# ‘Crossing the Channel to seek her future’: foreign female domestic servants in London 1881-1939




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## Short abstract

This thesis centres on international women migrants in London: how they crossed borders, navigated foreign spaces and experienced social and behavioural boundaries. Their stories are told through the lens of their economic status as domestic servants, by far the largest occupation absorbing women of all nationalities in London at this time. Accessing accounts of servant experiences has traditionally been perceived as challenging, yet as ‘aliens’ the women become more visible, both in society and in the records. What were the implications and consequences (positive or otherwise) of being foreign, female and employed in service during the period 1881–1939? And to what extent were they able to advantage of their otherness?

The thesis draws on an historical migration approach proposed by Pooley and Whyte in which both structural and individual evidence is bound together to offer new insights into both the system and the individuals it shaped. Using unique quantitative and qualitative sources permits an entirely new understanding of the female migrant experience, challenging our view of the male-only pioneering migrant, of foreign servants as luxury accessories and servants as young people engaged for short periods in a lifecycle occupation. In a bid to reverse the tendency in scholarship to represent female migrant labour as ‘victim’, the thesis incorporates servants’ experiences before, during and after domestic employment, that links London sculleries and suburban parlours with transnational migration.

# ‘Crossing the Channel to seek her future’: foreign female domestic servants in London 1881-1939

## Long abstract

This is a thesis about international women migrants in London: how they crossed borders, navigated foreign spaces and experienced social and behavioural boundaries. Their stories are told through the lens of their economic status as domestic servants, by far the largest occupation absorbing women of all nationalities in London at this time. Confined to the privacy of the domestic sphere, the hidden nature of indoor service has rendered most servant experiences invisible and consigned vast numbers of unaccompanied, foreign migrants to a footnote in the history of domestic service. Accessing accounts of servant experiences has traditionally been perceived as challenging. Yet as ‘aliens’ the women become more visible, both in society and in the records. What were the implications and consequences (positive or otherwise) of being foreign, female and employed in service during the period 1881–1939?

The thesis draws on an historical migration approach proposed by Pooley and Whyte in which both structural and individual evidence is bound together to offer new insights into both the system and the individuals it shaped. Unique sources analysed in this research permit an entirely new understanding of the female migrant experience, challenging our view of the pioneering migrant always being male, of foreign servants as luxury accessories and servants as young people engaged for short periods in a lifecycle occupation. The research is not a study of domestic service, but a study of the independent international migration of women through the lens of the largest single occupation open to them: service.

The thesis adopts a mixed-methods approach in analysing both quantitative and qualitative sources, to establish the scale and distribution of their presence as a group, as well as their experiences as individuals. By exploring the space in between structural forces and individual actions, this research advances a new methodological approach to understanding migration; one that challenges the trope that migrating women servants had little agency and in many cases were victims of some other force.

Qualitative sources drawn from disparate archival collections were captured in a bespoke relational database, relating to their lives both in and out of service and before and after their London work. This enabled nominal record-linkage for servants who appeared in multiple sources and helped to build a longer-term understanding of individual life experiences. More than 550 individual servants were identified from the qualitative sources, over 600 individual instances of employment have been examined; 211 non-work events have been recorded; 240 travel events have been captured; and 30 marriages have been traced. This is in addition to the *c.*1 million British servant records and *c.*20,000 foreign servant records analysed in the I-CeM dataset.

There is a tendency in studies to represent female migrant labour in particular as a passive victim with little agency, so by incorporating women's experiences before, during and after domestic employment, this thesis sheds light on how service was navigated, perceived and exploited by the migrant women themselves. The findings add in particular to the male-dominated immigration historiography which has entirely overlooked the importance of foreign servants in studies of London diaspora, part of a wider erasure of working women's experiences in historical study. Instead, domestic service offers a new insight into the way in which women migrants independently navigated rules, regulations and networks in an alien city, often with just intermittent interaction with the settled community, and used these to their advantage.

Chapter 2, **Strangers in a Strange Land**, consists of a statistical analysis of aggregate-level sources, based on a large census dataset, offering a macro-level understanding of foreign servants and their employers. The advent of digitisation and computational analysis has transformed the possibilities for the demographic study of the household level. In partnership with the Big Data Network Support (BDNS) team at the UK Data Archive and using the new Hadoop-based Data Services as a Platform (DSaaP), a number of SQL queries were carried out to generate unique datasets of foreign- and British-born domestic servants during the period 1851–1911.[1] This I-CeM Hadoop query platform has made it possible for the first time to analyse the demographic, socioeconomic and geographic context of servants and the households in which they served, and the chapter findings challenge the idea that

[1] The original I-CeM (Integrated Census Microdata) project was run by Kevin Schürer & Edward Higgs at University of Essex and is hosted by the UK Data Archive (UKDA). A full description of the project is available on the UKDA website: https://www1.essex.ac.uk/history/research/ICeM/documentation.html and in the project guide at: https://www1.essex.ac.uk/history/research/icem/documents/icem-guide-version-2-2015.pdf

foreign domestic servants in London were a 'tiny exotic minority'.[2] Not only were women arriving in significant numbers from the 1880s from a variety of geographic origins, but a far larger number of foreign women were experiencing service in Britain from 1881–1939 than had previously been imagined: the chapter demonstrates their number likely exceeded 200,000.

The I-CeM analysis both adds to and challenges scholarship on domestic service, by tracing both similarities and differences between the foreign and British servant cohorts. Significantly, most foreign servants were older than their British counterparts. Certain nationalities were also positively associated with certain roles or affluent employers; but this did not define all servants, which complicates the view that foreign servants only held prestigious jobs for wealthy employers. The foreign servant cohort was fractured along both nationality and age lines, whereby the youngest were found working with and for other foreigners in small households in less wealthy parts of the city, compared to their older cohort; and a 'second-class' cohort from Eastern and Southern Europe emerged as distinctively less prestigious than their West European counterparts.

Chapter 3, **White Armbands and Red Tape**, examines changes in the relevant laws and policies relating to foreign domestic servants, and the social expectations during the period of women outside their own homes. It draws on medieval notions of the 'masterless woman' to inform the social context in which foreign women were operating, and traces the regulatory changes affecting their movement into Britain. Placing a strong emphasis on the experiences of the servants themselves, it uses cases reported in purity and protection organisation annual reports and Ministry of Labour files compiled on suspicious ('blacklisted') aliens and employers. It argues that while gendered difference was built into the regulations, women migrants experienced this both positively and negatively. The chapter follows the women throughout the period, from their point of departure along their journey to their arrival in London, offering evidence as to why they migrated for work and the unintended consequences of the regulations which permitted their movement. It supports the findings in Chapter 2 that women were in general older than their British counterparts and that many saw work in London as a stepping stone to further opportunities, not simply as a life-cycle occupation. It suggests that financial gain was just part of the story, and that motivations for migration were often complex and multi-faceted. Although

[2] P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Stroud, 2004), p. 35.

experiences of arrival into Britain naturally depended on the political environment of the time, throughout the period the women were actively engaged in planning and profiting independently from their experience of overseas labour migration, and challenging the idea of the female servant as passive victim.

Chapter 4, **On the Lookout**, is an exploration of how women were able to leverage 'otherness' through the lens of job-seeking and recruitment. An analysis of the domestic permit applications submitted by mistresses to the Ministry of Labour, and government reports drawn up to examine the state of domestic service both at the start of the twentieth century and in the interwar period, reveal that those households who resorted to importing foreign servants were often undesirable to British servants: those who lived too far from central London, those paying too little in wages and those seeking specific (non-British) characteristics or skills. The impact of reduced numbers of British servants improved some foreign women's prospects in the market, particularly as their otherness was positively juxtaposed against the perceived low quality of British labour. Before World War I, they were able to leverage their foreignness to access some of the better-quality upper servant roles, but many found themselves disproportionately affected by the financial impact of the interwar years, when upper servants exceeded demand. For the job-seeking servant, work was most often secured through agencies (many of which specialised by nationality), both commercial and not-for-profit. Some of these operated internationally and in cooperation with other agencies or charities which is further evidence of the transnational infrastructure in which these women operated. A review of 1,377 'situations wanted' and 'situations vacant' advertisements in the *Morning Post* from 1881 to 1906 reveals important age, wage, residence and nationality findings. Foreign servants were over-represented as advertisers, compared to the size of their population at this time, and a number of explanations for this are explored, combined with findings from Chapter 2, focusing on the older age of foreign servants as a negative factor in securing work. The nationality of the foreign women entering service played a critical role: some were able to self-promote for upper servant roles while those others had little agency in being placed as welfare cases, in parallels with the British workhouse girls.

Chapter 5, **Only the Night is Mine**, explores the behavioural consequences of working as a foreign servant in a London household. It examines the way in which the women's time and spatial privacy

were regulated or restricted, exploring the ways in which employers sought to control behaviour and the sanctions used (on both sides) in cases of resistance, often very similar to those used by British servants. Sources drawn from the Ministry of Labour case files have been supplemented by an unpublished autobiographic short-story manuscript written by an Austrian domestic servant in the early 1930s: this offers a rare personal insight into the emotional strain domestic work had on a young woman searching for a sense of belonging and privacy. The chapter shows that despite the broadly positive experience of being able to access work as servants in London, foreign women after World War I were subjected to more severe restrictions and sanctions as a result of their foreign status, often based on behavioural rather than criminal misdemeanours. Nevertheless, being othered engendered in others sympathy and often leniency, once organisations established to support and protect them stepped in to advocate on their behalf. It concludes that foreign servants were rarely seen as settled migrants but were framed as being 'unnaturally' away from home, and that this lack of belonging had serious consequences for some of them.

Chapter 6, **Between the Gaps**, uses the time and space beyond the working day to understand how servants cultivated their own sense of self, as it existed outside both their roles in service and indoors, despite the constraints they faced by work and by society around them. It demonstrates that the lack of privacy afforded them as domestic servants drove them into the public space, challenging patriarchal notions of feminine behaviour. While engaging in similar leisure activities to their British counterparts, any hint of immoral behaviour could trigger official investigations or deportations, not faced by British servants. While out of work altogether, foreign servants were framed as especially vulnerable and housed in occupationally and nationally segregated hostels, their class-based activities complicating our understanding of the presence of cohesive diaspora in London. Designed to protect the women from danger, hostel matrons acted in loco parentis, attempting to instil in the residents middle-class values of domesticity, obedience and charity. But the servants were able to use these as further sites of a 'servant superhighway', as practical and social spaces. Here they experienced cultural and linguistic contact, rest and recuperation, connections to a home left behind and the creation of a global community they could rely on throughout their lives. Understanding how they made friends, learnt new skills or fell in love offers a rare glimpse into the lives of women who are so often reduced to their occupational experiences, and further challenging the idea of hidden servants in domestic isolation.

Using nominal-linkage techniques to weave together events before and after service, the **Epilogue** explores the next stages in the women's work and personal lives, after they left London's domestic service sector. It shows that the lifecycle model does not adequately explain their migrations. It further demonstrates that migration is not a rigid linear process – where motivations do not match reality nor is migration a singular decision to leave – challenging economic, male-dominated theories of push/pull migration. Characterised by mobility, it nevertheless demonstrates how narrow (and gendered) their options were, and indeed how social attitudes towards independence and individuality often translated for foreign women into legal investigations and deportations.

From the early 1880s, foreign servants in London became an increasing presence in the servant population and their numbers only increased further after World War I. The **Conclusion** explores how fears around women's independence, mobility and visibility in the public space continued to constrain them throughout the period, and the need to keep them in service, supervised and in place shifted from the family to protection agencies to the state. The very structural forces that sought to contain them, however, also permitted them to move and survive setbacks, and in this sense their experiences frame service, as the conduit, in an uncharacteristically favourable light. Reframing the passive victim as an active person, and exploring the interaction between the structural conditions and the individual decision maker, has offered, therefore, a unique opportunity to recast foreign servants as independent and resourceful. Domestic service, traditionally conceived of as an indoor, hidden occupation, functioned internationally as a conduit for the acceptable movement of decision-making women, and they were able to use it for a wide variety of life objectives, albeit within the constraints of their gender, nationalities, ages and behaviours.

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Through the AHRC internship programme I was able to spend a few months in Denmark which, in an ironic twist of fate, set me on my own course as a lone foreign female migrant. My experience of emigration revealed some surprising parallels with those of some of the women contained within these pages. With admittedly considerably more privilege, my decision to leave was nonetheless shaped by the politico-structural, in my case Brexit, and the personal.

My friends and family I simply could not have managed without, most especially Celia Robinson, Nadia Robinson, Robbie Robinson and Lucy Golding. Addi, Alex and Mookie did not live to see me get this far, but they continue to inspire me and it is to them that I owe much of my determination and resolve. Here in Denmark my heartfelt thanks go to Rune, for having unwavering faith in my abilities and endless encouragement in my multiple pursuits.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| DSP | Domestic Service Permits |
| GFS | Girls' Friendly Society |
| HL | Hartley Library |
| HWGL | Homes for Working Girls of London |
| JAPGAW | Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women |
| LCM | London City Mission |
| MoL | Ministry of Labour |
| SBS | Swiss Benevolent Society |
| SPH | Sara Pyke Home |
| TAS | Travellers Aid Society |
| TNA | The National Archives, Kew |
| UKDA | UK Data Archive, University of Essex |
| YWCA | Young Women's Christian Association |
| YMCA | Young Men's Christian Association |

# Chapter 1

Very few are aware of the great number of foreign lasses
that immigrate for a few years to London.[1]

This thesis might have been about how foreign domestics were exploited in London. A small number of foreign women labouring away in the basements, back stairs and nurseries of the capital's middle- and upper-class homes, over-worked, underpaid and lost in the vast army of British servants marching through their youth towards marriage. But instead it is the story of women from all over the world who saw an opportunity to leave their pasts behind them and migrate. As working women they faced barriers, seen and unseen; as lone travellers yet more. They might not have captained a ship or established a charity or led a coup, and they were most certainly restricted to a narrow range of occupations, but at some point in their lives they made a decision to leave their homelands. Domestic service was their means to a new future; their vehicle to a new version of themselves. And so this thesis is not really about how these women worked in domestic service, but how they made domestic service work for them. Britain, and more pertinently London, was at the centre of a growing and interconnected empire, a cosmopolitan city rivalling only New York. Why shouldn't these women be a be part of that? Not everyone left, of course. Nor could they. But for significant numbers of foreign women who crossed the Channel to seek their futures, London represented a new chapter in their lives. I therefore join with the sentiment of pride and respect conveyed by a servant hostel in London from 1912: 'We admire their pluck in coming […]. Their enterprise is most commendable!'.[2]

Women are the focus of this research for two main reasons: (1) assumptions about women's mobility and migration have traditionally been mired in the context of trailing wives and family emigration;[3] that they made international journeys independently is thus surprising; and (2) there was no discernible occupational parallel in men's migration which would have made a comparison between the two meaningful. Although foreign men were visible in the hospitality service sector in

[1] *Homes for Working Girls in London (HWGL). The Work of the Year 1891*, p. 78.
[2] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1912*, pp. 124-5.
[3] S. Rowbotham, 'Foreword', in P. Sharpe (ed.), *Women, Gender, And Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives*, (London, 2001), pp. xvi-xvii.

the years up to 1914, and the foreign waiter was a common trope at the time,[4] they were not as numerous as their female counterparts.[5] Furthermore, numbers were rendered almost obsolete once the 1920 Aliens Order restricted foreign men from entering the UK labour market. The Blacklisted Aliens archive (held at the National Archives and hitherto infrequently used) is held in six boxes containing a total of 276 files covering the interwar years. They overwhelmingly relate to cases of women servants, with less than 30 per cent concerning men or mixed groups, connected mostly to industrial, clerical and entertainment sectors.[6] The study's focus on London is explained more fully in Chapter 2 (Narrowing the Focus), and reveals how every nationality of the UK's foreign servant population was represented in the capital, making it a representative site of analysis.[7] Further, the rich source material relating to organisations and activities located near the transport hubs in London offer a strong case for studying foreign servants in the nation's capital.

