West. This was similar to the experience of some women in the Theosophical movement in India. Annie Besant, a major influence in that movement, and Theosophist Margaret Cousins were both also associated with Irish nationalism and brought useful international networks into contact with indigenous Indian movements.

Third, there were a number of women's organizations, founded in the West, that claimed international operation but actually linked women of colonizing countries and those of settler colonies. An example is the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which was formed under various names from 1915 and, like many other 'international' women's organizations of the time, held all its major meetings in Europe or North America.<sup>3</sup> Not until 1970 was a non-European or North American site chosen when a conference was held in New Delhi.<sup>4</sup> The Pan-Pacific Women's Association was founded in 1928, aspiring to similar communication between colonizing nations, but women from colonized communities were

<sup>2</sup> We have investigated the major impact of theosophy in conjunction with feminism and the emerging education movements of the early twentieth century in Heather Goodall and Devleena Ghosh, 2015: 'Beyond the "Poison of Prejudice": Indian and Australian Women Talk about the White Australia Policy', *History Australia*, Vol. 12, No. 1, April: 116–140.

<sup>3</sup> The early names varied—women organizing for peace in Australia in 1915, for example, called themselves The Sisterhood of International Peace until 1919, when they adopted the more internationally recognized title, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

<sup>4</sup> Catia Confortini, 2012: *Intelligent Compassion: Feminist Critical Methodology in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 56–83.

usually the objects of the discussions among colonizer and settler-colonial delegations rather than active contributors. Only in the 1950s did this association begin to face such contradictions because of the forceful demands of women from former colonies.<sup>5</sup>

Over this same period, there were dramatic developments in Indian women's organizations. Hindu modernizing movements like the Brahma Samaj advocated the education of middle-class women, within the framework of women as wives and mothers. Popular anti-colonial campaigns, such as the Indian National Congress and the Gandhian campaigns for self-determination to which women increasingly contributed, were associated closely with such modernization movements. These movements opened up significant new spaces for women to be active politically. Despite anxieties among elite Indian women activists that their 'respectability' should not be compromised and the Gandhian concern to include only the 'right sort of women' in the 1930s non-cooperation agitations, important statements about women's rights emerged in India significantly before they did so in the West.<sup>6</sup>

Many women who took leading roles in the mainstream anti-colonial movement were also critical of it and the tensions became evident in the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), formed in 1927, which brought together women's organizations across the country. This umbrella group was nevertheless strongly aware of women's organizations in other parts of the world, particularly those with an anti-colonial and nationalist stance.<sup>7</sup> Yet, until the Second World War, there had been little interaction between bodies like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and those like the AIWC.<sup>8</sup>

The political conditions after the Second World War began to force changes. Splits in movements occurred because of the Cold War but, ironically, it also opened up spaces for the voices of decolonizing countries' women's groups. An example is the development of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), which was

<sup>5</sup> Fiona Paisley, 2009: *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

<sup>6</sup> Geraldine Forbes, 1988: 'The Politics of Respectability: Indian Women and the National Congress' in D. A. Low (ed.), *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Highlights*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, pp. 54–97.

<sup>7</sup> Kumari Jayawardina, 1986: *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London: Zed Books.

<sup>8</sup> Confortini, *Intelligent Compassion*.

formed in Paris in November 1945 with a mixed attendance of delegates from 40 countries from across Europe and beyond present and Eugenie Cotton, French scientist and feminist, as its president. Although its membership was mixed across many left-wing and feminist groups, the Soviet Union backed the WIDF strongly. This led to the rapid withdrawal of anti-communist women's groups, which claimed the international body was a communist front. The WIDF headquarters were consequently moved from Paris to East Berlin. Those member organizations who remained in the WIDF, especially those from former colonies, included a high proportion of members of or sympathizers with communist parties.<sup>9</sup>

In India, the WIDF-affiliated body was the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), launched in 1954 by left-wing women from the AIWC, where the leadership consisted mostly of elite, upper-class, and upper-caste women, with few links to Indian unions.<sup>10</sup> The NFIW was more active in addressing the economic inequalities for female nurses and teachers as well as women agricultural workers, and contained women who were members of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Nevertheless, there were many links between the two organizations. A number of the middle-class women who remained with the AIWC were also closely associated with National Federation activities.<sup>11</sup>

Kapila Khandvala had been active in the AIWC before the National Federation was formed and she came to Australia in 1946 as a representative of the AIWC. She strongly supported the formation of the NFIW, with its attention to economic and caste issues, and she was elected as its president in the 1960s. Nevertheless, she retained close links with many women in the AIWC and did not join the CPI, although she worked closely with many National Federation women who were members of the CPI.

<sup>9</sup> Francisca de Haan, 2010: 'Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4: 547–573.

<sup>10</sup> Renu Chakravartty, 1980: *Communists in Indian Women's Movement, 1940–1950*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House; Gargi Chakravartty and Supriya Chotani, 2014: *Charting a New Path: Early Years of National Federation of Indian Women*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House; Sarla Sharma, transcript of interview, Old Delhi, 18 January 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Including Rameshwari Nehru, interview with Sarla Sharma, Delhi, 18 January 2014; de Haan, 'Continuing Cold War Paradigms'.

The Union of Australian Women (UAW) in Australia—an umbrella group formed in 1950 to link left-wing organizations—was also affiliated to the WIDF. While many of its members were in the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), many other outspoken women were not, so the UAW had an uneasy relationship with the CPA leadership.<sup>12</sup> It was in a very similar situation to the National Federation in India in that it was aligned with an older umbrella organization, the United Associations of Women (UA), formed in 1929 by both right- and left-wing feminist organizations to focus on economic and political rights. Lucy Woodcock, a strong trade unionist, became active in the United Associations in the 1930s, when she was seeking allies for the New South Wales Teachers Federation to oppose the forced resignation of married women teachers. She was on the socialist left wing of the United Associations and worked closely with women from the UAW. Until 1954, the United Associations could hold together because there was much common ground between its divergent political wings but differences came to a head over the Peace movement. The United Associations first endorsed Lucy Woodcock as its delegate to the 1954 Stockholm Peace Conference but, after she left Australia, its right wing retracted the endorsement, splitting the organization irretrievably along Cold War lines.<sup>13</sup>

The moderate and left-wing bodies in both India and Australia were in frequent communication with each other across the Indian Ocean. The AIWC and the United Associations of Women were actively involved in the developments around Women's Charters in 1945 and 1946. Kapila and the barrister Mithan Lam came to Australia for the Second Australian Women's Charter Conference in August 1946. Mithan Lam later became president of the AIWC during the same period as Kapila was president of the NFIW. In international events like International Women's Day (IWD) in April each year, it was the left-wing organizations—the National Federation in India and the UAW in Australia—that took the leading roles and coordinated with the other, although at least some colleagues from the more moderate organizations in each country were actively involved. More routinely,

<sup>12</sup> Betty Riley papers, N188, Noel Butlin Archive of Business and Labour (NBABL), Australian National University (ANU).

<sup>13</sup> Winifred Mitchell, *circa 1980: 50 Years of Feminist Achievement: A History of the United Associations of Women*, Sydney: United Associations of Women, pp. 95–96.

the National Federation and the UAW were in touch through the WIDF.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond this organizational interaction, women like Kapila and Lucy took their communication into personal and social arenas. Kapila opened her home to travelling left-wing activists in the following decades—not only to Jessie Street and Lucy Woodcock with whom she had worked closely at the 1946 conference, but to Lucy's close friends like Lotte Fink, a refugee and medical doctor, who became a family-planning advocate in Australia and visited Kapila when attending a family-planning conference in Bombay in November 1952. So too did Freda Brown, the activist in the UAW who became the president of the WIDF. Freda was the cousin of Lucy's close friends Sam and Ethel Lewis. Kapila was later to host not only Sam and Ethel, but Freda's daughter, Lee Rhiannon, now a senator in the NSW parliament. Through Kapila, Lucy met Indian women in trade unions in India in 1954. Lucy later expanded her relationships with Chinese women in Sydney, tutoring young Chinese in English and travelling to China in 1964.

*Tensions between socialism, feminism, and the 'peaceful mother'*

Women from Australia and India who met at these WIDF events, whether members or not of political parties, considered themselves as both socialist and feminist.<sup>15</sup> There were tensions inherent in their attempts to reconcile socialist commitments to egalitarianism with feminist desires to advance the cause and rights of women. In India, the women who formed the NFIW in 1954 wanted to break away from the domination of elites in the AIWC, yet they too were largely middle- and/or upper-class. NFIW Congresses were most often attended by urban women activists.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in Australia, UAW meetings were

<sup>14</sup> Joyce Stevens, 1985: *A History of International Women's Day*, online: <http://www.isis.aust.com/iwd/stevens/> (accessed 24 October 2018); in India, many references in all NFIW literature, for example, *Women's News*, April 1954, 1:7, p. 2 and NFIW, *Report of First Congress*, June 1954, p. 7. All NFIW documents held in private holdings, now digitized by this project and available on application to the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, Mumbai.

<sup>15</sup> Zora Simic, 2007: 'Butter Not Bombs: A Short History of the Union of Australian Women', *History Australia*, Vol. 4, No. 1: 7.1–7.15.

<sup>16</sup> NFIW Congress Reports and newsletters, 1954 to present, held in NFIW offices.

mainly attended by urban-based teachers and nurses.<sup>17</sup> The trope of ‘motherhood’ became a useful strategy for bridging the class and geographic divides for both the NFIW and the UAW. They deployed this trope particularly in peace campaigns to argue that women of all classes, ethnicities, and backgrounds had common interests in promoting peace because of their shared potential for motherhood.<sup>18</sup> The metaphor of a universal ‘peaceful mother’ was also useful in cross-cultural encounters, appearing frequently in speeches made on joint platforms as well in the WIDF journal.<sup>19</sup> This was an essentialist trope, assuming a biological determinism: that all women, whether mothers or not, had innate maternal instincts. Gayatri Spivak has termed this ‘strategic essentialism’—a deliberate deployment of biological determinism to achieve particular, limited aims.<sup>20</sup>

The women who were actually in touch with each other, however, like Kapila and Lucy, usually formed their friendships around shared commitments to improving social conditions and economic rights. Despite their common involvement in the WIDF, with its maternalist vocabulary, neither Khandvala nor Woodcock fitted the ‘maternal’ model. In their own local campaigns, both insisted on women’s equality as citizens. Occasionally, either of them turned to maternalism in an effort to reach across classes, cultures, and geographies but this tactic was a striking departure from their other statements.

Lucy Woodcock and Kapila Khandvala met several times at various conferences from 1946 onwards and kept in contact until Lucy’s death in 1968.<sup>21</sup> Their class background was different but they engaged in similar careers. Both were highly educated teachers who actively campaigned for peace, progressive education, and working women’s rights. Neither ever joined a communist party but both

<sup>17</sup> Simic, ‘Butter Not Bullets’; Union of Australian Women (UAW) Annual Conference Reports and Newsletters, throughout, NBABL.

<sup>18</sup> Simic, ‘Butter Not Bombs’, discusses the ‘peaceful mother’ trope throughout.

<sup>19</sup> Some examples from many: Booklet, WIDF 1952: ‘For Their Rights as Mothers, Workers, Citizens’, Berlin; Booklet, WIDF, May 1954: ‘I Want To Live: Ban Atomic Weapons’, with image of child on cover; WIDF, 1958: ‘Protection of Motherhood, as a Right of Women and a Responsibility of Society’, Berlin; much literature discusses ‘maternalism’ in women’s politics, including recently Marian van der Klein, R. J. Plant, N. Sanders, and L. R. Weintrob (eds), 2012: *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

<sup>20</sup> First coined by Gayatri Spivak, 1987: *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, York: Methuen.

<sup>21</sup> Their mutual friend, Jessie Street, left an archive of letters and diaries, MS 2683, held in the National Library of Australia (NLA), which show Kapila and Lucy to have been in mail communication. Lucy left no papers.



sympathized strongly with socialism and worked closely with ‘card-carrying’ communists.<sup>22</sup>

We examine four dimensions of these activists’ lives to comprehend better the formation of their long-term political relationships. First, because the personal is political, we consider their lifestyles, both of which were in marked contrast to the norms of their times, yet not uncommon among the working women they championed. Second, we look at their work for economic justice for women, in particular for teachers and nurses. Third, we look at their practice as educators, engaging with international ideologies but facing different local conditions. Finally, we look at their engagement in the Peace movement, where they shared much common ground but had very different priorities.

### Oppositional lives

Outlining the lives of these two remarkable women is more than scene setting. It illuminates the distance between these women and the conventional mores of their organizations. It emphasizes that their lives resembled those of many women in the movements to which they belonged, who also did not fit conventional stereotypes.

#### *Lucy Woodcock, 1889–1968*

Lucy Woodcock was born in Granville, in suburban Sydney, the eldest daughter in a lower-middle-class family. She entered teaching in 1906 as an apprenticed ‘pupil teacher’. By the time she retired in 1953, she was the last remaining teacher to have reached full qualifications ‘on the job’. She spent her first decade in small public schools, first in rural Eden in 1910 and later in working-class Sydney. Taking night classes, she completed two bachelor’s degrees at Sydney University, in Arts (1922) and in Economics (1924). In 1927, she spent a gruelling year in the United Kingdom teaching in 75 inner-city London council-run

<sup>22</sup> Autobiographical notes, Kapila Khandvala, in Jessie Street Papers, MS 2683/3/1211–1212, NLA; Interview notes, Jyotibhen Trivedi, 21 January 2015, Santa Cruz, Mumbai.

schools, many in the economically impoverished East End, and became interested in emerging ideas about ‘progressive education’.<sup>23</sup>

Lucy was an active unionist and committed to women’s rights during her early teaching years. Her politics shifted further to the left during the 1920s. This may have been due to the influence of her economics lecturer and friend, Robert Irvine,<sup>24</sup> and also other powerful experiences before she entered university. In her posting in Eden in 1910, the Robinovitz family, Jewish refugees fleeing Russian persecution, befriended the lonely young teacher. Their generosity made a powerful impression and she maintained a sustained anger against anti-Semitism in Europe and racial discrimination in general.<sup>25</sup> This experience was amplified during Lucy’s stint in the East End, where many Jewish refugees had settled after leaving Russia.

Lucy’s other formative experience was of the adult world of work, in which professional women were paid far less than their male colleagues. This led to her enduring commitment to equal pay for women. Though she mainly focused her attention on her own profession—teaching—Lucy was a co-founder of the Campaign for Action on Equal Pay in 1938, and continued to campaign for equal pay for all women in all industries throughout her life. Lucy was also one of the founders of the NSW Teachers Federation in 1918, having honed her advocacy skills by organizing the Night School Students at Sydney University. There she met Sam Lewis, a fellow teacher and CPA member, who became a lifelong friend.<sup>26</sup>

There are some scattered records about Lucy Woodcock’s professional and political career but little is known of her personal life. After her retirement, Lucy remained an active and prominent member of key women’s organizations—she was IWD president and UA president until her death in 1968. Many younger women met her during these years, remembering her as regularly chairing meetings,

<sup>23</sup> UAW, *News Sheet*, October 1955, State Library of NSW (SLNSW).

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Mitchell, 1990: ‘Woodcock, Lucy Godiva (1889–1968)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, online: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/woodcock-lucy-godiva-9172/text16197> (accessed 24 October 2018); Bruce Mitchell, 1975: *Teachers, Education and Politics: A History of the Organisations of Public School Teachers in New South Wales*, University of Queensland Press: St Lucia.

<sup>25</sup> *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 1 January 1942, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Sam Lewis, 1953: Testimonial Event on the Retirement of Lucy Woodcock, Teachers Federation, UAW files, Series Z236, Box 32, Folder 4, NBABL.

writing letters, and organizing campaigns—but there are few who remember her personally. Lucy seemed to them a reserved and private woman. Yet those, like Sam Lewis, who had known her during the interwar years when she juggled both teaching and national union politics, remembered her warmth, humour, and extraordinary negotiating skills.

Lucy offered only one glimpse into her personal life when, as an elderly woman, she revealed that, between the wars, she had been part of Sydney's Bohemian culture. This was a loose network of intellectuals, writers, and artists who were scathing critics of Sydney's bourgeois culture. They lived mostly in inner Sydney (where Lucy kept a flat) and celebrated sexual exploration and artistic innovation.<sup>27</sup> Lucy never married. She shared a lifelong interest in primary education and social work with another unmarried friend, Elsie Rivett (1887–1964). From the early 1930s, Lucy championed a Children's Library with Elsie in inner-city Sydney and the pair were active members of a number of peace organizations until Elsie's death (in 1964).<sup>28</sup>

In more recent times, Lucy may have identified herself as homosexual, but it is impossible to tell whether or not she was in a same-sex relationship. Yet, simply by remaining unmarried, she lived outside the conventions of traditional society and the significant proportion of left-wing women who identified as heterosexual and married, whether or not they had children. Lucy's lifestyle transgressed the conservative norms of both the wider society and the left-wing parties of the times, particularly those of the CPA, which was

<sup>27</sup> Bruce McFarlane (personal communication, letter, August 2015) arising from his interview with Lucy, late in her life, for his 1966 biography of R. F. Irvine, who had been her Sydney University Economics professor, and became a lifelong friend. Lucy's involvement with Bohemian culture is certainly supported by the photograph of Lucy in the 1920s with her close friend, the Jewish refugee Dr Lotte Fink. Lucy's clothing, her cigarette smoking, and her general demeanour suggest the Bohemian style more than any other—certainly more than that the CPA of the 1940s! (Photograph in Ruth Fink Latukefu family collection.) See Peter Kirkpatrick, 1992: *The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the Australian Convention on Peace and War. Elsie convened its conference in September 1953, at which Lucy was presented with an award 'for her sterling work on peace'. Press clipping in Australian Security and Intelligence File (ASIO) for Lucy Woodcock, Vol. 1: 120, National Archives of Australia (NAA), newspaper name unclear.

notoriously judgemental and punitive in its demands for conventional sexuality.<sup>29</sup>

*Kapila Khandvala, 1906–82*

Kapila was the youngest of seven children (five daughters and two sons) of the surgeon T. C. Khandvala from a family far more affluent than Lucy's. A resident of Bombay, T. C. Khandvala was prominent in the Brahmo Samaj—a Hindu reform and modernization movement. Brahmo Samaj principles included the worship of one divinity, a rejection of idolatry and of caste, and a belief in the equality of all humans and the empowerment of women through education. The Brahmo Samaj had common ground with the Theosophical Society and often shared venues and resources.<sup>30</sup> Khandvala took seriously the empowerment of women, insisting that all his children be educated in English, in 'modern' subjects like science, and gain professional qualifications. Kapila chose teaching, entering formal training in the late 1920s. Meanwhile, her older sisters, some in medical training, became active in the independence movement and were involved in the Desh Sevika Sangh (DSS)—a Bombay women's organization that was particularly active during the Salt March agitation and the picketing of cloth and toddy shops in Bombay.<sup>31</sup>

After her first degree, Kapila won a Barbour Women's scholarship in 1930 to study for her master's in Education at the University of Michigan, United States of America. She then completed a second degree in Social Work. Kapila returned via Europe, where she visited schools across Western Europe and the Soviet Union. After a period of teaching in Bombay, she represented India at the International Students Federation conference in Prague. In 1937, Kapila delivered the article 'Primary and Secondary Education in India' to the World Federation of Education Associations conference in Tokyo, then lectured at a number of Chinese universities on 'Indian problems'.