Domestic service absorbed the highest number of foreign working women from 1851 onwards and remained the largest employer of women (foreign or not) throughout the period, thus representing a rich and varied population of independent migrant women. In 1911, for example, 27 per cent of British-born employed women were engaged in indoor domestic work compared to 39 per cent of foreign women. At the turn of the century the figures were 37 per cent of employed British women to 48 per cent of foreign working women; and in 1881 29 per cent of the foreign working female population was in indoor service.[8] Tailoring absorbed the second largest group of foreign women over the same time period, but did not exceed 17 per cent of the total working population. No sending country had identical regional or national conditions that could determine triggers for migration, and such decisions were naturally constrained by specific legislative contexts, the availability of assistance networks, religions organisations, family support, class backgrounds and

[4] P. Panayi and S. Manz, 'The Rise and Fall of Germans in the British Hospitality Industry, c. 1880-1920', *Food and History*, 11, 2 (2013), p. 1.
[5] In 1901, the number of foreign-born men employed in indoor domestic service in England and Wales was 2,553 compared to 12,171 women. 2,330 were employed in hotels or lodging houses (*Parliamentary Papers* (1903), Census of England and Wales, 1901, Summary Tables. Area, houses and population, Cm 1523, Table XLVIII, p. 268-81).
[6] 'Employment and Training; Aliens Restriction Department: Correspondence concerning Blacklisted Aliens', 1924-1938, TNA, LAB 2/2080-5.
[7] See Section 'Narrowing the focus' in Chapter 2.
[8] *Parl. Pap.* (1903), Census of England and Wales, 1901, Summary Tables. Area, houses and population, Cm 1523, Table XLVIII, p. 268-81; *Parliamentary Papers* (1914-16), Census of England and Wales, 1911, Summary Tables, Cm 7929, Table 48, pp. 134-7; *Parliamentary Papers* (1863), Census of England and Wales, 1861, Population Tables, Cm 3221, Table XXIX, pp. lxxviii-lxxix.

proximity to transport termini. While arguing that the women had neither full agency nor were they simply passive victims of a larger system, the structure of the thesis moves from the macro level state and legislative environment through the intermediary groups, organisations and society at large before exploring the individual experiences of the women themselves. Through this structure, the thesis is able to explore the space in which they operated, examining when they were able to leverage situations for their own gain and, in contrast, where their resolve was undermined by the might of social, political, familial or economic power. An exploration of this ever-shifting, widening and narrowing corridor of opportunity connects the parlour maids of the 1880s to the nursery maids of the 1930s in terms of their scope to exert agency in different contexts. It also reveals more clearly where there were similarities, continuities or ruptures throughout the period while recognising the varying characteristics of conditions along multiple migration routes.

## Historiography

The academic study of female domestic servants in Britain has a surprisingly short history, given the size of the domestic service sector in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. Servants 'have never been regarded within the prevailing definitions of 'work' or the 'economy',[9] and were swept under the carpet for much of the twentieth century by historians and social scientists alike. It was not until the 1970s in the context of a wider shift in academia, that scholars sought to recover the voices and experiences of marginalised groups in society, and in particular those of women.[10] The historiography with which this thesis engages reaches beyond studies of servants, the discipline of History and indeed of the period 1881 to 1939. Nevertheless, the study begins by focusing on service, the largest female occupational category at this time, since its importance to the women of this thesis cannot be ignored.

[9] S. Rowbotham, 'Foreword', in P. Sharpe (ed.), *Women, Gender, and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives* (London, 2001), p. xvi.
[10] See in particular L. Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Social History*, 7/4 (1974); T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920* (London, 1976); M. Ebery and B. Preston, *Domestic Service in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, 1871-1914* (Reading, 1976); E. Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History*, 8/2 (1983).

## *Scholarly gaps and silences*

Domestic service has long been associated with young, unmarried women, both in Britain and indeed elsewhere, but the rise of the cult of domesticity among middle-class families in the mid- to late-Victorian period coupled with a growing and urbanising society fuelled an overwhelming demand for domestic labour, chiefly met by migrant women of rural backgrounds. Historian of domestic service, Teresa McBride, claims that the 'history of domestic service in the nineteenth century is the story of urban migration',[11] making it is impossible to understand service without an understanding of the movement of people into that market and its effect on the growth of cities. However, claims Baines, 'the main effect of the industrialization of Europe was to change the destination of migrants', not just to urbanising areas but also overseas.[12] Unprecedented numbers of (e)migrants made journeys across the Atlantic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including large numbers of lone young women leaving Europe behind for work as servants in North America, themselves the subjects of detailed scholarly analysis.[13] However, the experiences of women employed in Britain's capital are entirely absent in the scholarship.

**Existing scholarship**

Historian of Jewish History, Tony Kushner, has examined the role of the state in offering conditional asylum in the UK to women fleeing Nazi persecution in 1930s Germany, provided they worked as servants on arrival. In a highly gendered policy, indigenous male jobs were protected but the feminised domestic sector was to absorb several thousand newly-arrived refugees, raising questions about the perceived generosity and compassion of the British state.[14] Rose Holmes has more recently explored this group at a more individual level, focusing on their interactions with the vast women-led effort to place these refugee servants. Set at the very end of the period under study (1938), these remain the only accounts of foreign-born domestic workers (though, in these cases, forced migrants). Although it is usual for some historians to class migration from Ireland to Britain

[11] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 34.
[12] D. Baines, 'European Labor Markets, Emigration and Internal Migration, 1850-1913', in G. Hatton, T. J., Williamson, J., Boyer (eds), *Migration and the International Labor Market, 1850-1939* (London, 1994), p. 41.
[13] See for example C. Harzig, *Peasant Maids, City Women : From the European Countryside to Urban America* (London, 1997) and C. Harzig and D. Hoerder, 'Femina Migrans: Agency of European Women Migrating to Domestic Work in North America, 1880s to 1950s', in D. Hoerder and A. Kaur (eds), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden, 2013).
[14] T. Kushner, 'An Alien Occupation—Jewish Refugees and Domestic Service in Britain, 1933–1948', in W.E. Mosse (ed.), *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tubingen, 1991), p. 559.

in the nineteenth century as 'emigration', Baines argues that because the movement occurred within the same nation-state and within labour markets that were highly integrated, it is far more realistic to consider it 'internal' migration.[15] Although in this sense they are not strictly international migrants, the Irish were however the most numerous ethnic 'other' in London during this period, and the experiences of Irish female domestic servants in Britain have begun to be explored by historians from both a gendered and a racial perspective.[16] Work also exists on understanding the structures in place that encouraged women to emigrate as domestic servants, focusing largely on the movement between the UK and colonial societies.[17] And a growing body of research on international migrant domestic servants that especially informs this thesis exists in the European context, though none makes the explicit connection to London and its importance as a global city.[18]

Despite the growth in research on internal migrating domestic servants, and the handful of work on those from specific national or ethnic groups (above), there is no comprehensive account of foreign-born domestic servants in Britain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; yet preconceptions and assumptions about them abound. Subsumed in her detailed work on vast numbers of British domestic servants, Pamela Horn positions foreign-born women working in the sector as the preserve of the wealthy, with foreign ladies' maids much in demand among fashionable ladies.[19] She considers them to have been 'a small specialist sector of the domestic labour force',[20] offering skilled services as French, Swiss or German children's workers and French or Swiss ladies' maids.[21]

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[15] Baines, 'European Labor Markets', p. 36-7.
[16] See for example B. Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women* (London, 2001); L. Ryan, 'Moving Spaces and Changing Places: Irish Women's Memories of Emigration to Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29/1 (2003); J. Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness Exploring the Discourses on Irish Single Women's Emigration to England 1922-1948', *Women's History Review*, 17/3 (2008).
[17] See, for example, D. Oxley, Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia (Cambridge; New York, 1996); R. Mancuso, "'Give Me a Canadian": Gender Identity and Training Hostels for British Domestics for Canada, 1927-30.', Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History, 38/4 (2010); L. M. Sautter, 'Femininity and Community At Home and Away: Shipboard Diaries By Single Women Emigrants To New Zealand', Victorian Literature and Culture, 43/02 (2015).
[18] L. Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control: The Aliens Police and Foreign Female Servants in the Netherlands, 1918-40', *Social History*, 27/3 (2002), D. Wierling, 'Women Domestic Servants in Germany at the Turn of the Century', *Oral History*, 10/2 (1982) and M. König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris, 1870–1914, A Case Study', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33/3 (2012).
[19] P. Horn, *Life below Stairs in the 20th Century* (Thrupp, 2001), p. 169.
[20] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 169.
[21] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 169.

Similarly, there is a common trope that if populations are numerically small, they must be historically insignificant, and this seems especially true when applied to subgroups of domestic servants, or indeed foreigners. Laura Tabili claims that the latter have been neglected in particular in historical scholarship, exacerbated by an over-representation of certain groups who were overtly visible both physically and in the public consciousness; namely, the Irish and Jewish communities.[22] The largest occupational sector for women in European and North American societies for generations, service encompassed a wide range of individual roles, and indeed nationalities. Horn dismisses the importance of foreign domestics in the UK due to their small number, a 'tiny exotic minority'[23] in relation to their British-born counterparts. Their presence elsewhere in the literature is dominated by large numbers, either of indigenous women moving to expanding cities, or by women immigrating to the US and finding work as servants in the rapid expansion of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century North America. The dominance of these two phenomena in the literature has left little room for an exploration of smaller-scale migration between states and regions across the globe.

**Women as independent migrants**

If the scholarship features a shallow understanding of foreign-born women in studies of British domestic service, it is also guilty of omitting women more generally from accounts of migration and immigration. In her review of the literature on women's migration, Suzanne Sinke refers to the tendency to treat all immigrants as 'genderless men',[24] a view she is not alone in holding. Sheila Rowbotham, for example, in introducing a rich volume of articles on women as labour migrants, identifies a major challenge in the literature to be an assumption that men are prime movers while women remain their dependents.[25] Although the migrant has 'been designated the "central or defining figure of the twentieth century",' […] scholarship has focused on the 'uprooting and transplanting processes of adult men as representative and ignored the part of women in migration.'[26]

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[22] L. Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture: Natives and Newcomers in Provincial England, 1841-1939* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 6.
[23] P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Stroud, 2004), p. 35.
[24] S. M. Sinke, 'Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives', *International Migration Review*, 40/1 (2006), p. 85.
[25] S. Rowbotham, 'Foreword'.
[26] K. Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women in New York, 1870-1924* (Albany, N.Y., 1996), p. 175.

The absence of women as independent migrants in the literature has subsequently fed the myth that they did not move in any significant numbers before the advent of late-twentieth century globalisation, and masks the presence of women of all classes and backgrounds undertaking transnational journeys before the late 1900s. If acknowledged as present in the migration process at all, a woman is often 'constructed as a dependent, attached to husband and family, moving in kin-groups and networks, held back by family obligations and haunted by homesickness'.[27] A number of scholars are working hard to dispel this idea of the dependent female migrant or 'woman in tow', but most of the research focuses on the patterns of single female migration to North America with very little appearing in British scholarship on this subject.[28] Similarly, a dominance in the literature by both male- and Atlantic-dominated accounts of migration can result in a skewed periodization; claims such as those by Massey et al, that World War I 'brought European emigration to an abrupt halt and ushered in a four-decade period of limited migration'.[29] Using a different frame of reference can offer new insights into this. Adam McKeown argues from a global perspective, to dispute the transatlantic-centric analysis, showing instead that 'world migration reached new peaks in the 1920s'.[30] Migration studies will therefore benefit from a gendered perspective in examining female migration that spanned both pre- and post-First World War periods.

**Immigrant women as workers**

Part of a wider issue of labour historians not recognising domestic service as part of the economy has resulted in gendered obscurity for domestic workers in British immigration literature.[31] Although Sinke reports the growth since the 1970s of a scholarly critique of the 'genderless male' migrant by feminist historians in North America, historians of immigration to Britain, by contrast, appear to have sidestepped the gender issue in favour of class. In Panayi's article on working-class Germans in London, one illuminating table shows the number of Germans engaged in working-class occupations in each census from 1871 to 1911. Women servants outnumber every single male

[27] Harzig and Hoerder, 'Femina Migrans', p. 151.
[28] For North America, see especially J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago, 1988); for Irish migration to Britain see Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness'.
[29] D. S. Massey, 'Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis', in C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz, and J. Dewind (eds), *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (New York, 1999) p. 34.
[30] A. McKeown, 'Global Migration, 1846-1940', *Journal of World History*, 15/2 (2004), p. 156.
[31] P. Sharpe, *Women, Gender, and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives*, (London, 2001), p. xvi.

occupation in all but one year (when they ranked second),[32] yet Panikos Panayi omits them from his subsequent analysis though addresses every (male) German occupation in turn.[33] More recently, Ian Whyte refers to the fact that many Germans in Britain were 'clerks […] scientists, professional men and merchants',[34] with no mention of working women, despite the individual totals of each of the male-dominated occupations in this census year falling below that of female German domestic servants.[35]

Not only are domestic servants missing from the immigration literature, but they fail to be identified even as potential subjects for research. While identifying gaps in the scholarship relating to foreign settlers in the UK, historians have urged us to investigate neglected groups such as the post-1915 Belgians, the pre-1914 Chinese,[36] and groups of working-class occupations such as pork butchers and bandsmen as contributors to British life.[37] Yet women, women's work and domestic service are starkly absent; in the UK scholarship, the genderless male migrant is seemingly alive and well.

**The longer perspective**

Writing in 1978, Colin Holmes claims that there was a 'lack of interest in the historical dimension' of migration by sociologists.[38] Today, despite perceptive insights by contemporary academics into the perpetuation of low-paid, vulnerable domestic work available to foreign workers,[39] most modern sociological research into women's movement and the global domestic service market is not aware of its longer history. 'The feminization of migration is presented as a recent and general

[32] Only male waiters outnumbered them in 1911.
[33] P. Panayi, 'The German Poor and Working Classes in London', in G. Alderman and C. Holmes (eds), *Outsiders and Outcasts* (London, 1993), pp. 63-9. The figures are hard to ignore. In 1901, there were 4,335 German servant women, the largest occupational group among the Germans, representing 55% of all working women and one in eight working adult Germans in the UK. Bandsmen numbered 568 and butchers 1,224.
[34] I. Whyte, 'Migration and Settlement', in C. Williams (ed.), *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Malden MA, 2004), pp. 273-86.
[35] The total number of female servants was 2,244 compared to no more than 2,000 for each of the male occupations. Panayi erroneously gives the German servant numbers for 1871 as 1,522 (Panayi, 'The German Poor and Working Classes in London', p. 62) which is the number of domestic servants (general); for no stated reason, he excludes housekeepers, cooks, housemaids, nurses and laundry maids.
[36] C. Holmes, 'Immigrants and Refugees in Britain', in Mosse, *Second Chance*, pp. 18-19.
[37] Panayi, 'The German Poor and Working Classes in London'.
[38] C. Holmes, *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London, 1978), p. 200.
[39] See in particular Sharpe, *Women, Gender, and Labour Migration*; J. Momsen, *Gender, Migration, and Domestic Service* (London; New York, 1999); B. Anderson, 'A Very Private Business Exploring the Demand for Migrant Domestic Workers', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14/3 (2007); R. Cox, *The Servant Problem: Domestic Employment in a Global Economy* (London; New York, 2006).

phenomenon,' claims Schrover.[40] Positioning modern-day domestic service as fundamentally different to its nineteenth and early-twentieth century versions, literature focused on the last few decades has little understanding of the continuities it might draw upon to frame its work over a longer period. In an attempt to place the modern-day globalised domestic service market in some historical perspective, Harzig shows how migration was a key aspect of service in the nineteenth century, citing high numbers of internal migrants in various European countries and making an impassioned plea to understand women's migration for service as a longer term experience than is currently recognised in sociological research. Yet despite citing work by König on nineteenth-century German domestics in Paris, even she dates the first cross-border migrations from the 1920s, thus ignoring decades of international domestic service migration across Europe and within the British Empire. Drawing out the work and migration experiences of international domestic servants from over a century ago will thus help to anchor social science research in the continuities and changes of historical trends.