<sup>29</sup> For CPI criticism of even committed members living unconventional lives, see Betty Reilly papers, NBABL, N188.

<sup>30</sup> Jyotibhen Trivedi Interview notes, January 2015; Reba Lewis, 1957: *Three Faces has Bombay*, Bombay: Popular Book Depot, pp. 112–113; Tuljaram Chunilal Khandvala, 1941: *My Life Story: Autobiography of T. C. Khandvala*, Bombay: V. S. Sohoni, p. 30 and throughout.

<sup>31</sup> Bombay Police Report, Head Office, 12 April 1930, No. 1661/H/3717; Forbes, 'The Politics of Respectability'.

She returned to work at a social work centre in Bombay, undertaking outreach literacy work in rural villages, until appointed principal of a training college for women in mid-1938. In August 1941, she was appointed secretary of the Bombay Municipal Schools Committee, making her the first woman in India to be appointed as the head of an education department.<sup>32</sup>

Following Brahma Samaj principles, at least one of Kapila's sisters made a love marriage,<sup>33</sup> outraging their caste elders. Kapila took this a step further, deciding against marriage altogether. She and C. M. Trivedi were devoted partners, living together in Santa Cruz until Trivedi's death in 1976. Trivedi was already married to a sister-in-law of Kapila's niece, whom he was apparently unable to divorce. He and Kapila are remembered to this day as warm, vivid members of an extended network of family and Bombay intellectuals, artists, and reformers.<sup>34</sup> Yet there is discomfort in these memories. Kapila and Trivedi's refusal or inability to marry transgressed family and social expectations, including those of Kapila's reformist father. The pressure on activist women to remain 'respectable' had been paramount during the DSS agitation<sup>35</sup> and Kapila clearly breached this convention. Like Lucy Woodcock, Kapila challenged the social mores within her family, community, and left-wing networks.

Lucy and Kapila first met in Sydney in August 1946, introduced by their common friend, Jessie Street, who had recently travelled to India to attend that AIWC meeting in Hyderabad that approved the Indian Women's Charter. Kapila, as an educationist and activist, came to Australia to speak at two high-profile events: the Australian Women's Charter conference and a New Education Fellowship (NEF) conference on 'Education for International Understanding', which had sessions in all major Australian cities. Lucy Woodcock was involved in both conferences and a friend of Jessie Street, a founder of the Women's Charter movement. As Dymphna Cusack recalled, Lucy, by this time, was 'well known as a fighter' and a high-profile member of the United Associations of Women in their campaigns

<sup>32</sup> Autobiographical note by Kapila and dated 7 January 1946 in Bombay, and then attached to the draft of Kapila's plenary speech to the Second Australian Women's Charter Conference, August 1946, Jessie Street Papers, MS 2683/3/1211-2, NLA.

<sup>33</sup> That is, a marriage chosen by the partners rather than by parental arrangement.

<sup>34</sup> Indira Bharadwaj interview, 21 January 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Forbes, 'The Politics of Respectability'; this was a major issue in both Bombay and Calcutta.

for economic rights and equal pay. Lucy introduced Kapila to the education meetings<sup>36</sup> and they met again in January 1955 in Bombay after Lucy and Jessie had attended a peace conference in Madras, then visited Mithan Lam in Nagpur.<sup>37</sup>

### **Work: women's economic justice**

Lucy Woodcock and Kapila Khandvala were both committed activists for economic justice for women. On the surface, there were differences between their campaigns around wages and conditions but they shared an underlying commitment to the economic issues around wages, working conditions, and the cost of living. In the Australian situation, where the 1907 Harvester decision enshrined a lower pay scale for women than for men working at the same job, Lucy argued for equal pay and opportunities for advancement and leadership. She worked first with her own industry—teaching. After she co-founded the NSW Teachers Federation in 1918, she campaigned consistently for equal pay for women teachers at all stages of their careers, from assistants to principals, eventually achieving this goal after a long struggle. Lucy also broadened her attention to women in all industries, co-founding the Council for Action on Equal Pay in 1938 and leading it from 1942 until its consensual dissolution in 1948.

In India, the Indian National Congress had resolved in 1931 that there should be equal pay for all workers, regardless of gender, caste, or religion. Kapila's earliest attention was therefore on women workers in any industry. She focused first on the conditions of women in nursing—an all-female workforce in India at that time—before beginning a campaign for teachers, where the gendered pay gap was not as widespread or systematic as it was in Australia. Both Kapila and Lucy considered economic justice and the independence of women the fundamental measure of any progress, though they worked in differing local conditions.

<sup>36</sup> Dymphna Cusack, 'Foreword' to Mitchell, *50 Years of Feminist Achievement*, p. iv.

<sup>37</sup> Penelope Johnson, 1986: 'Gender, Class and Work: The Council of Action for Equal Pay and the Equal Pay Campaign in Australia During World War II', *Labour History*, Vol. 50, May: 132–146.

*Lucy Woodcock*

Lucy considered unions as an instrument for justice—particularly for women—but she used every tool she found, inside and outside unions, to advance women’s economic rights. In 1925, Lucy authored *Justice vs Tradition* on behalf of the Council of Women Teachers, setting out the many arguments for equal pay.<sup>38</sup> The book did mobilize the widely held maternalism argument that all women were temperamentally suited to educating children because of their biological potential as childbearers. Yet Lucy’s argument combined this essentialist assertion with a demand for recognition of women’s equal rights as citizens to challenge ‘tradition’. The book recounted women’s achievements in education, emphasizing their equivalence with those of men, and stressed that women therefore constituted no threat to male teachers because, with effective training and equal pay scales, both men and women could work constructively and collaboratively to meet equally the needs of all students.

The widely held view of all women as innately suited to teaching was brutally challenged in 1932 when the NSW government enacted the Married Women Teachers Dismissal Act. This incoming government argued that the economy had to be structured around families with male breadwinners because of the Depression. Immediately, 854 married women teachers lost their jobs, whether or not they had dependants, while all male teachers were retained, regardless of marital or family status.<sup>39</sup> Suddenly, married women were deemed to be superfluous to teaching. *Justice vs Tradition* had already dismissed the argument that family position should determine wages, pointing out that only a small proportion of male teachers were either married or supporting families. There had already been tensions between unmarried and married teachers. In a society in which women were usually accorded status only by virtue of marriage, teaching had offered those who chose not to marry, for whatever reason, a high status denied to single women. In addition to tensions over sexual

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Mitchell, 1990: ‘Lucy Godiva Woodcock’, *ADB*, for her key role in the writing of *Justice vs Tradition*; Lucy Woodcock, Speech, May 1963, reported in *The WA Teacher*, Teacher’s Federation files, NBABL, N111/2743.

<sup>39</sup> Majorie Theobald and Donna Dwyer, 1999: ‘An Episode in Feminist Politics: The Married Women (Lecturers and Teachers) Act, 1937–47’, *Labour History*, Vol. 76: 59–77, at 65–66.

orientation, there were tensions around competing sources of status.<sup>40</sup> This act disadvantaged married women, repudiating their right to earn independent incomes or be recognized as breadwinners for themselves or dependants.<sup>41</sup> For many unmarried women teachers, the wisest course seemed to be to quietly assent to the dismissal of married women because this offered them an economic advantage in difficult Depression conditions, providing more jobs and reducing the competition for them, as well as restoring more simple hierarchies of status.

Lucy refused to keep quiet. Instead, she spoke strongly in support of married women—and continued to demand that ALL women teachers be paid the same as male teachers.<sup>42</sup> Her argument was that marital or familial relationships should not be privileged over economic rights.<sup>43</sup> This egalitarian stand required tense negotiations with many single women teachers who were uneasy that they would lose an advantage.<sup>44</sup> Lucy persisted however and, in May 1937, she helped form the Council of Action for Equal Pay, in which teachers joined with other unionists, women's organizations, and individuals to fight for the act's repeal and achieve equal pay for ALL women.<sup>45</sup> Despite the shortage of teachers during the Second World War, the Married Teachers' Dismissal Act meant that married women were only able to re-enter the service as temporary casuals, with a massive loss of pay.<sup>46</sup>

When this act was finally repealed in 1947, Lucy immediately returned to the campaign for equal pay for all women. She took up the cause of 'assistant' teachers as well as married or single full-time teachers. Cathy Bloch, at that time a trainee 'assistant' teacher, told the UAW national conference in 1963 that Lucy 'had helped in their fight for equal pay which resulted in all trainee teachers receiving

<sup>40</sup> K. Holmes, 1998: 'Spinsters Indispensable: Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890–1920', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 110: 68–90; Kay Whitehead, 2007: 'The Spinster Teacher in Australia from the 1870s to the 1960s', *History of Education Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1: 1–17.

<sup>41</sup> Alison McKinnon, 2010: *Women, Love and Learning: The Double Bind*, Bern: Peter Lang; Theobald and Dwyer, 'An Episode in Feminist Politics', pp. 59–77.