Those historians who have acknowledged the presence of foreign women in the domestic service market also seem unaware of the longer perspective of international migration into the sector. Kushner refers to 'newly-established' domestic service agencies in 1930s Vienna and Germany in response to the increase in Jewish emigrants during this period, but these were in fact a continuation of the established German domestic service market, and indeed Jewish women's domestic service experiences, that had existed for at least the previous half a century.[41] Julia Laite, in identifying the deteriorating conditions in 1930s Europe as a trigger for service migration to the UK, claims this was the period in which the groundwork was laid for today's 'foreign domestic labourers who work under exploitative conditions'.[42] Lucy Delap, too, writing on mid-twentieth century domestic service, refers to 'the influx of foreign maids into Britain in the 1930s,'[43] masking the many thousands of women from all over the world who moved in and out of the British domestic service sector from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. A thorough analysis of early

[40] M. Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration: Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Hoerder and Kaur (eds), *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations*, p. 130.
[41] Kushner, 'An Alien Occupation', p. 559.
[42] J. Laite, 'Between Scylla and Charybdis: Women's Labour Migration and Sex Trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century', *International Review of Social History*, 62/01 (2017), p. 56.
[43] L. Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2011), p. 90.

international economic migrant domestic workers will thus redress this myopic version of the history of foreign women in British domestic service. Taking a longer view offers context to the refugee servants who arrived in the late 1930s and a more in-depth analysis of the state apparatus and legal framework that affected female servants will act as a corrective to the multiple assertions of the 1930s as the start of international service migration to London.

**Separate spheres?**

The cult of domesticity centred on the separation in all possible senses of the employer and their domestic staff. At its heart this was about polar opposites: dirt and cleanliness, work and leisure, working class and middle class, downstairs and upstairs. The prevalence of young, single, rural women engaged in domestic work in urban areas helped to reinforce a distinction between 'backward' societies and 'modern' ones. These polemics were literally built into the system, with even housing designed to emulate the morality of privacy among the superior classes, replete with passages, corridors and separate entrances allowing for the separation of the sexes and personal privacy away from the staff.[44] Yet some scholars have challenged these ideas of a distinct separation between employer and domestic servant, blurring some of the hard-edge distinctions between lower class, dirty manual workers and their morally clean middle-class employers. In her detailed micro-study of nineteenth-century Lancaster households, Siân Pooley found that maids and mistresses were more similar than previously imagined, with geographical and social connections facilitating recruitment and mistress and maid working side by side in a mutually beneficial arrangement, reinforced by kinship.[45] With big data sets of census returns now available to analyse, it is only now possible to look with more clarity at the demographic and socio-economic similarities and differences between household heads and their staff, correlations between which are revealed in the unique quantitative analysis in this thesis.

## *Exploring otherness*

Encouraged by migration historians to consider the continuities between internal and international migration and to develop 'an analysis capable of comprehending gendered differences in

[44] S. Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (London, 1982).
[45] S. Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers: A Case Study of Lancaster, 1880-1914', *Economic History Review*, 62 (2009).

migration',[46] the first set of research questions relates to the status of domestic foreign servants as 'others'. Service encompassed a wide range of individual roles amalgamated under one large category, dominated by women and defined more by the relationship between employer and employee than by job title. Operating in a vast pool of British domestics, how were they framed as different, and how did this shape their experiences both in and out of service? A key aspect to addressing this is by attempting to stratify them according to categories of 'otherness'. From the 1970s, categories have been used by feminist, race and labour historians to leverage an awareness of the exploitation of marginalised groups, such as the working classes, women, people of colour and intersections thereof. Were there particular ways in which the foreign cohort was segmented, and how might this that add to our understanding of the complexities of domestic service as an amorphous sector?

**Ethnicity**

New scholarship seems to be shifting away from the victim-based analysis of marginalised groups by positioning difference as a positive marker too, offering certain groups access to particular work or improved wages and working conditions. Caroline Bressey, in her work on finding black voices in classified newspaper advertisements, finds that being black was positively correlated to accessing certain job types, where 'men and women, both employees and employers, used 'race' as a criterion of employability'.[47] Thomas Orum's work on Jewish women from Eastern Europe working as prostitutes in the Amazon basin also explores a similar theme of capitalising on otherness, finding that their light-coloured skin was a major asset and commanded correspondingly higher wages.[48] In America, where race is a more significant aspect of studies in domestic service, Branch and Wooten identify how the otherness of being a black maid could reflect positively on their mistresses: 'More than the ability to perform household chores, the housewife needed a woman who was markedly different from herself […] one whose work and very identity confirmed the housewife's daintiness and perfection'.[49]

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[46] M. P. Hanagan, 'Labor History and the New Migration History: A Review Essay', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 54 (1998), p. 60.
[47] C. Bressey, 'Looking for Work: The Black Presence in Britain 1860 – 1920', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 28/2–3 (2010), p. 179.
[48] T. T. Orum, 'The Women of the Open Door: Jews in the Belle Epoque Amazonian Demimonde, 1890-1920', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 19/3 (2001).
[49] E. H. Branch and M. E. Wooten, 'Suited for Service: Racialized Rationalizations for the Ideal Domestic Servant from the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century', *Social Science History*, 36/2 (2012), p. 184.

**Nationality**

Certain national and regional identities have also been found to perform as positive features of otherness, suggestive of a hierarchy of desirability for market entry. Harzig and Hoerder describe how the North American domestic service market was divided by job function among the Poles, Swedes, Irish and Germans, as waitresses, maids, and live-in servants,[50] each associated with a particular aptitude for certain types of work. Moch's work on the 'Becassine' maid from Brittany identifies how access to the domestic job market in Paris was defined by stereotypical regional characteristics, albeit defined by being at odds with the sophistication of the city.[51] In her survey of modern-day employers and their domestic workers, anthropologist Bridget Anderson reveals interesting contemporary themes of employer preference based on foreignness (and thus implied classlessness), race, gender, persistent national stereotypes of personal aptitude for certain domestic roles and perceptions of developing-world poverty and economic disadvantage.[52] And borrowing from historical studies of prostitution, women fraudulently identifying as an 'other' to derive positive material benefits included French Fifi, the London prostitute in Slater's work: 'French Fifi' was actually Russian.[53]

**Age**

How the marital status of female servants affected their work experiences is examined in Redmond's work on Irish immigrant women in Liverpool. She explores their highly gendered experiences of the state, religious and purity organisations, identifying how their single status was 'ascribed as a category of identification' in a way it was not for men.[54] This manifested itself as 'concern over morals and behaviour',[55] and how their 'assumed rural origins and youth were perceived as making [them] under-qualified to cope with Britain's urban landscape'.[56] The Irish women in Caslin's work on Liverpool were also positioned as being unaware of 'the very concept

[50] Harzig and Hoerder, 'Femina Migrans, p. 162.
[51] L. P. Moch, 'Domestic Service, Migration, and Ethnic Stereotyping Bécassine and the Bretons in Paris', *Journal of Migration History*, 1/1 (2015).
[52] Anderson, 'A Very Private Business, p. 253, for comparisons between Nepalese and Filipino maids. See also R. Cox's work as a geographer on how ethnicity shapes the domestic employment sector in Britain: R. Cox, 'The Role of Ethnicity in Shaping the Domestic Employment Sector in Britain', in Momsen (ed), *Gender, Migation, and Domestic Service*.
[53] S. Slater, 'Pimps Police and Filles de Joie: Foreign Prostitution in Interwar London', *The London Journal*, 32/1 (2007), 53–74, p. 62.
[54] Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness, p. 470.
[55] Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness, p. 455.
[56] S. Caslin, "One Can Only Guess What Might Have Happened If the Worker Had Not Intervened in Time': the Liverpool Vigilance Association, Moral Vulnerability and Irish Girls in Early- to Mid-Twentieth-Century Liverpool', *Women's History Review*, 25/2 (2016), p. 261.

of urban space and distance';[57] 'particularly vulnerable to losing themselves, both geographically and morally'[58] and equating their status as single migrant women with that of childlike naivety and vulnerability. This infantilising occurs in combination with issues of race, as well as that of ethnic otherness, youth and marital status. The ayahs and amahs of Asia were also consistently positioned as childlike and dependent, both in the primary sources and in subsequent scholarship on their presence in London.[59]

**Mobility**

The movement of single women during the period of this thesis was set against a twin backdrop of the sanctity of the domestic versus the vice of the public sphere. The cult of domesticity idealised women not just as keepers of the home but in home being the rightful and most appropriate place for a woman to be, and for a woman to be operating beyond this was to signal her moral status. Erika Rappaport and Judith Walkowitz highlight the immoral insinuations of unaccompanied women occupying public space in late Victorian London. Shopping or travelling about the city alone was enough to risk being associated with 'fallen' women or seen as 'fast'.[60] Redmond notes that for emigrating single Irish women away from their families, 'watchful eyes could no longer ensure that single women could be kept from sin'.[61] And this fed into concerns from the turn of the twentieth century of the growing independence of working-class women, in terms of how they spent spare time, dressed and conducted themselves.[62] Such concerns are not specific to the British context, however, and are suggestive of a gendered challenge to a patriarchal system uncomfortable with women as independent and mobile decision-makers and wage earners. 'In Japan, these women, who spun or manufactured cotton batting, provoked many of the same anxieties as urban maidservants. Samurai officials and village headmen complained that they wore fine clothes and hairpins and flaunted their financial independence.'[63] Stanley is describing Japanese society in the medieval and early modern periods, yet these fears have older roots still.

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[57] Caslin, '"One Can Only Guess', p. 263.
[58] Caslin, "One Can Only Guess', p. 260.
[59] See R. Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London, 2002), p. 53.
[60] E. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), p. 23, p. 132; J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight : Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), p. 24.
[61] Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness, p. 456.
[62] S. Ledger, *Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester, 1997).
[63] A. Stanley, 'Maidservants' Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia, 1600-1900', *American Historical Review*, 121/2 (2016), p. 449.

Judith Bennett's work on migrant women in cities in the late medieval period argues that a law enacted in 1349 to compulsorily put idle people under 60 to work as servants was inherently gendered: this 'compelled service [was] a regime that was imposed with particular force on singlewomen', functioning as much to place her under surveillance as to employ her.[64] Further, Humphries and Wiesdorf found, in early-modern England, that '[w]omen who migrated to cities in search of employment were particularly distrusted; any woman travelling alone was suspected of immorality'.[65] Society's solution for these masterless women was to 'home' them, ideally in a cost-neutral manner to avoid being a drain on the social purse, most efficiently achieved through household service. This notion persisted down to the nineteenth century, where Davidoff suggests that 'the only legitimate and respected (or respectable) alternative to living with one's own family was living as a servant with another family';[66] and indeed reached the twentieth century, where Bartley found that '[s]ingle women were discouraged from being a burden on the rates so work was quickly found for them as domestic servants'.[67]

As young women, at perceived risk of greater harm away from their families, these fears of their mobility became linked to their vulnerability. Purity organisations that emerged in response to these perceived threats further reinforced the vulnerability of the women they protected. Indeed, Schrover claims that this protection of "'innocent" foreign women was used to legitimize restrictions on their mobility',[68] and that these "'narratives of victimhood" have ensured women were restricted, [albeit] in their best interests'.[69] A further aspect of the system to survive generations of confining women, was that of settlement. Social welfare and benefits were for centuries administered at the parish level under the English poor relief and poor law systems, and in order to access these applicants had to satisfy 'stringent residence or property requirements'. Failure to prove so meant 'they were classified as "strangers" and liable to be removed to their

[64] J. M. Bennett, 'Compulsory Service in Late Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 209/1 (2010), p. 46.
[65] J. Humphries and others, 'The Wages of Women in England, 1260–1850', *The Journal of Economic History*, 75/2 (2017), p. 423.
[66] Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life', p. 411
[67] P. Bartley, 'Preventing Prostitution: The Ladies Association for the Care and Protection of Young Girls in Birmingham, 1887-1914', *Women's History Review*, 7/1 (1998), p. 47.
[68] Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration', p. 127.
[69] Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration', p. 129.

[own] parish of settlement.'[70] In the context of foreign women, the notion of being away from their (rightful) natal homes made them ineligible for benefits in Britain and subject to removal; as such, the unit of assessment appears to have been magnified from parish to state level.

This first set of research questions, therefore, revolves around foreign women's domestic service experiences as a lens through which to examine different categories of otherness. In particular, I explore how these differences affected them both positively and negatively, before, during and after their period in service. Facing layers of resistance, in the context of deeply embedded social constructs linking fears of mobile women to service, surveillance and settlement, to what extent were these women disadvantaged in navigating both their migration choices and their work opportunities?

## *Exploring agency*

The second research question explores to what extent and under what conditions foreign-born female domestic servants demonstrated agency, choice and self-determination in their working and non-working lives, before, during and after service. A comprehensive account of the external forces that were brought to bear on the domestic servants will necessarily provide the context for how these women were able to navigate social, economic and geo-political structures, but the literature is divided over the extent to which the structural conditions shaped the experiences of the women, both as migrants and as servants. The debate fundamentally revolves around the levels of agency demonstrated by women, both in their decision to migrate and in their choice of occupation on arrival.

### Migration models

A basic tension in the migration literature exists between the structural forces at work in triggering migration and the decisions made by individuals to migrate. The push–pull model of migration identifies (largely economic) conditions for emigration at the place of origin, as well as perceived potential benefits offered at the destination, to explain the decision to move. In her seminal work on English and French domestic servants in the nineteenth century, McBride identifies push and

[70] D. Feldman, 'Migration', in M. Daunton (ed), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: 1840-1950. Volume 3*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 195.

pull factors involved in rural-to-urban service migration, in which urban domestic service offered not only 'a haven from starvation in a rural backwater or urban slum [but] involved an economically rational choice and a number of advantages'.[71] However, critics remain unconvinced that economic triggers in the sending and receiving areas adequately account for all types of migration, particularly in relation to the domestic labour market, given its high turnover of staff and their mobility. Although it seems to be uncritically accepted that servants moved from rural areas to urban areas (and then perhaps across national boundaries), little is known about the way in which migrants reached cities in the first place or whether the rural-urban-international trajectory really took place in that order. It is thus particularly difficult, according to Baines, to identify the exact point at which an individual decided to migrate (and thus the precise push conditions), and indeed the exact point at which an individual finished (and thus the precise pull conditions).[72] This ambiguity applies particularly to stage migrants, transmigrants and return migrants, many of whom found themselves working as servants en route to an onward destination.[73]

Critics further argue that the structural approaches to migration fail to take into consideration the personal agency of the individual migrant and thus casts him/her as a passive victim of global economic forces. Bartholomew was particularly dissatisfied with the push/pull framework in explaining the migration of *some* Welsh girls (by implication not others) into London's domestic service market in the 1930s.[74] Push/pull factors, she argues, fail to explain the active process of individual choice or family strategy: if the conditions at home and in London were the same, why did some girls leave Wales and some stay? Mary Chamberlain too has argued that so often migrant labour is represented as 'victim, with no history, momentum or agency of its own',[75] and many other scholars have moved from examining the large-scale structures to 'analyzing units below the

[71] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 48.
[72] Baines, 'European Labor Markets', pp. 38-39.
[73] In the 1880s as many as 50 per cent of transatlantic emigrants from Hamburg travelled via England due to cheaper shipping fares, cited in S. Manz, 'Negotiating Ethnicity, Class and Gender: German Associational Culture in Glasgow, 1864-1914', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 31/2 (2013), p. 151.
[74] K. Bartholomew, 'Women Migrants in Mind: Leaving Wales in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centures', in C. Pooley and I. Whyte (eds) *Migrants, Emigrants, and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration* (1991), pp. 174-87.
[75] M. Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Narratives of Migration', *History Workshop Journal*, 43/Spring (1997), p. 88.

macro-level such as the family, households or minor communities,';[76] still fewer, however, focus on the individual.

The tensions around these traditional models explaining migration are further challenged by those working in the area of gender studies. Kathie Friedman-Kasaba, through her extensive work examining historical immigrant women's experiences of migration to the US, argues that a lack of gender analysis has produced migration theories that fail to adequately explain women's experiences of migration and are, by extension, useless as tools for historians. By placing women at the centre of her argument, she was able to prove that neither the push/pull nor historical-structural frameworks fully explained how women experienced migration either as emancipating or as disempowering.[77] This raises broader questions about the validity of mainstream migration theories that were developed in the twentieth century based on the 'genderless male'.