<sup>42</sup> *Northern Miner*, 4 January 1932, p. 4; *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 20 December 1932, p. 9; *Maitland Daily Mercury*, 10 January 1933, p. 8; *Northern Miner*, 21 January 1933, p. 2; *Truth*, 23 May 1937, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> *The Northern Miner*, 4 January 1932, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Theobald and Dwyer, 'An Episode in Feminist Politics', p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> Lucy Woodcock, 1964: 'Brave Hearts', *Our Women*, May, p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> Theobald and Dwyer, 'An Episode in Feminist Politics', throughout.



equal pay'.<sup>47</sup> Since her 1925 *Justice vs Tradition*, Lucy had advocated the recognition of teaching as a profession, with all teachers, including women, gaining the respect and recognition their knowledge and skills deserved. Lucy herself had learnt 'on the job' but her concern for tertiary education inspired her to pay her own way through two degrees part-time. She valued training and rigorous teacher education. Yet her close work with assistant teachers demonstrated that she was not seeking 'professionalism' as a way of dividing teachers. Instead, she wanted a clear career path and non-discriminatory advancement, with accreditation as a way of confirming the status of all the workers in the profession.

Lucy's battle for equal pay had not been won at the time of her retirement in 1953. At the testimonial dinner held by the Teachers Federation, Lucy spoke directly to the Labor Party Minister for Education, whose presence at her retirement dinner indicated the government's recognition of her work:

Now Mr Heffron, I thought after 35 years as a unionist, I would have had as a parting gift equality of opportunity. You see that is something very important as I feel that no profession which pays its women less than its men is a true profession. For that reason alone, I would be glad if something could be done ere long to remove that discrimination which exists.<sup>48</sup>

After her retirement, no longer constrained by Education Department red tape, Lucy travelled to peace conferences and education meetings in Japan, China, India, the Soviet Union, Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom. During each visit, she contacted rural and urban women workers, reporting their conditions to the UA and the Australian media. In India, for example, she spoke with women working on cashew plantations in the south and in textile mills in north-western Ahmadabad.<sup>49</sup> She argued that women unionists in Australia had a responsibility to learn about and support women workers in post-colonial countries. Finally, in 1963, Lucy's long struggle bore fruit when equal pay was declared for NSW public-sector employees. She wrote about the 'brave hearts' who had led that battle—women such as Kate Ryan, Ruth Lucas, Margaret Swann, Rose

<sup>47</sup> *Advertiser*, 14 January 1949, p. 9; *Argus*, 14 January 1949, p. 5; *Daily Telegraph*, 18 December 1952; UAW Nation Conference, ASIO Report 63/178, p. 3, included in 'Margaret Holmes', NAA: A6119, 3362, p. 53 of 146.

<sup>48</sup> Lucy Woodcock, Response Speech, Testimonial Dinner 1953, UAW files, Series Z236, Box 32, Folder 4, NBABL.

<sup>49</sup> *United Associations News Sheet*, 1955, pp. 3–4.

Symonds, and others who, like her, had been ridiculed for their belief in ‘this crackpot notion of feminism’<sup>50</sup> but that ‘much still remains to be done to ensure full recognition of women . . . representing half of the population of the world!’<sup>51</sup>

### *Kapila Khandvala*

Rather than working through trade unions as Lucy did, Kapila Khandvala worked predominantly through the public service and women’s organizations to achieve economic and legal justice for women. She took a directly similar approach to Lucy, however, by focusing on economic justice—wages, conditions, and advancement. Her arguments were in marked contrast to the voices of authority in professions such as nursing.<sup>52</sup> This was an approach taken also by European advisory staff that became influential among Indian nurses in the post-independence period.<sup>53</sup> Kapila was a strong advocate of training and accreditation, but she argued that low status in both teaching and nursing was directly related to low pay. In this, Kapila had much common ground with Lucy Woodcock, the trade unionist, when she accepted her invitation to address the Teachers Federation and the NSW Trades and Labour Council in 1946.

Kapila returned to India in the mid-1930s, after post-graduate studies in the United States of America and travel across Europe, to take an active role in the struggle for national independence. This campaign had varying alliances with and impacts on the women’s movement.<sup>54</sup> Like Lucy, Kapila focused on the freedom of women from constraints on work and income due to family roles and sexual

<sup>50</sup> Woodcock, ‘Brave Hearts’, p. 26; see also Lucy Woodcock, 1963: *The WA Teacher*, May, Teacher’s Federation files, NBABL, N111/2743.

<sup>51</sup> Woodcock, ‘Brave Hearts’, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Kapila Khandvala: Report on ‘Women in Professions and Services’, Parts I and II, 1947–48, AIWC, Twentieth Session, 29 December 1947 to 1 January 1948, Madras.

<sup>53</sup> Madelaine Healey, 2103: *Indian Sisters: A History of Nursing and the State, 1907–2007*, London: Routledge. Her introduction states: ‘The colonial nursing leadership was weakened by its failure to mobilize either Indian or Western nurses and by its adherence to a professionalizing agenda that had relatively little real application in the Indian context’ (see Chapter 2) and then ‘The internationalist, professional orientation of Indian nursing was reinforced by the post-Independence arrival of nursing advisors in India, working for government and non-government development agencies’.

<sup>54</sup> Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, 2001: *Women in Indian Society*, New Delhi: National Trust of India, pp. 1–17.

relationships. She had demonstrated this in her strong dissenting report to the major inquiry launched by the Indian National Congress in 1939 into planning for the future in independent India. Kapila, as well as delegates from major women's organizations, was a member of the subcommittee on 'Woman's Role', which focused on women's economic rights. Its report, *Woman's Role in the Planned Economy* ('the WRPE'), was presented to the National Planning Commission (NPC) in 1940. Its major recommendations included the safety of women workers regardless of their job or income, the rejection of the family as the basic economic unit, and a demand for the recognition of women's unpaid work in the home and family—and its recompense. By this time, however, war had broken out and the Congress's Quit India campaign resulted in the mass arrests and incarceration of its leadership. Only in 1947, on the eve of independence, was the report finally published and available to the Indian public.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike other reports that were incorporated into the Nehruvian government's planning process, the WRPE was completely ignored in the first three Five Year Plans and only rediscovered in later years.<sup>56</sup> Kapila had played a key role in the deliberations in 1939 and in the overall recommendations of the WRPE, but she did not think they went far enough. Her dissenting report stated: 'The sub-committee has not made it (sufficiently) clear that in the future planned economy, what would count and count alone, will be the individual personality of each woman . . . . And no relationship that she . . . may have to bear with their fellows.'<sup>57</sup>

Kapila rejected both the proposition and the practice of making the family the economic unit. She argued that, while the WRPE proposed strong remedies, there was no guarantee of implementation to ensure

<sup>55</sup> Nirmala Banerjee, 'What Ever Happened to the Dreams of Modernity? The Nehruvian Era and Women's Position', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 17, 25 April–1 May: WS2–WS7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7; it has been slowly rediscovered. Dr Kumud Sharma found it in the Uttar Pradesh archives in the early 1980s, passing it on to the Centre for Women's Development Studies in Delhi, after which Leela Kasturi wrote about it in *Samya Shakti*, the Centre's journal in the early 1990s. Then it was circulated more widely in 1995 by Krishnaraj and, most recently, the text has been analysed by Chaudhuri, pointing out both its continued and striking relevance and its internal contradictions. Maitreyi Krishnaraj, 1995: *Remaking Society for Women: Visions from the Past and Present*, for Indian Assoc., New Delhi: Women's Studies Conference; Maitrayee Chaudhuri, 1996: 'An Analysis of the First Plan Document on Women', first published in Patricia Uberoi (ed.), *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State*, Sage.

<sup>57</sup> Kapila Khandvala, 1948: Dissenting Note, WRPE, published by NPC, New Delhi, p. 234.

that, *in practice*, the rights of a woman as an individual citizen, not as a 'wife and mother', would be the fundamental measure of economic justice. She objected bitterly to the failure to guarantee the rights of married women to work and control over their income. Overall, the body of the WRPE text agreed with the letter of the 1931 Congress resolution regarding equal pay—but Kapila's view was that its lack of a feasible implementation plan failed to ensure that this resolution would achieve practical reality in the coming republic.

Soon after the war ended, Kapila and Mithan Lam were AIWC delegates at the Australian Women's Charter conference in Sydney in 1946. Kapila focused on women's economic rights, specifically endorsing the demand for equal pay for equal work. She and Jessie Street addressed the NSW Trades and Labour Council (TLC) immediately afterwards, supported by Lucy Woodcock, who, as senior vice president, was the Teachers Federation delegate to the TLC. Jessie spoke about the politics of the recent charter conference, explaining the looming split between anti-communist and left-wing women's groups. Kapila explained trade union work in India, discussing joint activity by both men and women and raising key issues such as working conditions and child-care needs in mining, as she also did a few days later at the YWCA in Canberra. Her impact on trade unionists in all her speeches was reflected in the strong contributions they made to support her call for famine relief in India.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the continuing disappointment of the lack of congress interest in the WRPE, Kapila returned from Australia to India to organize vigorously within the AIWC. She coordinated an AIWC survey addressed to 'Women in Professions and Services', which she reported to the Twentieth Session of the AIWC in Madras, four months after the achievement of independence.<sup>59</sup> Kapila foregrounded this in her report, pointing out: 'We are now a Free Nation aspiring to attain our rightful place in the comity of nations.'<sup>60</sup>

Her survey had elicited a moderate response rate; most came from Bombay itself and Baroda, north of Bombay in Gujarat. The major professions surveyed were postal workers, teachers, and nurses.

<sup>58</sup> *Canberra Times*, 16 August 1946, p. 3. Her speech was aimed directly at the commonly held Australian view was that Indian workers were not assertive; see, for example, *The Australian Worker* over this period. *Tribune*, 13 August 1946, p. 8; Resolution 13, Proceedings of 2nd Australian Women's Charter Conference, 4–11 August 1946, p. 30, Australian Women's Charter Committee, Sydney.

<sup>59</sup> Khandvala, Report on 'Women in Professions and Services', Parts I and II.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 99.

Kapila argued that both male and female teachers were badly paid, although there was not as significant a pay differential as there was in Australia. Nevertheless, she saw such a pay difference beginning with 'modernization' and criticized it.<sup>61</sup> In each of these areas of work, she found significant areas of concern for women workers. In each, there was sexual harassment and exploitation, bullying, poor working and sanitary conditions, and—of greatest concern for her—severe discrimination against married women.<sup>62</sup> Many young women were deterred from marrying for fear of dismissal and married women were dismissed or refused permanency. She was particularly concerned about racial discrimination: she cited examples where senior Indian staff—of both sexes—were paid less and overlooked for promotion or leadership in preference to European teachers or Indians with European training. She was just as angry—as she had argued in Australia—about text books then in use in India that contained insulting depictions of non-European Indian history, culture, and peoples along with those of other colonized countries.

In nursing, along with all of the above concerns, she wrote about the attempts by nurses to form an effective union for decent wages and conditions that was accompanied by outright bullying and intimidation. Khandvala described the nurses' attempt at one Bombay hospital to join the existing Hospital Employees Union. Instead, the Christian churches had applied pressure on the many nursing staff who were affiliated with them, leading 'Roman Catholic and Christian probationary nurses to withdraw from the Union'. In Khandvala's view: 'Most of the matrons and doctors are against the formation of Unions for nurses, because the nurses belong to a profession. Those that are still there have great difficulties facing them.'

One of those difficulties was the threat made against many nurses that they would 'lose their Diplomas'. However, Khandvala reported that: 'While talking to the nurses, it seemed to me that the idea of forming Unions, in spite of such difficulties, is gaining ground for them. They feel that their strength and the protection of their rights lie in organization and unity.'<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Part I, p. 83. The focus on professionalization that Khandvala describes here as articulated by the matron, doctors, and Christian churches was similarly described by Madelaine Healey in her discussion of the generalized weakness in colonial nursing leadership and in post-colonial international advisors in her 2013 *Indian Sisters*.

The questions Khandvala raised around nurses' wages and conditions accorded exactly with the interests of Sarla Sharma, a Delhi-based activist who was at that time still a participant in the Indian National Congress and the AIWC, although she soon after became a member of the CPI. Sarla had researched the conditions of nurses in Delhi and joined forces with Kapila to make recommendations to the AIWC for improved conditions for these working women across all of India.<sup>64</sup>

Sarla and Kapila were among those who left the AIWC in 1954 to form the NFIW. As mentioned before, this was an umbrella association that aimed to work more broadly than the AIWC, involving not only elite, but also working-class and peasant women's groups, of all castes and religions. NFIW conferences were nevertheless mostly attended by urban professional women like teachers and nurses rather than rural workers, and the NFIW often appealed to women as mothers in the hope of crossing class lines.<sup>65</sup> Its party membership remained mixed and Kapila was one member who, unlike Sarla, never joined the CPI.

Much of Kapila's work on the WRPE Report in 1939 and the analysis of the 1947–48 survey would have resonated with Lucy Woodcock. When they met in 1946, Lucy was still fighting against the NSW Married Women Teachers Dismissal Act. Kapila's concerns about women being trapped by their family roles would have been familiar, in spite of the different family and social structures in India and Australia.

Similarly, both women had a shared understanding of 'professionalism' as a marker of knowledge and training and therefore worthy of respect—but not precluding collective activity. Kapila's scathing dismissal of 'matrons and doctors' for arguing that unions were not suitable for nurses because they were 'in a profession' gives a good indication of her position.

Both opposed racism in education and recruitment, but prioritized it differently. Lucy waged a continuing campaign to protect Aboriginal and Jewish refugee children from discrimination in education and recruitment but this was one of many causes. For Kapila, the question of racial discrimination was all-important because of British colonialism. The discrimination between European and Indian nurses

<sup>64</sup> Sarla Sharma, transcript of interview, 18 January 2014, Old Delhi.

<sup>65</sup> Hajrah Begum, transcript of interview, conducted by Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) Oral History project, 19 September 1994, held NMML.

and teachers in salaries and seniority was just one dimension of colonialism in India. She wanted it gone, root and branch.

Both campaigned against the delayed advancement of junior female staff and the bullying and sexual harassment of working women by senior staff, male or female, in any industry. And both saw unionization as a key strategy to achieving economic justice. This picture differs materially from Healey's presentation of an Indian workforce largely influenced by the elitism of European reformers. Further investigation of women involved in nursing and the women's movement of the time, following the suggestions from Kapila Khandvala's extensive 1947 survey analyses and Sarla Sharma's recollections, might offer alternatives to the professionalizing and modernizing narratives that appear to have been so influential on Indian women.<sup>66</sup>

Lucy and Kapila differed on work issues and developed different strategies and priorities for their local campaigns. Kapila stressed nationalism and argued for the recognition of women as fully equal citizens of the new nation, whereas Lucy asserted the rights of women to not sacrifice their present to a future 'national interest'. The major similarity between them was their preoccupation with economic justice for women and the protection of their right to work.

### **Education: for teachers and learners**

Lucy and Kapila shared a passion for education, explicitly focused on ensuring access for girls, women, and low-income children of both sexes. They gained their training in different traditions.<sup>67</sup> Lucy, in British tradition, trained 'on the job' and gained bachelor's degrees in Arts and Economics from Sydney University. During her time in the United Kingdom in 1927, she learnt more about the British-initiated NEF. Founded in 1921 by British theosophist Beatrice Ensor, the NEF drew on theosophical principles, such as equality between cultures, religions, and people; the empowerment of women; and the nurturing of independent thought. It had networks in Europe, India, and South Africa and, in India in particular, the NEF built on theosophy's links with Indian cultures, in particular with reforming groups such as the

<sup>66</sup> Healey, *Indian Sisters*.

<sup>67</sup> Craig Campbell, Geoffrey Sherrington, and Margaret White, 2007: 'Borders and Boundaries in the History of Education', *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, Vol. 43, No. 1: 1–6, at 5–6.

Brahmo Samaj, though Europeans like Maria Montessori were also involved.<sup>68</sup>

Kapila's time as a graduate student in the United States of America led to her involvement in the World Fellowship of Education Associations (WFEA), which was founded in 1922 in the United States of America with strong links to East Asia. The WFEA ran nine biennial conferences in Asia between 1922 and 1944, with participants from the United States of America, Europe, and various Asian countries. Kapila's experience of education was broad: after her return to India from the United States of America, she taught literacy to women in rural social work centres, travelled to Tokyo to speak at WFEA conferences in 1937, and was appointed principal of a women's college. Despite its extensive networks, however, the WFEA eventually splintered under Cold War pressures.<sup>69</sup> The NEF remained the one surviving international network for progressive education.

The immediate contexts Kapila and Lucy faced shaped their practice in education as well as work. Lucy was girls' headmistress at Erskineville Public School in inner Sydney from 1933 to 1953. Local people often struggled to find work, as the area's factories had been hit first by the Depression and then by de-industrialization in the decades after the war. There were many Aboriginal children and some children of wartime refugees at the school, all of whom required specific attention, and their families also needed support to strengthen literacy and numeracy skills. The school also housed one of the first 'opportunity class' in the state, for gifted children from the surrounding areas, requiring another type of specialized teaching. Local families faced the disruptive and discriminatory impact of 'slum clearance'—Lucy supported the principle of improved housing but

<sup>68</sup> Margaret H. White, 2007: 'Traversing Personal and Public Boundaries: Discourses of Engagement in New Education 1930s–1980s', *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, Vol. 43, No. 1: 151–163, at 154, 156–157; Kevin J. Brehony, 2006: 'A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921–1938', *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, Vol. 40, Nos 5&6: 733–755, at 751–755.

<sup>69</sup> Henry L. Smith, 1944: 'The World Federation of Education Associations', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 235, September: 107–112, at 109. The WFEA, like many educational organizations in the United States of America, became caught up in Cold War polarizations after the Second World War and merged into the 'World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession' in 1946.



insisted that people have their houses renovated so they could live in them with dignity rather than being forced to leave their own areas.<sup>70</sup>

Kapila faced a different set of issues—girls' education and that of lower-caste groups were ignored after independence in 1947 and the Bombay area was overwhelmed by incoming partition refugees, whose children needed education even more urgently than local children. Kapila's role was to create an education system for a new republic. She was determined to remove the burden of British culture under which the school curriculum laboured. She wanted to expand access to education for girls and lower-caste and -class children as well as foster a culture of patriotism for the new republic.

Despite such differences, Lucy and Kapila shared considerable common ground in feminism and socialism. They utilized similar student-centred approaches and shared a strong commitment to gender- and class-conscious teaching strategies. Despite gaining different kinds of training and facing different educational conditions, they created classroom experiences in Sydney and in Bombay that were strikingly similar.

### *Lucy Woodcock*

Lucy first encountered the NEF in the United Kingdom in 1927 and applied its progressive approaches to her own teaching in Australia. She started work in 1933 in Erskineville Public School—a so-called 'slum school' in a struggling working-class area—and found her place in life. Her qualifications earned her offers of senior roles in at least two other more prestigious high schools with middle-class students, but she refused to leave Erskineville.<sup>71</sup> She built student-centred creativity into the mainstream curriculum, ensuring opportunities for children to express themselves through visual arts, music, and performance, as well as challenging debates. She took these 'slum' students to museums and art galleries, as well as factories, insisting that creative work was a key way to develop the independent thinking they required for principled decision-making as adults.<sup>72</sup> Lucy believed that 'progressive

<sup>70</sup> *Singleton Argus*, 21 July 1939, p. 8; *SMH*, 23 August 1939, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> R. J. Heffron, Minister for Education, *Testimonial*, Teachers Federation 1953, NBABL, UAW files, Series Z236, Box 32, Folder 4, NBABL; *Obituary*, Teachers Federation, 1968; United Associations of Women Newsheet: 1968.