While political, economic and social factors combined in the nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries to result in the mass migrations westwards to North America, its over-dominance in the literature has effected a marginalisation of other migration trends. Moving away from the linear emigrant patterns of migration that tend to concern economic historians, there is a growing recognition that migration is rarely a bounded entity, starting at one point and finishing at a destination. Instead, 'we are beginning to see people as multiple movers in more than one direction', according to Harzig.[78] Accounts of reverse migration and intra-European service migration are helping to shift our understanding of women's movement, and the motivations for doing so are not always rooted in economics.

Resistant to the imposition of sociological theories and models, and critical of their value in explaining the historical migration process, geographers Pooley and Whyte advocate for the adoption of sociologist Giddens' structuration theory, which takes into account movement from both a structural and an agency perspective: 'it is the interaction between structures in society which

[76] L. Vikström, 'Gendered Routes and Courses: The Socio-Spatial Mobility of Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Sundsvall, Sweden', (PhD, Umea Universitet, 2003), p. 29.
[77] Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, p. 178.
[78] C. Harzig, 'Women Migrants as Global and Local Agents', in Sharpe, *Women, Gender, and Labour Migration*, p. 18.

produce [sic] both opportunities and constraints and the reactions of individual people which is of greatest interest to social historians'.[79] I engage with this approach throughout the thesis, drawing particularly on Scott's observation, that 'people are not simply rational, goal-oriented beings, but subjects of unconscious desire […] people aren't mobilised according to purely objective interests, but rather according to interests created for them by collective fantasies'.[80] Understanding women's motivations for migration to the British domestic service sector will offer new insights into these accounts of international movement, and complicate patterns and experiences of migration long-held by scholars of US- and male-led immigration.

**Domestic service as a last resort**

A similar polarity exists between women choosing to be domestic servants, either as victims of some larger structure, or as women with personal agency making active decisions. Steedman acknowledges that in an attempt to rescue the voices of the marginalised, the new feminist and labour historians of the 1970s and 1980s were more interested in retrieving experiences of the exploitation of domestic servants than in acknowledging their opinions on unionising or their shrewd use of the legal system to assert their own rights. 'The historical story of women's oppression deeply inflects much recent sociology of migrant domestic labour',[81] she claims. Indeed, even recent studies by social scientists on the globalisation of domestic service are motivated to change the system, to advocate for those who continue to experience poor working conditions and vulnerable status as migrant workers. They position service migration as being inherently structural, with power imbalances rooted in the North/South divide caused by unequal economic opportunities.[82]

Historical descriptions of life as domestic servants have often focused on the inevitability of this type of work as a necessary step in the life cycle for young working-class women with few other options in life. Historians have described service as involving 'long hours, lack of freedom,

[79] C. Pooley and I. Whyte, *Migrants, Emigrants, and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration* (London, 1991), p. 13.
[80] L. M. Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', *Gender & History*, 28/2 (2016), p. 332.
[81] C. Steedman, *Labours Lost : Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge; New York, 2009), p. 27.
[82] See for example H. Lutz, 'At Your Service Madam! The Globalisation of Domestic Service', *Feminist Review*, 70 (2002), pp. 89-104.

loneliness, and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse'.[83] Tabili writes how in South Shields, 'domestic service loomed large among a narrow and unappealing array of occupational choices', citing the 'rigors and humiliations' of domestic service by the turn of the century.[84] Visram's account of ayahs in early-twentieth-century London places them in a passive role as receivers of Christian charity when they are abandoned by their [white oppressor] employers, despite admitting that 'it is difficult to assess the scale of the problem [of abandoned ayahs]'.[85] This has not stopped wide speculation about their poor treatment and victim status, however.[86] The positioning of migrating woman as vulnerable is explored from a spatial perspective by Bieri and Gerodetti, who argue that purity organisations operating at major stations were 'part of a European network of support, control and surveillance', centred on 'defenceless' lone women.[87]

**Domestic service as assimilation**

In her examination of nineteenth-century women in Chicago who lived away from their place of work, Meyerowitz attempts to understand how they sustained themselves outside the homes of family, relatives and employers. Significantly, she found that 'women who were afraid of the city chose to become live-in domestics' and it was only once they 'felt more comfortable in the city' that they joined the ranks of women adrift, living and working independently of their employer(s).[88] She claims that the poorly-viewed conditions repelled many wage-earning women but high demand for servants led some 'to accept such positions when they could find no others'.[89] This implies a connection between migration and independence via domestic service, placing subservient and restrictive service work at the bottom of the occupational pile, ideally to be avoided. However, much of her rhetoric appears to be based on reform literature which was designed to position and problematize servants as unlegislated and therefore exploited and vulnerable. The fact that many of them were not, was not in the interests of the campaigners. Yet she is not alone in seeing domestic

[83] E. W. Sager, 'The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871-1931', *Social Science History*, 31/4 (2007), p. 510.
[84] Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, p. 170.
[85] Visram, *Asians in Britain*, p. 51.
[86] See for example the British Library account, Our Migration History project entry (http://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/a-home-for-the-ayahs- (Jul 2016) in which evidence from the missionary magazine is unproblematically reproduced as fact.
[87] S. Bieri and N. Gerodetti, '"Falling women'–'Saving Angels"': Spaces of Contested Mobility and the Production of Gender and Sexualities within Early Twentieth-Century Train Stations', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8/2 (2007), p. 230.
[88] Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930*, p. 24.
[89] Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, p. 28.

service for newly-arrived immigrants to North America not as a preferred choice but as an economic necessity, acting as a temporary bridging mechanism prior to full assimilation/acculturation into the host society. Sager sees how 'domestic service was an obvious path of entry into Canada and its labor markets',[90] and Harzig and Hoerder claim that for newly-arrived single women in America, 'domestic labour provided an entry space' since local girls did not want the work.[91]

**Domestic service and urbanisation**

Others see service as an essential process of urbanisation, 'a traditionally important channel for urban migration and assimilation',[92] and a necessary but temporary process to transform rural migrants into urban citizens. In her research on French and British domestic service, McBride draws scholarly attention to the 'marked venturesomeness of the female servant' migrating to cities, and thus 'the contribution of service to the formation of modern urban populations'.[93] In her history of pan-European domestic service, Moch also subscribes to the theory that domestic service was 'an occupation associated with temporary migration [and] became a means to begin urban life',[94] part of a longer-term conversion of migrants to the culture of the receiving city or country, and their onward independent lives. For all these scholars, then, becoming a servant was a consequence of the economic and social conditions facing migrant women on arrival, with few exploring the level of agency they were able to exert on their circumstances.

**Personal agency in migration and domestic service**

Newer accounts challenging the passivity of the migrant woman and her lack of agency are now emerging. Cross-disciplinary studies in particular have drawn on oral histories and life-course analysis to extract the voices of women involved in migrant journeys. Linda McDowell's work on post-1945 Latvian state-sponsored immigrant women,[95] Bronwen Walter's interviews with Irish domestic servants in London[96] and Chamberlain's with Barbadian women in Britain[97] all expand the rather narrow 'view of migrant women as passive victims of circumstance, economic and

[90] E. W. Sager, 'The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, p. 509.
[91] Harzig and Hoerder, 'Femina Migrans', p. 168.
[92] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 10.
[93] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 9.
[94] L. P. Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, 2003), p. 141.
[95] L. McDowell, *Hard Labour: The Forgotten Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers* (London; Portland Or., 2005).
[96] Walter, *Outsiders Inside*.
[97] Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Narratives of Migration'.

social'.[98] May's study of domestic worker rights in New York is particularly successful at finding a range of ways in which newly-arrived women working as servants connected to other immigrant working-class groups in the city, such that 'domestics suddenly appear[ed] less passive'.[99] Sources written by servants themselves in Delap's work on twentieth century servants 'suggest that service was a positive experience for many working-class women,'[100] and she criticises the historiography for being too assumptive of the way the servants saw their jobs as negative, challenging us to avoid the 'subordinating gaze of sympathy'.[101] And Selina Todd advances arguments that servants should be categorised neither as deferent nor defiant, as in older approaches to servants' limited scope for agency, but more as individuals using service as a temporary coping mechanism: 'for them, it was just a job — a way of getting by, making do, surviving'.[102]

Scholars (often in other disciplines) are also challenging our ideas of formerly marginalised or unappealing occupations, which offer new insights into how service functioned as more than an economic necessity between childhood and marriage. Historian Julia Laite draws parallels between nurses, domestics and prostitutes making active decisions in their work lives, tracing the agency displayed by women in assessing the potential benefits of becoming prostitutes, being 'guided by the promise of easy cash, adventure and change for the better'.[103] Agustín's work on modern-day migrant sex workers offers useful parallels in endowing women migrants with agency. In their testimonies, 'women describe how they make decisions to change their lives by traveling abroad to work, weighing their options, talking with friends and family, taking advantage of opportunities offered, and continuing to exercise judgment along the way.'[104]. The way in which women attempted to shape their own lives, within the restrictive structures that constrained them, inspire new ways to frame service as something less passive than has previously been imagined.

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[98] Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Narratives of Migration'., p. 181.
[99] V. May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill, 2011), p. 4.
[100] S. Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', *Past and Present*, 203/1 (2009), p. 182.
[101] Delap cited in Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 182.
[102] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 198.
[103] J. Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens : Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Basingstoke; New York, 2012), p. 107.
[104] L. Agustín, 'Migrants in the Mistress's House: Other Voices in the "Trafficking" Debate', *Social Politics*, 12/1 (2005), p. 97.

The positioning of service as a last resort is perhaps rooted in the narrative of its perceived disappearance during the early twentieth century, with the recurring theme in the literature on domestic service being one of decline. Many scholars reach back into the late nineteenth century to find the source of its demise, invoking debates around urbanisation and industrialisation, pointing to how 'young working-class women found the occupation oppressive and left when job opportunities increased in factories, shops and offices.'[105] The downward trajectory in the domestic service market is now being challenged by historians of the twentieth century such as Todd and Delap, who reposition it during this period as 'one of development, rather than decline.'[106] Todd argues that although residential service came to an end by the 1950s, '[d]omestic workers remained vital to the economic condition of the working class', by providing 'crucial supplements to industrial workers' wages'.[107] This repositioning of domestic servants as central to ideas of class and socio-economic impact challenges former debates over the decline of domestic service as a choice for women, and re-establishes it as a strategy for both social mobility and economic gain. Placing the agency of servants themselves in the foreground of this research is a way to 'bring female actors into a larger story that has often excluded them'.[108]

## *Recovering personhood*

### New identities

The final set of research questions are embedded both in the individual and indeed to the approach to the research as a whole. The act of migration involves a decision and the dream of the possibility for something new. In stepping outside of their own homes and families, the women who migrated to distant cities and countries sought the potential for a different version of themselves. Agustín encourages us to recognise the '"multiple identities" that change over life-courses composed of different stages, needs and projects,'[109] and in an attempt to understand how domestic service functioned for them in considering the choices made by foreign servants, the thesis explores the lives of the women beyond their (often temporary) roles as servants.

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[105] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 182.
[106] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain' and Delap, *Knowing Their Place*.
[107] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 188.
[108] A. Stanley, 'Maidservants' Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia, 1600-1900', *American Historical Review*, 121/2 (2016), p. 440.
[109] L. Agustín, 'Challenging Place: Leaving Home for Sex', *Development: Local/Global Encounters*, 45/1 (2002), p. 112.

**Alone and isolated?**

Historians are now in agreement that most servant-employing households were not the country estates employing complex hierarchies of staff but were most likely to be more modest homes who rarely hired more than one or two women at a time. The implications of this have been to imagine the maid-of-all-work as an isolated girl, separated both from her employers by way of position, and her peers and social contact by way of her live-in status and restrictive working conditions. Added to this was the emotional impact of being separated from the family home, being unsure of her new city surroundings having come from a rural area, and being unaccustomed to middle-class standards, equipment and behaviour; thus was a timid and overwhelmed adolescent introduced to her life as a domestic.[110] This positioning of newly arrived migrants as victims or vulnerable has its roots in the (now dated) structural context of migration studies, in which (backward, rural, disadvantaged) migrants arrive in (modern, urban, wealthy) cities and little weight is given to network or kin ties which would reduce the traumatic impact of migration to distant destinations. In her assessment of paternalistic relationships between 'master and servant, husband and wife', for example, Davidoff identifies the subordinate party as having 'few other links to the wider society'.[111]

**Local diaspora**

More recent studies, however, focusing on how women were connected to those outside the home, have argued that despite migrating to a new place and living as part of their employer's household, domestic servants were not as isolated or unconnected as some of the literature suggests. According to Vikström, Moch's comparison of urban immigrants and natives in the Languedoc region of France, for example, rejects 'the pessimistic model of urban migration' that recognized migrants as alone, unattached and most susceptible to misfortune when they moved to the cities.[112] In her study of Lancaster households before 1914, Pooley found that geographic or family connections between employer and servant acted as forms of recruitment, mediation, support and comfort.[113] Hatton and Williamson identify evidence of women's contact with local ethnic communities in New York

[110] See Ryan, 'Moving Spaces and Changing Places', p. 75, for oral history accounts of women being made to feel ignorant when unaccustomed to middle-class household appliances.
[111] Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life', p. 407.
[112] Vikström, 'Gendered Routes and Courses: The Socio-Spatial Mobility of Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Sundsvall, Sweden', p. 30.
[113] Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers'.

'to maintain some of their traditions, culture and customs while gradually integrating into American life', and how social networks provided a structure for mutual aid.[114] May's study of immigrant domestics in New York examines local networks for evidence of community belonging, finding examples ranging from dances to mutual aid organisations and religious associations. May claims that in the absence of legislation and unions, young immigrant women created networks beyond their employers' homes, extending into working-class communities and providing them with a support system and the means to bargain for better (or resist poor) working conditions.[115]

**Associational networks**

Nevertheless, many of these studies are based in a context in which newly-arrived women had a sizeable diaspora at their disposal. Access to contact among their conational communities was only possible if the community was of a size and proximity to allow the women regular contact. Even this was no guarantee of support. Despite large numbers of Irish living in London, having no family there 'made their first months in the city very lonely' for some, and many reported not seeing friends for long periods of time as their weekly half-day holidays rarely coincided.[116] Scholars working on migrants (rather than those looking to settle permanently) have looked to extra-curricular activities as a way to understand contact between foreigners in Britain, examining associations for working girls and women, for co-religionists and for those of the same nationality.[117] Bartholomew finds how letter writing between London-based servants and their family and friends back in Wales, 'enabled them to maintain contact with their cultural identity'[118] arguing that 'geographical dispersion did not […] lead to […] social isolation or ghettos';[119] and Ryan's study of the Irish in London found robust contact networks built around attending (Roman Catholic) church.[120] Tabili, however, criticises this dominance in studies of migration of focusing on 'the formation of and reliance on networks of relatives and co-villagers' in migrant networks.

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[114] T. J. Hatton et al., *Migration and the International Labor Market, 1850-1939* (London, 1994), p. 15.
[115] May, *Unprotected Labor*, p. 44.
[116] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', pp. 74-6.
[117] For German associations see Manz, 'Negotiating Ethnicity, Class and Gender'; for working girls' clubs see I. Dove, 'Sisterhood or Surveillance? The Development of Working Girls' Clubs in London 1880-1939', (PhD, University of Greenwich, 1996); for Jewish associational life see J. Spence, 'Working for Jewish Girls: Lily Montagu, Girls' Clubs and Industrial Reform 1890-1914', *Women's History Review*, 13/3 (2004).
[118] Bartholomew, 'Women Migrants in Mind', p. 184.
[119] Bartholomew, 'Women Migrants in Mind', p. 185.
[120] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 78.

Instead, in her own work, she explores 'everyday relations between migrants and natives', and as a result her work 'confounds views of migrants and natives as discrete and bounded populations'.[121]

A range of possible connections have thus been explored by scholars in establishing the level of contact experienced by newly-arrived migrants and the type of connections they made, but none in the context of non-British/Irish women. How did foreign-born, non-native English-speakers or racially-othered women differentially experience or generate extra-domestic ties? How successful were they? And what were the consequences of their ability to reach beyond the home in terms of employment options, working conditions, social contact, political awareness or their subsequent life course?