<sup>72</sup> *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 3 September 1942, p. 10; *Education*, 15 July 1938, *Report of Conference*, p. 705, cited in J. M. O'Brien, 1985: 'The NSW Teachers

education' deployed the use of creative expression as a way of building confident, independent thinking rather than aesthetic appreciation. She maintained this approach in broader community work—with Elsie Rivett, Lucy established a Children's Library and Club in Erskineville, deliberately unconnected to the school. Former users have warm memories of this library; all children were welcome and their interests in theatre, craft, and musical performance were encouraged just as much as reading.<sup>73</sup>

Appalled at the narrow competitiveness of the 'academic' curriculum, Lucy scoffed at the NSW education system. She was unimpressed by the old system of university entrance exams as well as the newly emerging 'individual' assessments of IQ testing:

the NSW child is being reared in a system of tests like cheese and butter . . . . But human nature was something greater than those material things which needed to be tested frequently. The high school met the demands of a select few, but the plain ordinary man and woman needed a type of education which would fit them to carry out the duties of democracy.<sup>74</sup>

Lucy paid particular attention to girls. Her former student, Betty Makin, later a community leader in Erskineville, remembered:

My teacher, Miss Lucy Woodcock, had a great influence on my life. In my first year of high school, she was the head of the Teachers Federation in NSW. She taught us girls that we should always stand up for ourselves. The greatest thing I remember her saying is that men . . . weren't as clever as us.<sup>75</sup>

Lucy was particularly frustrated that the students at Erskineville were denied a chance at higher education because of their families' poverty. Betty Makin recalled: 'We knew that none of us could ever go to University—there was no subsidy then. Miss Lucy Woodcock said at a Mothers' Meeting one day that we were the brightest children and it was a tragedy that we wouldn't be able to advance ourselves through education.'<sup>76</sup>

Federation, c 1957–1975', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, p. 121; *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 400511, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Beverley Langley, 2016, and article, *Pix*, 29 November 1947, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> *The Newcastle Sun*, 16 December 1935, p. 7; Lucy Woodcock, 1938: *Education: Journal of the NSW School Teachers' Association*, 19 January, p. 69; cited David McCallum, 1990: *The Social Production of Merit: Education, Psychology and Politics in Australia, 1900–1950*, London: The Falmer Press, p. 96; *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 3 September 1942, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Betty Makin, interview, in Susan Mitchell, 1987: *The Matriarchs*, Ringwood: Penguin Books, p. 48.

<sup>76</sup> Betty Makin in *ibid.*, p. 50; *North Lismore Star*, 9 August 1946, p. 6.

Lucy was an organizer of the NEF conference in New Zealand and Australia in 1937, becoming its second president and later vice president until her death in 1968. In Lucy's view, however, the NEF conference did not engage actively or widely enough with the Australian population. Before the end of 1937, Lucy was organizing a new conference—to be called an Education Conference for a Progressive, Democratic Australia, inviting Australian unions, employers' bodies, and cultural institutions to a gathering in June 1938, the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the British settlement. Lucy wanted a future in which citizens could think for themselves through 'progressive education' in the public schooling system, to become confident, independent decision-makers capable of informed choices at the ballot box.<sup>77</sup> She remained an office bearer of the Australian branch of the NEF until her death in 1968, committed to working in this 'non-sectarian, non-religious organization, aimed at fostering independent thinking' that she had helped to build.<sup>78</sup>

### *Kapila Khandvala*

Despite coming from a far more affluent family than Lucy, Kapila Khandvala was just as deeply committed to public, non-religious, and non-communal education and increased access for working-class and lower-caste children. She was particularly concerned about the cultural impact of British colonial control over educational curricula. Her job as secretary of the Bombay Municipal Corporation Education Committee involved developing a public education system for a city where girls' education had been promoted only by religious bodies, such as the reforming Brahma and Prarthana Samajs, and some Christian missionary and Muslim schools and a theosophical school.<sup>79</sup> Although Hindu reformers like those in the Brahma Samaj opposed the caste system, in practice, their schools were effectively caste-segregated, since they could not otherwise attract fee-paying students.<sup>80</sup> For similar reasons, many girls' schools, including those

<sup>77</sup> *Education: The Journal of the NSW Teachers Federation*, issues for September (pp. 768, 782–783), October (pp. 798–799, 801–803, 805–808), November (pp. 11–13), and December 1938 (pp. 33, 55).

<sup>78</sup> Margaret Henry, 2007: 'Flowering, Fading and Facing the Facts: World Education Fellowship in Queensland—1970 to 2005', *New Horizons*, Vol. 114.

<sup>79</sup> Established by Roquia Sakhawat Hussain (Begum Rokeya).

<sup>80</sup> Banerjee, 'What Ever Happened?'

of the theosophists, increasingly focused on high-caste Hindu girls. Christians ran separate schools for lower and higher castes.

In 1946, during her visit to Australia, Kapila administered 630 public schools and was responsible for many of the newly built ones in Bombay in her role as secretary of public education. On the WRPE subcommittee in 1939, Kapila had been particularly concerned to increase marginalized groups' and girls' access to education and enable all students to learn in their mother tongue. The WRPE had very carefully avoided mentioning religion in connection with education to evade giving offence to any particular group. Kapila, however, in her dissenting report, was adamant that religion must be kept out of formal training. In her presidential address to the NFIW national congress in 1962, Kapila repeated this view publicly: 'It is time that a serious thought must be given to the harm done to our children by schools dominated by religious bodies. No government should allow such schools in a secular State such as ours.'<sup>81</sup>

In Australia, Kapila had a direct message for Australian educators: they must take responsibility for changing the assumptions about racial superiority and colonialism in Australian text books. She argued that education should play an active role in fostering peace by directly challenging 'this poison of prejudice' of the White Australia Policy.<sup>82</sup>

Kapila began to implement her vision of education in Bombay in 1947. There are two glimpses of her practice. Her niece, Dr Jyotibehn Trivedi, remembered that Kapila:

changed the whole path of teaching—she introduced creativity!—she brought in local culture and festivals—there were 9 days of dancing! . . . She wanted to inculcate children into creativity!—to know what the whole world was like! To know what India was like! What conditions were like [outside the towns]. This changed the whole way of teaching—there was more of equality—and more of equality of women.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1962, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Khandvala, Plenary speech, 2nd Women's Charter Conference, NLA Jessie Street Papers, 2683/3/1259–1270, NLA; Kapila Khandvala, 1946: Speech to New Education Fellowship conferences: 'Education, International Understanding and Peace', in Rupert J. Best (ed.), 1948: *Education for International Understanding: Selected Addresses to the International Education Conference Held in Australia from 31st August to 12th October, 1946*, Adelaide: New Education Fellowship, pp. 24–38, 113–116.

<sup>83</sup> Jyotibehn Trivedi (born Jyoti Master), interview, 21 January 2015, Santa Cruz, Mumbai. Dr Trivedi later became vice chancellor of the SNTD Women's University and supported the foundation of the Research Centre in Women's Studies (RCWS).

Reba Lewis, the wife of Roger Lewis, an American doctor stationed in Bombay for three years in the early 1950s,<sup>84</sup> described Kapila as calm, quiet, tolerant, and patient, ‘all those traits which make her such an excellent administrator’.<sup>85</sup> The structure, medium, and curricula of education in Bombay was transformed in these few years. Only some primary schools still used English: most children were taught in local languages. Lewis noticed the opportunities for play and creative expression in all schools, including those provided by the municipal authority for ‘low’-caste and ‘untouchable’ groups and children of partition refugees. These schools were separated: Kapila had not achieved caste integration in her schools. In class terms, however, much had been achieved. Lewis remarked that the children in Kapila’s primary schools appeared impoverished compared to the children attending private and religious schools but that milk and some food were distributed and demonstrably reached more marginal communities than the private and religious schools did.<sup>86</sup>

Kapila was very aware that the literacy rates for girls, while improved, had not caught up with those of boys. She explained to Lewis that this persistent problem was hampered by the underpayment of teaching staff. Still Kapila introduced visual arts, performance, and music and seized the opportunity provided by an annual local harvest festival, *Sharad Utsav*, to bring the children from all schools together—across caste and regional lines—to perform plays, dance, and music for each other. Lewis gives a vivid description of the ‘9 days of dancing’ recalled by Jyotibehn. Kapila’s attitude to innovation in education had strong resonances with Lucy Woodcock’s approach at Erskineville Public School, fostering creativity and interaction across all sectors of the community.<sup>87</sup>

Most girls, however, still lacked educational opportunities. The total disregard for the WRPE was a warning to the women’s movement. When Kapila became NFIW president, she raised several urgent issues in each of her three presidential addresses. In 1962, she spoke of girls’ and women’s literacy, pointing out that only 12.8 per cent of women

<sup>84</sup> Roger and one of Reba and Roger’s sons can be seen photographed with Kapila, C. M. Trivedi, Lucy, and Jessie at Santacruz, Bombay, in January 1955. Presumably Reba took the photo. Jessie Street Papers, MS 2683/11, NLA.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis, *Three Faces*, p. 118.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110–126.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110–126, which can be compared with descriptions of the Children’s Library and Club in Erskineville, Sydney.

were literate compared to 32.9 per cent of men.<sup>88</sup> At the time of her later speeches in 1965 and 1967, there had been only a marginal increase in female literacy.<sup>89</sup> By the time the 1974 Report on the Status of Women was released, the indicators for women in India in all areas—employment, health, literacy—had worsened.