## Sources

In her own inspiring global and local history study of an early-modern Japanese maidservant, Amy Stanley's source analysis is based on 'excavating, to understand the social and economic landscape within which she pursued her own interests, and surveying, to find similar patterns on a larger scale.'[122] This thesis mirrors her mixed methods approach in order to bring the experiences of migrant women servants working in London into focus. The thesis began with a chance discovery of a servants' home in the census enumerators' books, and the census remains central to providing both macro-level aggregate quantitative data on foreign-born servants in Britain (important in establishing their claim to historical analysis) as well as micro, household detail that has enabled the fine-grained tracing of individuals through both time and space.

### *Quantitative sources*

The thesis makes use of a unique bespoke subset of digitised and transcribed census data derived from the Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM) project.[123] With 100 per cent coverage of decennial

[121] Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, p. 9.
[122] Stanley, 'Maidservants' Tales', p. 441.
[123] The original project, led by Kevin Schürer and Edward Higgs at the University of Essex, is hosted by the UK Data Archive (UKDA). A full description is available on the UKDA website: https://www1.essex.ac.uk/history/research/ICeM/documentation.html and in the project guide at: https://www1.essex.ac.uk/history/research/icem/documents/icem-guide-version-2-2015.pdf, hereafter *I-CeM Guide v.2*. (3 Jul 2017).

censuses of England and Wales for 1851, 1861, and 1881 to 1911, it forms the quantitative basis for the research, the structure and methodology for which is described in detail in Chapter 2. Numbers, naturally, are limited in their ability to explain the research questions relating to otherness, agency and personhood and, in the case of the censuses, at times inconsistent even in the data they capture and publish. Heeding the call by Pooley and Whyte to avoid an overdependence on aggregate, quantitative data, which 'tend to produce an impersonal, dehumanized approach',[124] the thesis is embedded in extensive qualitative sources in order to interrogate and build on the quantitative findings of the census and other survey data.

### *Qualitative sources*

As their work was confined to the privacy of the domestic sphere, accessing accounts of servant experiences has traditionally been perceived as challenging, but as 'aliens' the women became more visible, both in society and in the record.[125] As the state increased its scope into the lives of foreigners after World War I, servants became individually recorded by the state: in police registration files, copy passport files and domestic service permit files. Remarkably little-used in scholarship, the latter are held in a series under LAB 2/2081–2085, and represent a significant body of evidence in exploring the lives of foreign servants in Britain from *c.*1924 to 1938. A detailed analysis of the laws and regulations that governed their movement in and out of Britain throughout the period, along with the records they generated, is featured in Chapter 3.

Archives of organisations established to protect these mobile servants contain rich source material on foreign servant experiences in the form of correspondence, reports, individual cases and investigations. Hostels for women between positions were set up especially for foreigners, their records and reports offering unique glimpses into life outside service. Key collections include those of the National Vigilance Association (hereafter NVA), Homes for Working Girls in London (hereafter HWGL), the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (hereafter JAPGAW) and the London City Mission (hereafter LCM), but, as explored throughout the thesis, these non-state actors operated inter-organisationally and internationally, such that many other purity, charity and religious groups feature throughout the collections.

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[124] Pooley and Whyte, *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants*, p. 4.
[125] Sharpe in particular bemoans the paucity of sources in *Women, Gender, and Labour Migration*, p. xvi.

At the heart of the approach to this research is the search for the holistic individual, not simply in her role as servant, and this is reflected in how the source material was collated. Building a bespoke relational database from scratch, nominal data linkage was used to build pictures (albeit fragmented) of the women's lives, both while in and out of service. It was possible to trace some of these from birth to death; for others, a particularly detailed portrait over a very short period of time was constructed. Nominal data linkage presents its own challenges in terms of identification. Attempting to trace the anglicised names of recently-arrived Russian or Polish Jewish women handwritten in the JAPGAW files was particularly difficult, for example. But since case files include dates and places of birth, and employing triangulation methods where possible, finding the foreign servants became more verifiable.

The database, containing about 560 individually-named foreign servants, over 400 employers, and over a thousand individual work, travel, leisure or life events, allows for evidence-based conclusions on trends such as ages, origins, recruitment methods, geographic dispersal, work and migration patterns. Using genealogical techniques and sources also permitted a deeper understanding of the servant lives before, during and after London service.[126] Adopting this holistic approach to the women's experiences, and recognising that service was, for most, a temporary period in their lives, the thesis follows Agustín, in the 'consideration of all aspects of people's lives and travels', and not simply in identifying them as 'maids' or 'labeled according to what may be a chance or temporary occupation.'[127]

Initially disappointed at a lack of personal sources written by foreign servants of their experiences in London, I was generously gifted access to a suitcase of documents formerly owned by Frieda Ehrenstein, and recently bequeathed to Prof. Esther Leslie of Birkbeck College, University of London. Born in Austria at the end of the nineteenth century, Frieda chronicled her experiences of working as a domestic service after she moved to southeast London in 1931 to live with her brother. She wrote several versions of an (unpublished) short novel in the first person, complete

[126] Most of these are digitised and available on subscription family history sites such as Ancestry.com.
[127] Agustín, 'Migrants in the Mistress's House, p. 113.

with spelling and grammar inaccuracies in line with her level of English.[128] In these she described her life as a domestic in 1930s Britain, revealing long hours and challenging working conditions. She makes no specific reference in her writing to being treated differently as a foreigner, though, in a separate German article, pointed out that her English pronunciation was not that good: '*Vielleicht hat er mich nicht gut verstanden, meine Englisch Aussprache ist nicht sehr gut'*,[129] which will have marked her out to her multiple employers as an outsider. Although she was Jewish, she moved to Britain to be near her brother and therefore did not enter Britain as a refugee. Her papers have been a unique opportunity to understand her hopes and disappointments as a foreign servant in 1930s service and add a very rare personal voice to the thesis research.

As 'others', foreign servants were people of interest. In the nineteenth century they were inherently differentiated from their British-born counterparts by their place of birth and, as the state increased its scope into the lives of aliens after World War I, they became more individually recognisable in the record. Subject to considerable social supervision and surveillance, by their status as lone, young, mobile women, if their perceived victimhood made them subject to protection, then their national origins made them identifiable; a boon to the historian, but of mixed value for the individuals involved.

## Conclusion

Domestic service has been traditionally seen as an occupation entered into reluctantly by girls and women with few other choices, victims of economic inequality or an inevitable lifecycle occupation for working-class women. Yet this narrative of victimhood has been problematic, feeding and perpetuating a dangerous rhetoric of women as overly sensitive, vulnerable creatures, rather than as independent actors and workers; a narrative with a long history and a global reach. New scholarship is emerging now to challenge the victim-led analysis of marginalised groups, though none has successfully addressed the intersectionality of gender, class, race and alien 'other' represented by the foreign female domestic servant employed in London. Throughout the historiography relevant to

[128] She also used the pseudonym "Tony" or "Toni" within her writings.
[129] Frieda Ehrenstein papers, 'Ich Suche Stellung!', unpublished manuscript, p. 69.

each of the three research questions are dichotomic tensions evident: between the rural and the urban, the naïve maid and the sophisticated employer, the victim and the agent, tolerance and hostility, otherness as a form of persecution and difference as positive, imperial core and periphery, individual decision-making and structural push/pull factors, personal strategy and social control, potential new identities and stifling surveillance, physical boundaries between employers and staff, isolation and extended networks and discrete distinctions between the foreign and the native. An analysis of the themes of otherness, agency and personhood will add substantially to each debate and complicate many of these linear polemics to align with scholarship that understands these to be more nuanced debates.

This study engages with literature from social, economic, urban and global history, gender studies, population studies, migration studies, geography, sociology and anthropology, applying a mixed methods approach by drawing on quantitative and qualitative research, oral histories, life-story analysis and source-based historical research. A better understanding of the presence and role of unaccompanied foreign women domestic servants in London will naturally contribute to the growing literature on domestic servants in twentieth-century Britain. More importantly it will add women's accounts to (and disrupt) histories of immigrant communities–dominated as they are by the genderless male–along with informing studies of British attitudes towards gender, class and ethnicity. The fields of urban and women's history will benefit from new insights into how space and gender were navigated in London, and with current interest in modern-day slavery in the global domestic service industry, the research will give context to its history which is so often vague or glossed over in contemporary reports on its origins. Further, the study will add a British historical dimension to research on transnational labour and cultural networks and the sociological and anthropological literature on the feminization of international migration.

Although the census and certain parts of the historiography are dismissive of foreign domestic servants as a tiny proportion of the domestic workforce, their route to Britain as migrant maids offers an entirely new perspective on gendered migration, women's lives, British attitudes towards outsiders, women's use of urban space and the use of an occupational sector in decline by foreigners wishing to pursue their own life goals. Chapter 2 now offers an analysis of the

regulations that permitted and enabled the women to arrive in Britain: the very start of the journey, both for them and for this thesis.

# Chapter 2

## 'Strangers in a Strange Land': tracing foreign female domestic servants

A number of assumptions have been made in the literature, as outlined in Chapter 1, about the presence and status of foreign servants in Britain. Yet these suppositions have been made in the absence of any detailed investigation of either their numerical presence or their experiences of service. In 1983, Edward Higgs claimed that historians have been unable to really understand the domestic service sector, largely because of the limits of the sources. Paradoxically it is *because* of its vast size that the domestic service sector has remained '*terra incognita* for modern historians, who have had to rely on aggregate tables in the census reports, household manuals and anecdotes for their information.'[1] The advent of digitisation and computational analysis has recently transformed the possibilities for study at both the household and the survey level, though, and this chapter makes use of individual and household data drawn from the Integrated Census Microdata project (hereafter I-CeM) to establish the size of the foreign servant population in London, its relationship to other servants and to the households in which they were enumerated.

The original I-CeM project, in partnership with the commercial genealogical records provider Find My Past, transcribed the census enumerators' books and household schedules from digitised census enumerators' books (CEBs) for each of the decennial censuses in England and Wales, from 1851 to 1911, followed by a data enrichment programme executed by the I-CeM project team.[2] Before I-CeM, the time- and resource-intense nature of this detailed work made it impossible to make a comprehensive review of all but the smallest geographical census districts. Yet many years after the project's end, the online platform Nesstar, on which publically accessible I-CeM downloads can be performed, still remains limited in scope.[3] In partnership with the Big Data Network Support (BDNS) team at the UK Data Service using the new Hadoop-based Data Services as a Platform

[1] E. Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History*, 8/2 (1983), p. 202.
[2] Transcriptions were not available for 1871, so this year has been omitted from the data analysis.
[3] There is a maximum record download limit of 1,000 and it is not possible to query combinations of datasets.

(DSaaP), I was able to carry out a number of unique SQL queries to generate bespoke datasets of foreign- and British-born domestic servants for the period 1851–1911.[4] This I-CeM Hadoop query platform has made it possible for the first time to analyse the demographic, socioeconomic and geographic context of servants and the households in which they served, laying a solid quantitative foundation on which to build an understanding of foreign-born domestic servant experiences of migration, recruitment, employment and interactions with others during their sojourn in London.

This chapter combines published census reports and government figures with raw and derived I-CeM data, to form the basis for research into this hitherto entirely unmapped group of women. It will quantify the presence of foreign-born domestics during the period, and will track the arrival of different nationality servants. It aims to recognise ways in which foreign women differed from their British counterparts, both as individuals and in relation to the households in which they resided. And it will attempt to understand the shape of the market and how the women may have found their place within it by profiling the foreign-born cohort according to key demographic, geographic and socioeconomic variables. Section 1 reviews published reports from the General Register Office for England and Wales and Ministry of Labour, mapping and counting foreign servants at aggregate level throughout the period, where data is available. It then moves to focus on London as a site of international and imperial movement and migration, to identify the countries of origin of foreign servants in the capital. Section 2 analyses the detail of the I-CeM data by drawing out correlations and trends to outline the structure of the foreign domestic service market in London during this period. The findings from this analysis inform and shape the approach in subsequent chapters to understanding foreign-born domestic servant experiences of their lives in London.

## Macro view of foreign female servants

### *The census reports*

Although a macro approach offers a useful overview of data for the period, there are naturally some caveats to making more detailed comparisons of census data over time, since these are notoriously difficult to compare from year to year given the changes in categories, their definitions

[4] SQL is a domain-specific language used in programming and designed for managing data held in relational databases.

and indeed individual census 'defects'. In censuses before and after 1891, 'daughters and other female relatives of the Head of a Family, who were described as assisting in household duties, were classified among the unoccupied';[5] in 1891, however, they were listed as 'domestic indoor servants' and thus over-counted in the reports. In 1871, only servants aged over 20 years old made it to the aggregate figures; and in the 1921 and 1931 censuses, enumerators grouped servants engaged both in commercial establishments and private residences under one occupational class, so figures for the entire category of indoor servants in those two years are inflated.[6] Changes in political borders create some challenges. In 1911, for example, Poland had ceased to be an independent territory although census respondents still differentiated (sometimes in the same household) between being born in Russia, Russian Poland, Austrian Poland and Prussian Poland. Some groups of foreign servants were not physically in the country at the time of the censuses, which were always held in late March/early April with the headcount taken in the evenings. The superintendent's testimony to the Committee of Distressed Colonial and Indian Subjects in 1910 stated that the Indian ayahs and Chinese amahs ('native' children's nurses) passing through the doors of the Ayah's Home in Hackney numbered around 90, or about 10 per month of the season.[7] However, the annual travelling season had only just started by the time of the census, so that most of the Asian domestic servants in these roles were never enumerated. In order to account for such differences, the countries have been grouped into regions (see Table 1).

[5] *Parliamentary Papers* (1904), 1901 Census of England and Wales. General Report with Appendices, Cm 2174, pp. 76–7.
[6] In previous censuses, the category of lodging/hotel service accounted for an additional 8%–15% on top of indoor servant numbers. *Parl. Pap.* (1913) Cm 7017, Census of England and Wales 1911. Vol. IX. Birthplaces. Table XVIII - Occupations of foreigners, 1901 and 1911, pp. xxii-xxiii.
[7] *Parl. Pap.* (1910), Cm 5134, Distressed colonial and Indian subjects. Committee on Distressed Colonial and Indian Subjects. Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, pp. 72–4.

| Region | Countries | Observations | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Asia** | China, Hong Kong, India,[8] Java (Indonesia), Japan, Korea, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), Malaya (Malaysia), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand | 1332 | 5 |
| **Austro-Hungary** | Austria, Hungary | 440 | 12 |
| **Benelux** | Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands | 956 | 10 |
| **British Dominions** | Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa | 1136 | 7 |
| **Eastern Europe** | Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Yugoslavia | 1154 | 6 |
| **France** | France | 3876 | 2 |
| **Germany** | Germany | 6959 | 1 |
| **Rest of World (ROW)** | Including those born at sea, Gibraltar, South America, Jamaica and islands of the Caribbean and West Africa[9] | 1451 | 4 |
| **Scandinavia** | Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden | 990 | 9 |
| **Southern Europe** | Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Italy, Monaco, Malta, Portugal, Turkey | 1001 | 8 |
| **Switzerland** | Switzerland | 1844 | 3 |
| **USA** | USA | 497 | 11 |

**Table 1: Regional categories showing constituent countries, total observations and size ranking**

From 1851, each census aimed to capture a person's place of birth, whether in the UK or outside, but it was not until 1911 that a person's nationality was recorded. Since this thesis is attempting to understand foreignness as a differentiator, their nationality is less important than their experience as an outsider to Britain. In all discussions of this throughout the chapter, it is country of birth which will be described rather than nationality, though of course these are not mutually exclusive. Significantly, for most of the period, Ireland still formed part of the British state and emigrants from Ireland were therefore officially classified at 'not foreign'. For context, Irish women comprised 2.7 per cent of British domestic servants in 1881 (compared to 0.46% for foreign servants) and around 4 per cent of indoor domestic servants in the interwar period (compared to just over 0.7% for foreign women).[10] While the literature on Irish women working as servants in the UK is woven into the thesis by way of comparison, because their migration occurred within the same nation-state and within labour markets that were highly integrated, the Irish are treated as

[8] See 'Defining categories' for a full discussion of the treatment of Indians in the census returns.
[9] As those born in South America were sometimes grouped in the census under South America, and at other times separated out into individual countries, this category was particular difficult to compare over time. The largest contingent in the Rest of World (ROW) group, though, were those born at sea (344) and by removing these, the ROW population would be smaller than that of the British Dominions category.
[10] L. Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 11.

internal migrants, as recommended by Baines.[11] Irish women do not, therefore, form part of the foreign servant cohort in this study.

## *A tiny minority?*

Although foreign servants have been portrayed in the literature as a 'tiny exotic minority',[12] this is in relation to the vast numbers of domestic servants in Britain during this period. Table 2 shows the proportion of foreign-born women relative to the total domestic servant population over the research period. Against more than a million servants throughout England and Wales, the percentage foreign population does indeed look small. In no way insubstantial, though, the actual numbers of foreigners, by way of occupational comparison, were akin to those of pawnbrokers or those in the painter/artist/sculptor category, according to the decennial censuses.[13]

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | 1921 | 1931 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Female indoor servants** | 1,230,406 | 1,386,167 | 1,285,072 | 1,271,990 | 1,148,698 | 1,332,224* |
| **Of which foreign** | 5,616 | 7,912 | 12,516 | 12,158 | 7,319 | 9,505* |
| **% foreign** | 0.46 | 0.57 | 0.97 | 0.96 | 0.64 | 0.71 |

**Table 2: Total number of female domestic indoor servants enumerated in the 1881–1931 England and Wales censuses and foreign proportions thereof.[14]**

***includes those occupied in hotels and boarding houses**

Figure 1 traces the upward trend in foreign-born servants against the population of England and Wales as a whole, and against the relatively flat trajectory in British servant numbers during the period.

[11] Baines, 'European Labor Markets', pp. 36-7.
[12] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 35.
[13] *Parl. Pap.* (1917-8), Cm 8491, Census of England and Wales. 1911. General Report, Appendices, p. 144.
[14] British servant numbers are taken from M. Woollard, 'The Classification of Domestic Servants in England and Wales, 1851-1951', *Proceedings of the Servant Project*, 2/June (1999), pp. 13-20; foreign servant numbers as per the census records.

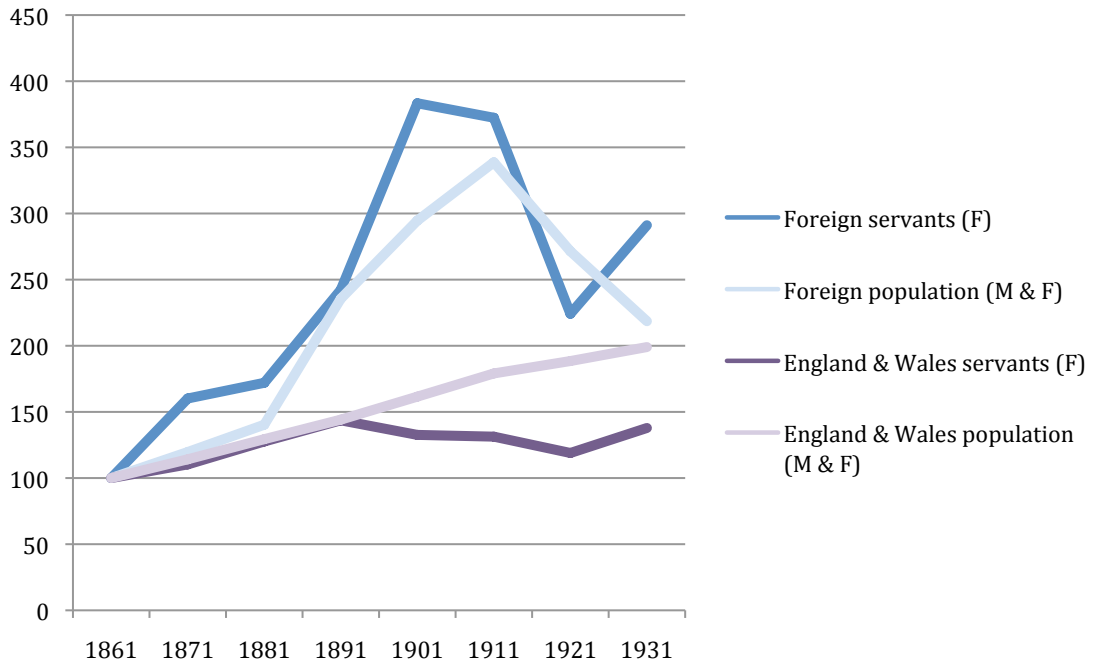



**Figure 1: Index of change in size of the British and foreign population of England & Wales and British-born and foreign-born servants since 1861**

The sharp increases in growth from 1881 until the close of the century are followed by a stabilisation in foreign servant numbers pre-war, a drop post-war then a recovery by the start of the 1930s, as to be expected. The late-nineteenth century increases reflect, for many European nations, triggers for movement based on agricultural depression, mechanisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and, for some, persecution. However, over the same period, the foreign population in Britain as a whole grows and falls at a less dynamic rate, suggesting that servants may not have been drawn from the settled foreign population. Within the British servant population, the reverse is true: numbers go into decline from 1891 while the national population continues to grow. When taking into account the increase in living standards for all but the poorest in society and an expansion of the middle classes, this shows perhaps most graphically the root of the 'servant problem' that plagued polite society for decades: there were just not enough servants to go around.

By the end of World War I, certain nationalities were reduced to much smaller proportions, but it was not just the war that disrupted the upward trajectory after 1911: foreign women travelling to the UK for work were, from 1919, much more restricted by new state regulations than the earlier migrants (see Chapter 3 for a full discussion of these new rules). With servant numbers failing to recover during the 1920s, government policies were designed to enable the import of female

foreign labour into domestic work via a system of individual permits. The domestic service permits (DSPs) explicitly connected women to private domestic work. Men were not entitled to apply, though, by contrast, permits for employees of hotels or restaurants were only ever issued to male foreigners.[15] Job sectors for which permits were available to foreigners were added and removed from the permitted list throughout the period according to labour demands. Figure 2, featuring the categories and numbers of permits issued in 1925 and (by way of comparison) 1931, shows that the domestic service category remained top of the list throughout the period.

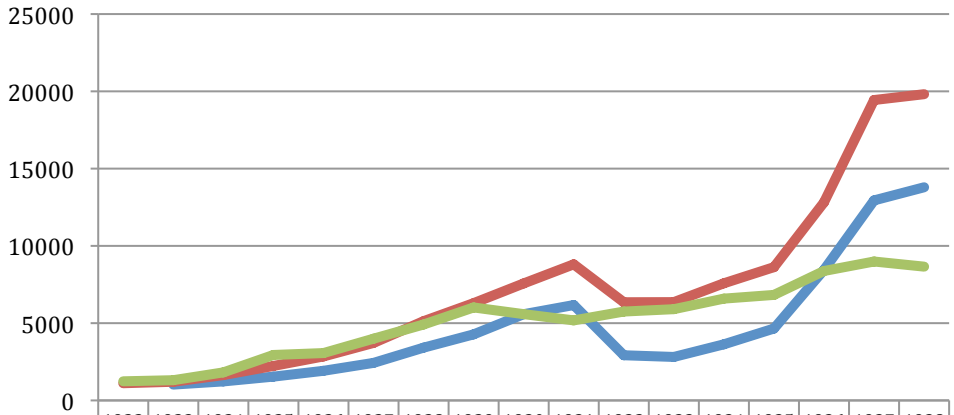
| *Classes of Labour.* | *Granted.* |
|---|---|
| Domestic Servants and Nurses ... ... ... | 1,917 |
| Musicians, Theatrical, Vaudeville and Concert Artistes ... ... ... ... ... ... | 1,771 |
| Foreign Correspondence Clerks and Volunteer Commercial Students ... ... ... ... | 606 |
| Engineers to erect and repair imported machinery ... ... ... ... ... | 218 |
| Beet Sugar Industry (machinery erectors and specialised operatives) ... ... ... | 173 |
| Hotel and Restaurant employees ... ... | 133 |
| Teachers of Foreign Languages ... ... | 338 |
| Miscellaneous ... ... ... ... ... | 384 |
| Total ... | 5,540 |

| *Classes of Labour* | *Granted* |
|---|---|
| Domestic servants &c. ... ... ... ... | 6,172 |
| Theatrical, variety, circus, cabaret and concert artists and musicians ... ... ... | 2,675 |
| Foreign correspondents, clerks and volunteer commercial students ... ... ... | 756 |
| Teachers of foreign languages ... ... | 563 |
| Engineers, machinery erectors, &c. ... ... | 238 |
| Hotel and restaurant employees ... ... | 366 |
| Miscellaneous ... ... ... ... ... | 974 |
| Total ... | 11,744 |

**Figure 2: Ministry of Labour work permits issued to foreigners by occupational category, 1926 (L) and 1931 (R)[16]**

These immigrant workers became, as a result, more visible and subject to official scrutiny, but their presence also allowed for more precise numbers to be published. The Ministry of Labour reported that permits issued to domestic servants rose from 1,025 in 1923 and had more than doubled to 6,172 per year by 1931 (Figure 3). Although Kushner estimates the number of women fleeing Nazi oppression in Europe to be 7,000,[17] the figures shown in Figure 3 'do not include persons admitted to the United Kingdom by the Home Office as refugees […] employed as domestic servants in private households'.[18] Combined with Ministry figures of arrivals of those women holding permits (though not necessarily DSPs) the trend is clear: women were moving to Britain in vastly increased numbers compared to the pre-War period, and is indicative of a renewed increase in the proportion of foreign women in the British domestic service sector.

[15] *House of Commons (HC) Debates, 5s., 296,* (1934), 12 Dec 1934, cols. 395-6.
[16] *Parl. Pap.* (1927), Cm 2856, Report of the Ministry of Labour for the Year 1926, p. 31; *Parl. Pap.* (1932) Cm 4044, Report of the Ministry of Labour for the Year 1931, p. 50.
[17] T. Kushner, 'Asylum or Servitude? Refugee Domestics in Britain, 1933-1945', *Bulletin -- Society for the Study of Labour History*, 53/3 (1988), p. 20.
[18] *Parl. Pap.* (1939), Cm 6016, Report of the Ministry of Labour for the Year 1938, p. 24.




| | 1922 | 1923 | 1924 | 1925 | 1926 | 1927 | 1928 | 1929 | 1930 | 1931 | 1932 | 1933 | 1934 | 1935 | 1936 | 1937 | 1938 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DSPs issued | | 1,025 | 1,230 | 1,540 | 1,917 | 2,429 | 3,415 | 4,275 | 5,581 | 6,172 | 2,923 | 2,814 | 3,631 | 4,651 | 8,449 | 12,94 | 13,79 |
| Arrivals (female) | 1,113 | 1,207 | 1,640 | 2,231 | 2,846 | 3,721 | 5,129 | 6,295 | 7,571 | 8,808 | 6,354 | 6,362 | 7,580 | 8,624 | 12,81 | 19,43 | 19,81 |
| Arrivals (male) | 1,238 | 1,310 | 1,815 | 2,942 | 3,065 | 3,995 | 4,913 | 6,017 | 5,584 | 5,180 | 5,751 | 5,905 | 6,588 | 6,828 | 8,376 | 8,989 | 8,657 |

**Figure 3: Number of domestic service permits issued and permit-holder arrivals into Britain (M/F) 1922-38.**[19]

Combining figures from both the census reports (1851-1931) and the permits (as reported by the Minister in the House of Commons for 1934 and 1938, and in the absence of data from the 1931 report) and grouping them by geographic region, Table 3 shows the reported number of foreign servants over the period.[20]

| | 1861 | 1871 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 | 1921 | 1934 | 1938 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Asia** | | | | | 27 | 36 | 92 | 50 | 1 |
| **Austro-Hungary** | 31 | 51 | 72 | 130 | 242 | 423 | 66 | 1,063 | 7,794 |
| **Benelux** | 272 | 152 | 284 | 347 | 539 | 582 | 894 | 470 | 209 |
| **Eastern Europe** | 45 | 124 | 149 | 437 | 809 | 564 | 648 | 609 | 557 |
| **France** | 906 | 1,666 | 1,233 | 1,746 | 2,435 | 2,569 | 2,117 | 960 | 133 |
| **Germany** | 1,479 | 2,162 | 2,553 | 3,312 | 4,432 | 3,476 | 540 | 2,747 | 1,270 |
| **ROW** | | | | | 12 | 27 | 26 | 180 | 20 |
| **Scandinavia** | 55 | 126 | 291 | 512 | 998 | 1,483 | 727 | 964 | 1,161 |
| **Southern Europe** | 122 | 241 | 227 | 281 | 643 | 827 | 831 | 497 | 213 |
| **Switzerland** | 355 | 707 | 807 | 1,147 | 1,701 | 1,722 | 941 | 961 | 2,210 |
| **USA** | | | | | 678 | 449 | 437 | 975 | 8 |
| **Totals** | 3,265 | 5,229 | 5,616 | 7,912 | 12,516 | 12,158 | 7,319 | 9,476 | 13,576 |

**Table 3: Amalgamated foreign domestic servant figures 1851-1938**

[19] Report of the Ministry of Labour for the Years 1924-38; Aliens Restriction Acts, 1914 and 1919. Aliens Order, 1920. Statistics in regard to alien passengers who entered and left the United Kingdom in 1921-38.
[20] *HC Deb., 5s., 293,* (1934), 1 Nov 1934, cols. 324-5; *HC Deb., 5s., 335,* (1938), 9 May 1938, col. 1251.

## *Hidden multitudes*

Census reports offer a useful snapshot to gauge the size of a group on a given day (rather, evening), but when that group is so mobile, these numbers fail to account for those foreign servants who moved to and from Britain between the decennial censuses. The government did not count foreign servants in and out of the country, so we are reliant on other evidence to estimate their turnover. In the 1880s, it was reported that the average stay in England of foreign women connected to one of the foreign hostels was two to five years.[21] In the interwar period, most foreign women left British service within two years of arriving, according to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour: those 'remaining here under permit for more than two years is negligible'.[22] In 1937, this sentiment was repeated by the Home Secretary: 'a large proportion, if not the majority, of foreign domestics leave the country within two or three years of their arrival.'[23] Similarly, German servants who moved to the Netherlands for domestic work in the interwar period also stayed around two years before they left the country or the sector.[24] On the basis that most servants left service or Britain (or both) after two years, and using figures from both the census reports and government-reported numbers of domestic permits issued, it has been possible to estimate the number of individual foreign-born women to have experienced service in Britain between 1881 and 1939.