### Working for peace

Kapila Khandvala and Lucy Woodcock appeared to have had the most commonalities in their attitude to peace activism but, as we probed further, these commonalities dissolved. They advocated for peace in many of the same conferences and peace was the goal for each of them in countless speeches and press statements. They diverged significantly, however, because of the local conditions and contexts in which they worked. In particular, they differed on the conditions required for peace, with Lucy arguing that total nuclear disarmament was necessary, while Kapila insisted that no peace was possible without decolonization. Yet, despite such differences, they agreed on the most effective strategy for its ultimate achievement.

These two women called publicly for a peaceful world during the interwar period. The First World War had left many scars: both Australia and India had sent troops to fight for the British empire in Gallipoli and Europe, suffering heavy casualties. Lucy's brother had died in the trenches in France in the First World War—a painful loss that she still grieved until the end of her life and no doubt produced her lifelong pacifism. Over this same period, there were strong demands for independence in India and in Ireland, the latter of direct relevance to Australians because of shared history and religion. The Australian Catholic press, for example, linked British suppression of the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Ireland to the 1919 Amritsar massacre in India.<sup>90</sup> There was increasing interest in Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent *Satyagraha* (truth force) as a strategy against violence in the West. The War Resisters League asked Kapila, then a master's student at the University of Michigan, to speak about 'The Technique

<sup>88</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1962, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1965, p. 29; NFIW Congress Report 1967, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> As examples: *The Catholic Press* [Sydney], 15 July 1920, p. 27; 17 March 1921, p. 13; *The Southern Cross* [Adelaide], 12 August 1927, p. 11.

of Gandhi' at its conference on militant pacifism in New York in 1932.<sup>91</sup>

*Lucy Woodcock*

By 1936, Lucy was trying to have International History included in all school syllabuses 'with the object of fostering world peace'.<sup>92</sup> In 1938, she was speaking at a teachers conference against the impending war, supporting the argument that women, as mothers, bore the responsibility for passing on 'the spirit of national superiority and hate that brought men to the battlefields', adding that 'teachers are daily correcting the misconceptions passed on by the mothers of the children'.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, Lucy's old friendship with the Robinovitz family propelled her to help new refugees from Nazi Germany. She created remedial schooling situations for refugee children and assisted over 160 adult Jewish immigrants to secure work in the education system and helped others to gain a university education.<sup>94</sup>

Lucy's emphasis on how peace was to be established shifted after the atomic bombing of Japan. She then focused increasingly on the need for total nuclear disarmament.<sup>95</sup> By the early 1950s, she was arguing that education and nuclear weapons were directly related because the rising cost of armaments was responsible for falling government funding of the public education system.<sup>96</sup>

After her retirement, Lucy attended at least three peace conferences (Stockholm, July 1954; Madras, December 1954; and Helsinki, 1955)

<sup>91</sup> War Resisters League, 1932: Programme, *Militant Pacifism Conference*, Saturday 7 May 1932, "The Technique of Gandhi" by Kapila Khandvala, Feminist, Leader of the Indian Youth Movement', 6–9 May, W10-54-004, p. 6. Swarthmore College Peace Collection, online: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/peace/> (accessed 24 October 2018).

<sup>92</sup> *The Mercury*, 9 January 1936, p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> *SMH*, 8 April 1938, p. 4; Marie Gollan was a left-wing activist from Cessnock, associated with the Miners Union and with the IWD committee in Newcastle.

<sup>94</sup> *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 1 January 1942, p. 6; 3 September 1942, p. 10; 5 November 1942, p. 3; 26 November 1942, pp. 6–7.

<sup>95</sup> Lucy's statements to the 1948 Australian Teachers' Federation Conference, remembered by Doris McRae, who attended the conference. Cheryl Griffin, 2005; 'A Biography of Doris McRae, 1893–1988', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, p. 210; *Advocate*, 12 May 1949, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> *The Biz* [Fairfield], 17 January 1952, p. 5; *Cessnock Eagle and South Maitland Recorder*, 17 November 1953, p. 3.

and travelled to Japan, first to Hiroshima, then to Tokyo to visit ‘the 22 surviving fishermen [of the *Lucky Dragon*] who had been injured by the Bikini explosion in March 1954. One died and the remainder are still in hospital.’<sup>97</sup> When Lucy returned to Australia in August 1955, her message to the first Hiroshima Day commemorations in Perth was unequivocal: ‘We can only talk about nuclear war. But when you actually see the imprint of a man’s shadow in the stones of Hiroshima, you know what the Japanese people experienced and why they say “never again”.’<sup>98</sup>

Lucy’s call for total disarmament took place in the context of the growing concern within Australia about atomic weapons. Public opinion was initially complacent about British nuclear testing in Australia until the American hydrogen bomb blast in the Marshall Islands in April 1954.<sup>99</sup> Escalating public alarm in Australia meant that Lucy’s account of her Japan visit was eagerly received. For example, she described the Japanese experience of nuclear weapons and their resistance to rearmament to a group of young people in August 1955, saying that teachers had a responsibility to educate a new generation against war and that trade unions should play a crucial role in the peace movement.<sup>100</sup>

### *Kapila Khandvala*

Kapila Khandvala’s position on the pre-conditions for peace was different. Her view—a common one in India—was not well known in Australia, because the impact of the Second World War on India was not fully understood. Indian women from the AIWC, of which Kapila was then a member, took part in the founding of the WIDF in Paris in November 1945. They realized that Europeans assumed that the Indian nationalist movement had been pro-Nazi during the war. Repudiating this suggestion, Ela Sen explained that Indian women saw the anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggle to be one and

<sup>97</sup> *Tribune*, 21 December 1954.

<sup>98</sup> *Tribune*, 10 August 1955.

<sup>99</sup> Jonas R. McClelland, J. Fitch, and W. J. A. Jonas, 1985: *Report, Royal Commission into British Nuclear Testing in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

<sup>100</sup> *Tribune*, 10 August 1955.



the same.<sup>101</sup> Echoing her words, Mrs Jai Kishore Handoo said that, in India:

Women take their role as citizens seriously, not only as citizens of their country, but as citizens of the world. They are conscious of the fact that their struggle for freedom, in our country, is no different from the struggle of other freedom loving people . . . There cannot be democracy as long as it doesn't exist in India, where a fifth of the world's population live.<sup>102</sup>

Vidya Kanuga (later Munsu) was another member of the Indian delegation. She pointed to the widespread and insidious presence of fascism across the West, particularly in the assumed racial hierarchies embedded in films, books, and school texts.<sup>103</sup> Their view was that the anti-colonial struggle in India was an anti-fascist struggle with the same goal—freedom.

In August 1946, at the Women's Charter conference, Kapila spoke on this theme at a number of sessions and at the public peace rally. Her published speeches at the NEF conferences repeated this view. Peace, she argued, was essential but it could not be achieved without decolonization:

There must be real freedom and democracy in the world, if we want peace . . . . For understanding and peace between nations there has to be equality for all, equal opportunities for all and no discrimination between races. There are many countries today which were not free to shape their own destinies.<sup>104</sup>

Kapila and Lucy met again when Lucy and Jessie stayed with Kapila in Bombay in early January 1955 following the All India Congress for Peace and Asian Solidarity held in Madras in December 1954. By the time of this meeting, Lucy was focused on nuclear disarmament as well as educational issues. Kapila continued to see decolonization as critically important, but she was also busy with the reshaping of public education as documented by Reba Lewis.

Yet the challenges for Indian peace activists such as Kapila through the 1960s were far more difficult than they were for Australians like Lucy Woodcock. There was rising antagonism between India and Pakistan; since partition in August 1947 and in 1962, there was a

<sup>101</sup> Married to Scots journalist Alec Reid; *Congrès Intenational Des Femmes*, 26 November–1 December 1945, p. 60, translated by Helen Randerson.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>103</sup> Later Vidya Munsu, the well-known activist and historian; *ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>104</sup> Best, *Education*, pp. 113–116; *Argus*, 13 September 1946, p. 6.

sudden attack from an unexpected quarter. A border war blew up with China in which India suffered enormous losses.<sup>105</sup> In 1965, the long-threatened war with Pakistan broke out. Indian peace activists attempted to balance peace advocacy with patriotism. Kapila was president of the NFIW throughout this time and, in each of her presidential addresses to the three congresses (1962, 1965, and 1967), she argued for peace negotiations with China and Pakistan, and appealed to her audience's protective maternal instincts regarding children. This was a departure from her previous assertion of women's rights as citizens but, as discussed earlier, the mobilization of the image of 'peaceful mothers' was common in earlier NFIW newsletters as an effective bridge between the leadership and working-class and peasant women: 'A woman as the mother is vitally interested in the preservation of life and its flowering. We, women, are against all predatory wars that lead to devastation of human life.'<sup>106</sup>

Kapila's presidential speeches at these NFIW congresses grappled predominantly with critical domestic issues. She reiterated the fears in her 1939 minority report to the WRPE subcommittee—that the high-flown rhetoric of the nationalist movement about gender equality would not translate into practice.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the impressive 'Directive Principles' of the new 1949 Constitution, Kapila stressed that women's rates of pay were grossly inferior to men's; they were constrained by family roles; the gap between men's and women's literacy had not improved; their health indicators had deteriorated; and their physical vulnerability had worsened, with murders and suicides increasing. Her critique foreshadowed many of the problems identified in the 1974 Report on the Status of Women.<sup>108</sup>

Kapila also became increasingly concerned about communalism, the fostering of division, and hatred between religions. She said in 1962: 'It is time that serious thought be given to the harm done to our children by schools dominated by religious bodies. No government should allow such schools in a secular State such as ours.'<sup>109</sup>

<sup>105</sup> 2,100 Indian troops dead or missing, with 4,000 captured, compared to 700 Chinese troops killed.