The calculation naturally comes with a number of caveats. Firstly, intra-censal fluctuations in arrivals have not been taken into account.[25] Any omissions of such fluctuations are mitigated (socioeconomic conditions in the sending countries notwithstanding) over the relatively long fifty-year time period of the exercise. Secondly, it is impossible to accurately calculate what proportion of women left service after two years, so estimates have been made based on half, three-quarters and all of them. Thirdly, the outbreak of World War I saw the repatriation of most foreign servants (if not all enemy aliens) which is not accounted for in the incremental annual decreases between 1911 and 1921. Nevertheless, by using a rough calculation, the number of newly arrived women for

[21] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1890*, p. 194.
[22] *HC Deb., 5s., 283,* (1933), 30 Nov 1933, col. 1026.
[23] *HC Deb., 5s., 322,* (1937), 19 Apr 1937, col. 1432.
[24] B. Henkes, *Heimat in Holland: Deutsche Dienstmädchen 1920-1950* (Niedesthein, 1989), p. 48, quoted in C. Harzig, 'Domestics of the World (Unite?): Labor Migration Systems and Personal Trajectories of Household Workers in Historical and Global Perspective', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 25/2 (2006), p. 55; B. Henkes, 'Maids on the Move. Images of Femininity and European Women's Labour Migration during the Interwar Years.', in Sharpe, *Women, Gender, and Labour Migration*, p. 224.
[25] For example, in 1891 there were 2,296 more foreign servants enumerated than in 1881. To reach an annual figure for the intervening years, I have simply added 10% of 2,296 to each year: the figure for 1884 would therefore be calculated as having 230 x 3 (1882, 1883 and 1884) more servants than in the 1881 census.

every ten year period has been estimated, based on extrapolated population figures for the years in between each census. Since permit numbers were published covering the interwar period, new arrivals of foreign women for 1921–1938 can more reliably be estimated; combined, these are built into Table 4.

| | | New foreign women entering British domestic service | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Published census figures | 50% leave every 2 years | 75% leave every 2 years | 100% leave every 2 years | DSPs issued to women | % Turnover |
| 1881 | **5,616** | 5,616 | 5,616 | 5,616 | - | - |
| 1891 | **7,912** | 17,197 | 25,796 | 34,394 | - | 40%* |
| 1901 | **12,516** | 28,026 | 42,039 | 56,052 | - | 53%* |
| 1911 | **12,158** | 33,633 | 50,449 | 67,265 | - | 40%* |
| 1921 | **7,319** | 24,779 | 37,168 | 49,557 | - | 31%* |
| 1922 | - | | | - | **1,113**** | 15% |
| 1923 | - | | | - | **1,025** | 13% |
| 1924 | - | | | - | **1,230** | 15% |
| 1925 | - | | | - | **2,461** | 30% |
| 1926 | - | | | - | **1,917** | 23% |
| 1927 | - | | | - | **2,804** | 32% |
| 1928 | - | | | - | **4,580** | 52% |
| 1929 | - | | | - | **5,522** | 61% |
| 1930 | - | | | - | **6,647** | 72% |
| 1931 | **9,505** | *21,303* | *31,955* | *42,607* | **7,267** | 76% |
| 1932 | - | | | - | **3,723** | - |
| 1933 | - | | | - | **4,169** | - |
| 1934 | - | | | - | **4,376** | - |
| 1935 | - | | | - | **5,406** | - |
| 1936 | - | | | - | **9,393** | - |
| 1937 | - | | | - | **13,344** | - |
| 1938 | - | | | - | **14,080** | - |
| **Total** | | 197,194 | 249,011 | 300,828 | 89,057 | |

**Table 4: Estimated numbers of female foreign-born domestic servants in England & Wales 1881-1938**

* Based on 75% leaving every 2 years. **total number of permits issued (domestic or otherwise) to women. Published figures in **bold**. *Italicised* new foreign women figures for 1931 are for indicative purposes only, and excluded from the totals, since the permit figures are more accurate. Census figures taken from: . Permit figures taken from MoL Annual Reports 1921-38.

Simply adding together the decennial census figures for the period fails to offer a realistic assessment of how many foreign women experienced service, given how mobile they were in and out of the sector. The calculations, made on the basis that most servants left after two years, suggests that somewhere between 197,000 and 300,000 foreign women experienced service during this period. Since mobility and short-term employment was so engrained in the occupation, it is clear that most domestic servants from abroad are unaccounted for in the decennial censuses.

Most foreign occupational categories captured in the censuses and written about in the literature tend to be of those of a settled male immigrant community. Butchers or bakers, for example, would have needed to rent and establish premises, and were unlikely to do so for short sojourns of just a few years.[26] As a result their population numbers from one census to the next are likely to be more stable than those of the servants. This exercise has shown that the number of foreign female servants to have entered (and left) the British labour force utterly dwarves that of male foreign workers, and is further evidence of the marginalisation of women (as workers or as migrants) in scholarship.[27] Despite the census masking their cumulative numbers, the size of their occupational group in the censuses was not insignificant: in every census year from 1861 to 1931 they represented the most numerous group of female workers, both as a whole and within individual nationalities. As outlined in Chapter 1, service remained the most common occupation among employed foreign women, as it was for the British.

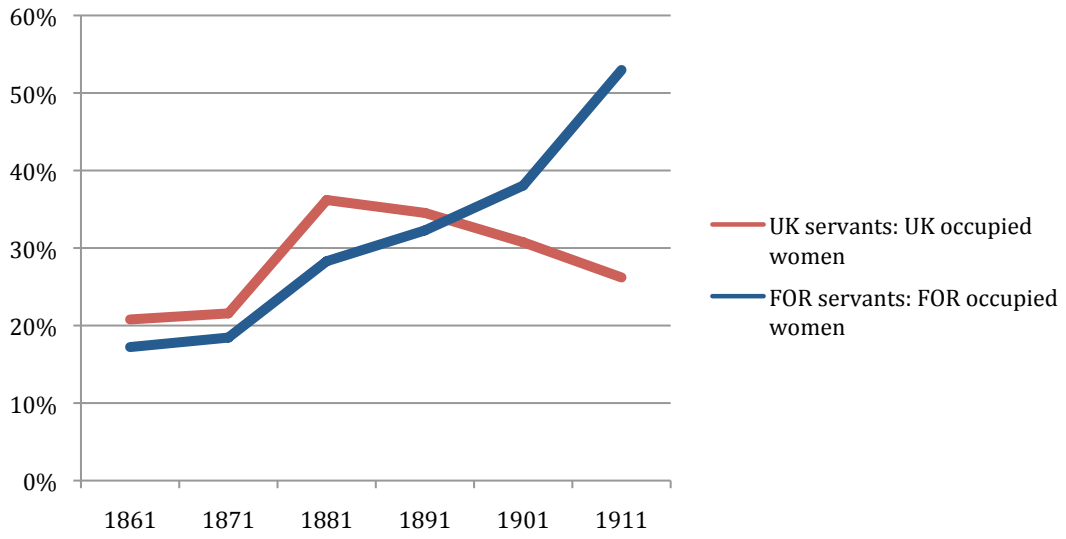



**Figure 4: Foreign-born and UK-born domestic indoor servants as proportions of occupied women over time (England & Wales)**

Figure 4 shows that the proportion both of British and foreign women working as servants increases in line with each other from 1861 to 1881, but thereafter they diverge significantly. At this

[26] P. Panayi, 'Germans in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History Today*, 43 (1993), 48–53.
[27] Excluding sailors in British ports, the largest occupational group of men in 1901 were tailors, totalling 19,856; the next largest groups were the 5,195 clerks and 4,600 cabinet makers. Source: *Parl. Pap.* (1913) Cm 7017, pp. xxii-xxiii.

point, British servants represent a decreasing proportion of occupied females in England and Wales, and foreign women represent an ever-increasing proportion of occupied foreign women in England and Wales. After 1891, servants come for the first time to represent higher proportions of foreign working women (38%) than their UK counterparts (31%), suggesting decreased barriers to market entry as British women shunned service in favour of other less restrictive occupations.[28]

In reality, foreign women from 1881 until the end of the 1930s represented a much larger body of domestic workers in England and Wales than has previously been acknowledged, their size having been masked by decennial census figures failing to account for their high turnover. Service was the most important employment sector for women of all nationalities and the numbers experiencing life in Britain are likely to have surpassed those of their male counterparts, making the study of their experiences even more overdue.

### *Narrowing the focus*

It was not until 1901 that the growing numbers of foreign servants in London, as opposed to nationally, warranted separate tables in the census reports, itself showing the political increase in interest being shown towards foreigners at this time (see Chapter 3). At the start of the new century, 5,676 foreign women were enumerated in London households from more than 70 countries across the world. Certain groups were more likely to be living in London than elsewhere in the country: those born in Poland, Russia and the states of Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria were more likely to be clustered in London than outside, whereas those born in China, Portugal and Norway were more often to be found outside London than in the capital itself (Figure 5). Nevertheless, all nationalities of foreign domestic servants were represented in the capital making it a key site for exploring the diversity of these women's experiences. While foreign servants made up less than one per cent of all servants across England and Wales in each census year, they represented 2.32 per cent of all London servants in 1901 and 2.97 per cent in 1911, a significant increase in the proportional representation of foreign domestics between province and capital.

[28] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 184.

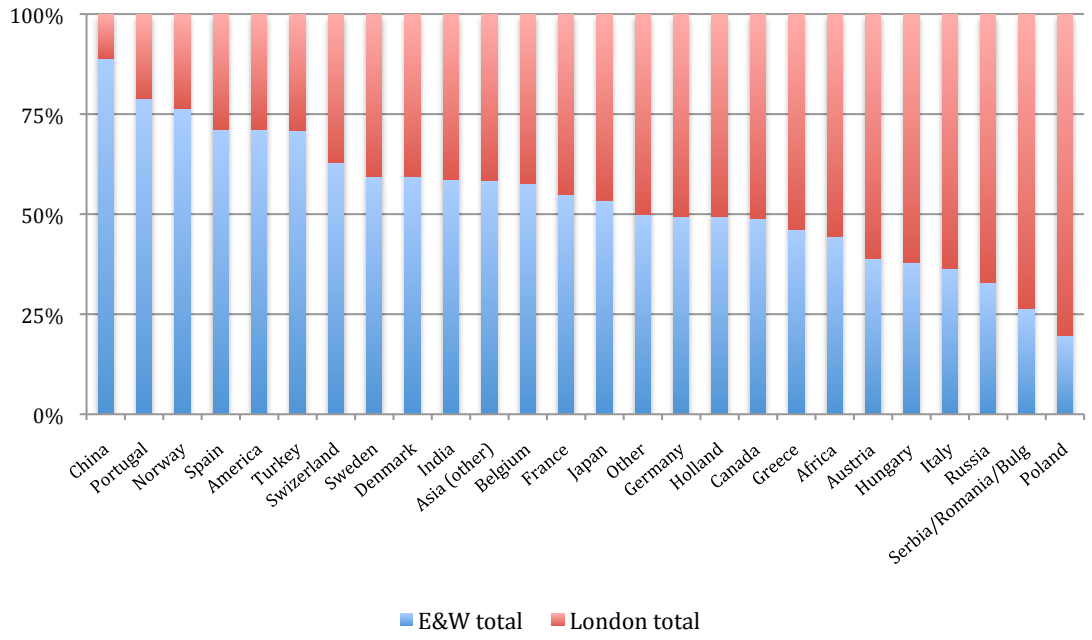



**Figure 5: Proportion of foreign-born servant places of birth enumerated in London and the rest of England & Wales, 1911**

Section 1 has offered a broad overview of the presence in England, Wales and London of foreign-born female domestic servants in the period 1851 to 1939, based on published census reports. It has shown how a significant shift from 1881, in both their numerical presence and in their proportional representation of occupied women compared to that of their British counterparts, offers a useful starting point for analysis and has identified London as a rich and informative focus for this thesis. It has suggested that the short-term nature of domestic servant employment meant that decennial censuses failed to capture all those who came to Britain to work as servants, and their numbers are consequently much higher than previously thought. Further, foreign women engaged in domestic service constituted the largest group of occupied women from each country of origin and far outnumber immigrant occupational groups dominated by their male counterparts.

## Micro view of foreign servants and their households

### *Building the I-CeM datasets*

The chapter now turns to capturing interactions between the servants and the households they served using the I-CeM census data. This offers a starting point for understanding servant

motivations for migration to London, recruitment strategies and employer attitudes and preferences for foreign servants during this period. Historians have long recognised the paucity of sources in studying the lives of domestic servants in the UK, and using aggregate census data to reconstruct characteristics is fraught with difficulties, some of which have already been outlined in Section 1. Until recently, alternatives to aggregate data analysis involved either narrowing a search to a more manageable size at a local or micro-study level, thus losing generalizability, or heavily sampling from a larger population, which requires extraordinary amounts of time. Even Higgs' detailed work in the 1980s was only able to realistically process a dataset consisting of one in four households in Rochdale over three census years, thus losing the long view and indeed a comprehensive local context.[29] Nevertheless, the advent of digitisation and using data from the census at a household level, rather than aggregates, offer much more fine-grained opportunities for detailed analysis and avoid the restrictions of small-scale sampling.

**Defining categories**

Foreign-born female indoor domestic servants in the census were taken to mean those whose birthplaces were given as being outside the British Isles (where the British Isles includes Ireland), whose relationship to the household head is given as servant *and* whose occupational class was coded as indoor domestic servant. Many servants were born in India and other colonies who were British daughters of colonial civil servants or settlers. The enumerators (in all years but 1891) attempted to make a distinction between those of British parentage (proxy for white) and those who were British subjects (Anglo-Indians[30] or indigenous people). They approached this problem by requiring those born abroad to specify their relationship to the British nationality (e.g. British by parentage). If this was not made clear, the census report compilers allocated all those foreign born with 'distinctly British surnames […] as British subjects';[31] by implication, those with foreign-sounding surnames were deemed to be foreigners. In 1911, the exercise was repeated: 'the natives of India and Ceylon of Asiatic origin have, as far as possible, been tabulated separately from those of European parentage'.[32] Since the I-CeM data is anonymised, it has not been possible to follow the same methodology for this exercise. However, in the case of servants, particularly those from the colonies, this approach is particularly problematic as many were given 'new' names by their

[29] Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', p. 205.
[30] This term is used in this thesis in the sense of mixed race, rather than the British in India.
[31] *Parl. Pap.* (1904), Cm 2174, p. 139.
[32] *Parl. Pap.* (1917-8), Cm 8491, p. 216.

employers to make them easier to pronounce (e.g. Elsie Hamey is a native ayah in 1911; Marian (no surname) is listed in 1891). As a result, the Indian servant population is over-represented in the I-CeM sample and necessarily includes white, Anglo-Indian and indigenous servants. The numbers are relatively small, however, and do not pose a risk of excessive distortion.

**Data selection, cleaning and enrichment**

While the publically available data held at the UKDA is downloadable, it is not able to be manipulated with any sophistication. Instead, I was able to work with the UKDA data team at the University of Essex to test a new SQL Hadoop query platform which would offer the flexibility needed to query the census data for the purposes of this thesis. The team wrote a series of code that would return only those data lines which featured non-UK women who were enumerated as having a servant relationship to the head of household, then these were cross-tabulated with the other members of the household to generate complex relational data for each decennial census year. It was possible to generate very specific data relevant to this study using 41 variables from a total of 118. The data was pre-filtered to exclude households that were not private (e.g. hospitals, lodging houses, hotels, asylums etc.) and which fell into one of the 28 metropolitan boroughs (established by the London Government Act 1899) and the City of London. Table 5 lists the variables featured in the dataset.

| *Household* | *Servant* |
|---|---|
| Parish | Country of birth: any country other than England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, 'at sea' and 'unknown' |
| Head's country of birth | Age |
| Head's age | Marital status |
| Head's marital status | Occupational title |
| Head's occupation (including HISCO code) | Occupational code |
| Gender split of household (including head's gender) | |
| Number of householders | |
| Number of servants | |
| Number of female servants | |
| Number of foreign householders (and their position in the household) | |
| Number of householders whose nationality matches that of the servant (and their position in the household) | |
| Number of female householders whose nationality matches that of the servant (and their position in the family) | |

**Table 5: Raw and enriched I-CeM data variables relating to the foreign servant dataset**

The total observations for this dataset for the six census years was 21,636. A separate dataset was returned capturing much of the above data for UK-born servants for comparative purposes. The datasets relating to British servants was significantly larger than that for the foreign women: total observations for the six years amounted to 917,808.

| *Household* | *Servant* |
|---|---|
| Parish | Place of birth: not foreign, i.e. England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, 'at sea' and 'unknown' |
| Head's country of birth | Age |
| Head's age | Marital status |
| Head's marital status | Occupational title |
| Head's occupation (including HISCO code) | Occupational code |
| Gender split of household (including head's gender) | |
| Number of householders | |
| Number of servants | |
| Number of female servants | |

**Table 6: Raw and enriched data variables relating to the UK servant dataset**

In order to make the data comparable over the various census returns and to the British-born servant data, a data-cleaning exercise was carried out. The datasets are transcriptions of the original census enumerators' books (and household schedules in the case of the 1911 data) where the data has been filtered several times (e.g. via census enumerators, compilation of CEBs, Find My Past/brightsolid transcriptions). Correcting typing or interpretation inaccuracies as well as tabulation issues relating to the use of .csv files in Excel were resolved manually. Individuals with ages given as over 100, for example, were edited such that they remained in the dataset but their ages were defined as unstated. Fields derived from the raw data, such as geographical zones containing countries of birth or calculations identifying households where different members shared the same country of birth as their servant(s), were subsequently generated and a further enrichment process was applied by defining both the socioeconomic status of households based on the head's occupational category (described in detail later in the chapter under Household profiles) and identifying hierarchical job roles within the indoor servant category. These were identified by performing a lookup search in Excel to find all instances of servants whose occupations were recorded in the occupation column, according to whether they worked as a housemaid,

parlourmaid, children's nurse, lady's maid, cook, housekeeper or kitchen maid. Not all individual servants had a job title, so these were excluded from the exercise sample, but the remainder have been used to understand servant hierarchies by analysing a number of servant and household variables (see Occupational composition section below).