<sup>106</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1962, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14–19; NFIW Congress Report 1965, pp. 4–5, 25; NFIW Congress Report 1967, pp. 7–8.

<sup>109</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1962, p. 16.

In 1967, she was more blunt: 'Communalism has become a menace to Democracy.'<sup>110</sup>

She urged the government to 'ban all organizations which propagate communalism directly or indirectly.'<sup>111</sup>

Though Kapila's focus may have shifted from the international issues in this period, her commitment to equality between nations, classes, religions, castes, and genders remained. In 1965, she stressed in her presidential speech that 'the struggle for emancipation of women in India or anywhere in the world is linked with the struggle for peace and national liberation'.<sup>112</sup>

She finished her 1967 speech with a call for negotiations rather than warfare—in this case, with Pakistan. She made her appeal on the basis of solidarity among women: 'Peace is our dearest wish and our greatest need. We (women) can contribute to abolish tensions and conflicts between nations.'<sup>113</sup>

### **Conclusions: differing conditions, shared strategies**

As socialists and as feminists, Lucy Woodcock and Kapila Khandvala shared many principles: both believed that economic, political, and gender justice was the essential foundation of genuine peace. They both agreed that public, non-sectarian, and empowering education for all, both men and women, was the key strategy to achieving this justice that would inevitably lead to peace. Australians were interested in India because Indian women were at the forefront of demands for the formulation of women's rights, however imperfect the realization might be in practice. Indians were interested in Australia because they believed that strong unionism had led to the achievement of more rights for women in practice—a belief somewhat shaken when Kapila and Mithan came to Australia.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, both Kapila

<sup>110</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1967, p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1965, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> NFIW Congress Report 1967, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Kapila Khandvala, 1946: 'Report of the Australian Conferences to AIWC', 10 December, throughout. Typescript, AIWC Archives, New Delhi, pp. 1–20; Mithan Lam, 1946: *Roshni*, Special Issue, 'Impressions of the Women's Charter Conference in Australia', November, pp. 42–48; see especially p. 44 for the disappointment and surprise felt by Khandvala and Mithan Lam, her fellow Indian delegate to the Australian conference. After describing a series of problems women in Australia face,

and Lucy believed that their shared visions would be achieved in the future.

Each woman was influenced by the international ideas that underpinned these visions but their strategies and practices were shaped by local conditions and pressures. We have discussed these by comparing Woodcock and Khandvala's work in three areas: the movements for economic justice, progressive education, and peace. To do this, rather than working only in one country, we scoured the archives and considered the material and pictorial evidence from both countries in association with the interviews we conducted together in India and Australia. In working on this material, we have undertaken collaborative research, but also collaborative analysis, where differences in our interpretations arising from our different backgrounds and perspectives were not synthesized or ignored, but instead were identified in order to develop further research questions.<sup>115</sup> This study may therefore offer strategies for working on global histories, where collaborative research and, importantly, collaborative analysis to identify and probe differences are conducted in each of the areas considered, and by researchers with backgrounds in the countries involved. Our comparative conclusions could not have been drawn without this collaborative approach.

We found that, despite very different local conditions, Woodcock's and Khandvala's approaches were closest in the campaigns for economic justice. Lucy consistently challenged the demand that women make sacrifices for the economic good of the nation during the Depression and after. Despite being forced at times to accept incremental improvements, Lucy remained committed to full economic equality. The newly independent state of India embraced gender equality in its Constitution but, in practice, ignored women's rights completely. Khandvala, despite her nationalism, challenged the new state, arguing that women could not be expected to support an independent India unless they were recognized as equal citizens. The status of equal pay was not achieved in India in any immediate sense either, but Khandvala, like Woodcock, kept up a sustained and long-term campaign to achieve this goal.

Lam wrote: "These things grieved us greatly, for we were under the impression that women in Australia were very advanced."

<sup>115</sup> This approach to analysis is discussed further in Goodall and Ghosh, "Beyond the "Poison of Prejudice", pp. 116–140.

On 'progressive education', both Khandvala and Woodcock were notable in their commitment to implement such educational practice in publicly funded, government schools. They both saw progressive education as fostering independence of thought as well as creativity. In the 1950s, however, Khandvala was faced with the realities of a newly independent nation riven by religious and caste differences and burdened with the massive flows of partition-driven refugees. The educational structures she set up had to utilize local and traditional cultures to cross social and cultural barriers. Both women, however, sustained a continued interest in girls' access to formal education and the delivery of literacy and other forms of adult education to women.

Woodcock turned to maternalist arguments only once in these two areas of her work. In her 1925 book, *Justice vs Tradition*, she mobilized both egalitarian and maternalist arguments to assert that women had the right to be teachers. Khandvala refused to use this essentialist language at all in either her calls for economic rights or for educational justice, insisting in the WRPE dissenting report that girls as students and women as teachers must be recognized as full citizens who deserved nothing less than total equality with their male counterparts.

Khandvala and Woodcock developed many similar approaches in their attitudes to the economic and educational rights of women within differing local conditions. Where they differed significantly, however, was on the necessary conditions for the achievement of peace. Lucy had called for the peaceful settlement of international disputes between the wars, but her activity escalated after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She continued to call for decolonization, but the Asia she wanted to support was the Asia that had faced nuclear attack. She considered nuclear weapons as the most urgent threat in Australia and elsewhere, and her first priority remained total nuclear disarmament.

Khandvala, on the other hand, expressed a view widespread among Indian activists: that the essential precondition for peace was decolonization. Peace was only possible if there was true equality between all peoples and an end to colonial hierarchies of race. In 1950, nuclear war was an abstraction for most Indians, unlike the experience of economic inequality and the intense memories of recent colonialism. Nuclear disarmament remained a long-term goal but, for Khandvala, it was not an urgent one.

They continued, however, to share much. They both attempted to reach a wide audience in their peace activism. In marked contrast to their earlier argument that women's rights to equality were

guaranteed by their citizenship, both Kapila and Lucy turned to maternalist language when they spoke on the topic of peace, saying that women had a special commitment to seeking world peace because of their childbearing potential. Both believed that education was an essential precursor to peace and educators bore a primary role in its achievement in all countries through the fostering of cross-cultural understanding. In the last years of their lives, both women devoted their energies to striving for education for peace.

At the same time, they both tried to re-imagine a new Asia, where India and Australia were closely connected with other neighbours. Until the end of her life, Kapila hosted left-wing Australians, particularly teachers, in her home in Santa Cruz, Bombay, including Lucy's close friends, Sam and Ethel Lewis, and later the young Lee Brown, who became Senator Lee Rhiannon.<sup>116</sup> Kapila counted Australians like Judah Waten in her network of artist friends, writing to Waten throughout the 1960s and introducing her friend from Bombay, K. K. Hebbar, to him in 1969.<sup>117</sup> Kapila continued to retain a lively interest in Australian politics, quizzing visitors like Betty Bloch about the details of the Governor General's dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 and sharing details of Indian and Bangladeshi politics with her friends in Australia.<sup>118</sup> Lucy stayed in touch with Kapila but, as an older woman, her activity was closer to home, with the Chinese community in Sydney, although she made one more trip to China in 1964. While Kapila devoted her later years to establishing a college of education in Bombay, Lucy worked with Chinese women and young people in Sydney, tutoring them in the English language and school subjects to strengthen their access to education.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Cathy Bloch, 13 September 1963, Third National Conference of the UAW, NAA, 63/178; Interview notes: Cathy Crowley, phone interview, 4 October 2013; Jeannie Lewis, interview notes, phone interview, 4 October 2013; Lee Rhiannon, notes from personal communication, 6 October 2013; Cathy Bloch, interview notes, phone interview, and email correspondence, 22 September 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Kapila Khandvala to Judah Waten, 1966 to 1972, 6 aerograms with reference to correspondence earlier than 1966 and contacts. NLA MS 4536: 2/957; 2/1312; 2/1445; 2/1624; 2/1833.

<sup>118</sup> Kapila Khandvala to Lee Rhiannon and Freda Brown, 1970–1977, letters held in Senator Rhiannon's personal collection.

<sup>119</sup> Research visit to Kapila Khandvala College of Education, Mumbai, photographs, archives, August 2015. Lucy Woodcock, obituary, *Education*, 20 March 1968, p. 36; 'Vote of Thanks to Lucy Woodcock', 22 February 1968, *United Associations of Women, Newssheet*, April–May 1968, p. 1, SLNSW.

Kapila and Lucy's conversations and activism demonstrate the significant exchange of ideas in the global sphere during this period, facilitated not only by the structures of international communism and organizations like the WIDF, but also by the networks among progressive educators and women's movements. The interactions between Lucy and Kapila demonstrate that their praxis was inevitably shaped by these internationally circulating ideas as well as the requirements of local conditions. Their lives are witness to the richness of cross-cultural and cross-border relationships that influenced both their substantial careers and kept their friendship alive until their deaths. The retrieval of their stories highlights the means by which progressive movements retained their dynamism and internationalism in a period of superpower geopolitics. Such politics mandated against any connection between people who lived on opposite sides of the Cold War and white Australia policies, yet they did not prevent women in Australia and India from imagining a new Asia at the end of a second Great War.