**Data coverage**

Once all the above pre-selections, filters and data cleaning had been carried out, Table 7 shows the number of records for each census year and servant group along with the total reported in the contemporary published census reports. Despite having access to such a rich body of data, each dataset still represents a sample, albeit a large one, with an average coverage of the 1901-11 datasets of 78% of all enumerated foreign servants.[33]

| | 1851 | 1861 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | | 1911 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Sample size* | *Sample size* | *Sample size* | *Sample size* | *Sample size* | *% of total* | *Sample size* | *% of total* |
| **Asia (including India)** | 44 | 61 | 229 | 356 | 362 | - | 280 | - |
| **Austro-Hungary** | 4 | 11 | 39 | 64 | 155 | *84%* | 167 | *72%* |
| **Benelux** | 79 | 132 | 173 | 149 | 227 | *81%* | 196 | *82%* |
| **British Dominions** | 52 | 69 | 268 | 228 | 277 | - | 242 | - |
| **Eastern Europe** | 19 | 43 | 69 | 224 | 483 | *85%* | 316 | *83%* |
| **France** | 321 | 341 | 786 | 706 | 968 | *83%* | 754 | *72%* |
| **Germany** | 193 | 543 | 1,559 | 1,558 | 1,790 | *84%* | 1,316 | *84%* |
| **Rest of World** | 186 | 164 | 262 | 316 | 304 | - | 219 | - |
| **Scandinavia** | 8 | 13 | 137 | 167 | 290 | *85%* | 375 | *86%* |
| **Southern Europe** | 57 | 68 | 181 | 141 | 235 | - | 319 | - |
| **Switzerland** | 70 | 124 | 353 | 345 | 523 | *85%* | 429 | *71%* |
| **UK** | 119,589 | 126,553 | 177,396 | 176,708 | 171,601 | *71%* | 145,961 | *73%* |
| **USA** | 28 | 35 | 126 | 100 | 62 | *46%* | 146 | - |
| **Total** | 1,061 | 1,604 | 4,182 | 4,354 | 5,676 | *78%* | 4,759 | *78%* |

**Table 7: I-CeM dataset London sample coverage: grouped origins of servants and (for 1901 and 1911) the proportion of the total reported foreign servant populations in London according to census reports**

By the end of the period, the most numerous of the groups were women born in Germany, followed by those from France then from Switzerland, but other nationalities came to feature alongside these too, with the total countries of origin rising from 50 in 1851 to 72 in 1911. In order to allow for more meaningful comparisons to be made, countries of origin have been grouped into

[33] Total numbers of enumerated foreign servants for London were only published from 1901 onwards; before 1901, there are no comparable aggregate figures against which to compare the sample.

regions, reflecting porous boundaries in some cases and ensuring group sizes are statistically useful. For any given census year, each group contains no fewer than 30 observations, a figure generally accepted to be the minimum on which to base normal distribution analysis and above which samples are no longer considered 'small'.[34]

## *Findings*

The findings from the analysis are broadly dealt with in four sections: the first two are focused on the servants and subsequent two are focused on the households in which they were enumerated. The structure of these findings are designed to best explore how the foreign servant and the household she worked in compare to that of the British-born servant context, and to test assumptions held in the literature about foreign servants in London. Together, the four sections aim to identify key areas of enquiry based around the foreign domestic service market in London– the recruitment of and preference for foreign domestic servants–which are addressed in later chapters using qualitative source material. The data analysis is an opportunity to establish the size of the foreign-born domestic servant population in London during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, and to profile distinctive features both of the servants themselves and the employers for whom they worked.

### Demographic distribution

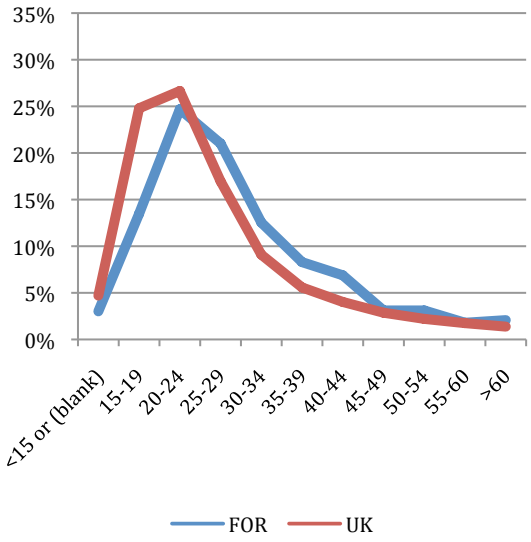
#### *Age*

Since the 1970s, historians have asserted a link between the age and marital status of servants and their participation in life-cycle service.[35] This has been the case among internal migrant servants in Britain and in France,[36] as well as reflecting the system in north-western Europe too. Married couples formed separate households, and in order to afford to do so would work and save their wages. 'In this way, the system of life-cycle servants was an integrated part of the European marriage pattern.'[37] Was this the case for the foreign servants in London too? At the start of the period, the average age of foreign servants was 29.1 and this rose to 30.4 in 1911, but there are

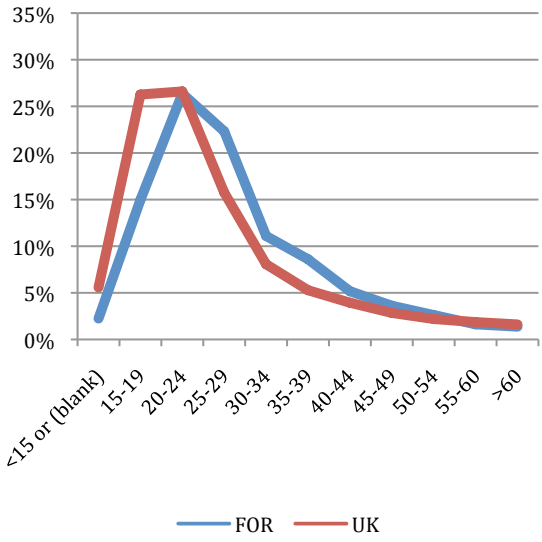
[34] C. H. Feinstein and M. Thomas, *Making History Count : A Primer in Quantitative Methods for Historians* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 122.
[35] See for example P. Laslett, 'Characteristics of the Western Family Considered over Time', *Journal of Family History*, 2 (1977).
[36] See Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers and McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, respectively.
[37] C. Lundh, 'The Geography of Marriage', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 38/3 (2013), p. 319.

many variations within this. The age distribution of foreign servants is plotted against that of their British-born counterparts in Figure 6, and shows significant differences between the two groups in each of the six census years.

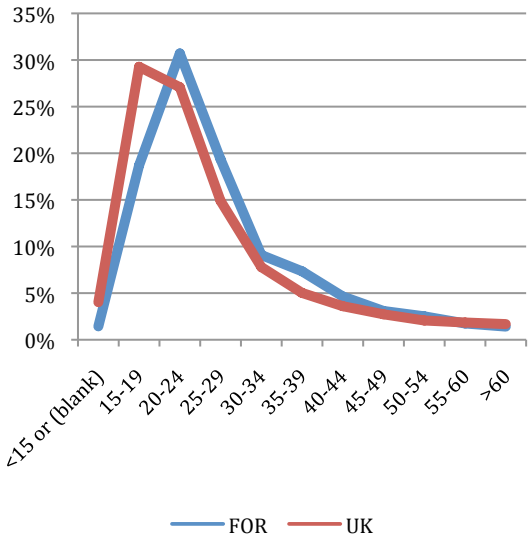
**1851**



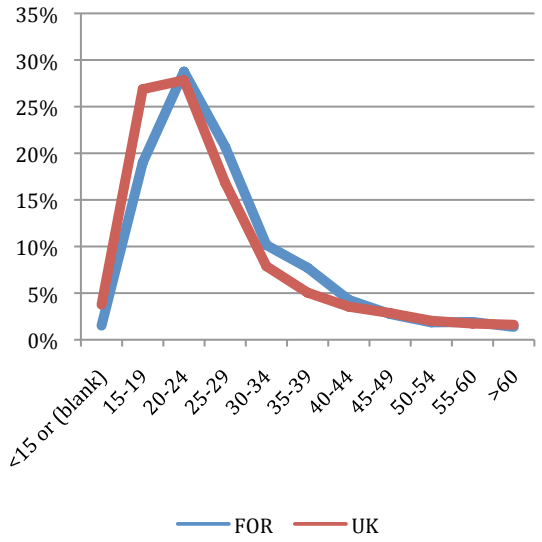

**1861**




**1881**




**1891**




**1901**

**1911**




**Figure 6: Age distribution of foreign-born and British-born servants 1851–1911**

The shape in the foreign age distribution changes over time from a clearly older profile than that of the British servant, to one that starts to show greater similarities. By 1911, the two distributions are very similar; nevertheless, a chi-square test confirms the differences as statistically significant at both the 95% and 99% confidence levels,[38] suggesting that the foreign servants are less likely to be found in the under 20 year old group.

| | Observed (O) | Expected (E) | O-E | (O-E)2 | (O-E)2/E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **<15 or (blank)** | 26 | 49.16 | 23.16 | 536.50 | 10.91 |
| **15-19** | 520 | 866.48 | 346.48 | 120,051.21 | 138.55 |
| **20-24** | 1223 | 1,189.81 | (33.19) | 1,101.37 | 0.93 |
| **25-29** | 990 | 876.18 | (113.82) | 12,955.53 | 14.79 |
| **30-34** | 655 | 538.39 | (116.61) | 13,598.56 | 25.26 |
| **35-39** | 439 | 393.43 | (45.57) | 2,077.01 | 5.28 |
| **40-44** | 303 | 269.15 | (33.85) | 1,146.08 | 4.26 |
| **45-49** | 232 | 210.51 | (21.49) | 461.77 | 2.19 |
| **50-54** | 163 | 145.12 | (17.88) | 319.72 | 2.20 |
| **55-60** | 111 | 121.28 | 10.28 | 105.68 | 0.87 |
| **>60** | 97 | 99.49 | 2.49 | 6.22 | 0.06 |
| **Totals** | 4759 | 4759 | | | **205.3006821** |

**Table 8: Chi-square contingency table comparing the age distribution of foreign female servants (O) to that of the general servant distribution (excluding foreign servants)(E) in 1911**

[38] $\chi^2$ value is 205.3, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01. The chi-square test relies on fewer than 20% of the expected values to be no less than 5 and that no expected values to fall below 1, both of which were satisfied for this test.

Figure 7 compares the average ages of servants in each region to one another over time. In the cases of Asia, Eastern Europe and the Rest of the World ages appear to fall before rising again after 1891; for those from Benelux, Southern Europe, Scandinavia and France the trend appears to be one of decreasing average ages (albeit skewed by data in 1911); and for women born in Britain, USA, the Dominions, Germany and Austro-Hungary the trend is one of increasing ages. Overall there are no clear patterns to make strong conclusions.

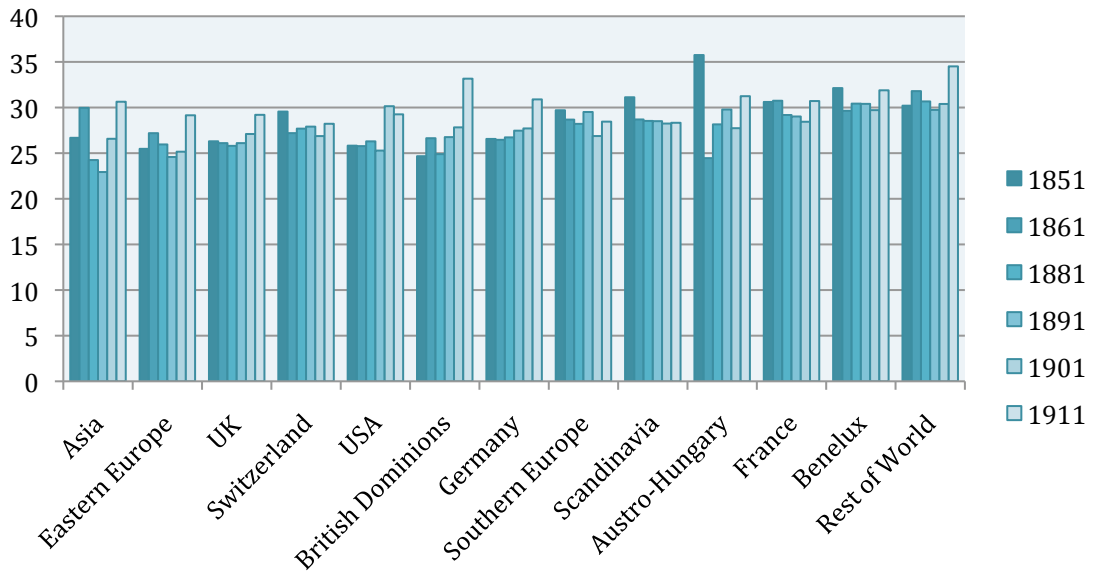



**Figure 7: Average ages of servants by census year according to country of birth in order of overall average**

Over time, the foreign servant population becomes less concentrated in the 20-24 year old age bracket, and as a group increased in age. Amongst foreign servants, Eastern Europeans were by 1901 the youngest nationality group (average 25.2 years), with those from the Rest of the World (30.4 years) the oldest. Only the Eastern Europeans and Asian servants were on average younger than British servants (27.1). The average ages of the foreign servants, therefore, hide a multitude of variations and will be further explored throughout the chapter.

*Marital status*

As a group, the women who arrived in London to work in domestic service throughout the entire period were overwhelmingly single, and the unmarried steadily increased as a proportion of the whole from 1851 until the end of the century, rising from 83 to 90 per cent. Of the remainder, a small and relatively steady percentage were married (3–7%) or widowed (5–8%). By 1911, the

proportion of married and widowed women had increased, reducing the proportion of single women to 84 per cent.

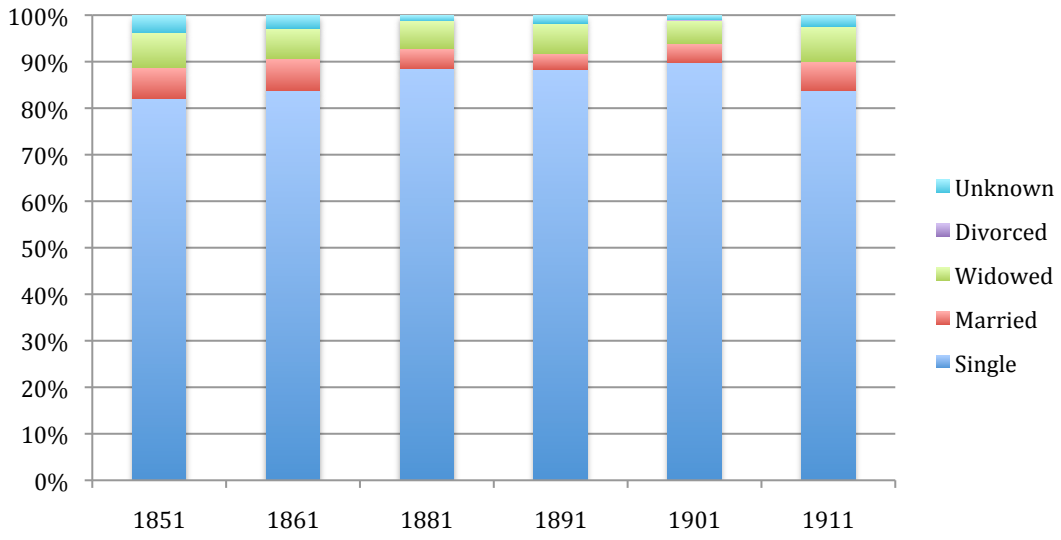



**Figure 8: Proportion of foreign servants' marital status over time**

Despite this high proportion, however, foreign women were less likely to be unmarried than their British counterparts (Figure 9) and a chi-square test confirms the difference between the two as statistically significant at both the 95% and 99% confidence levels.[39]

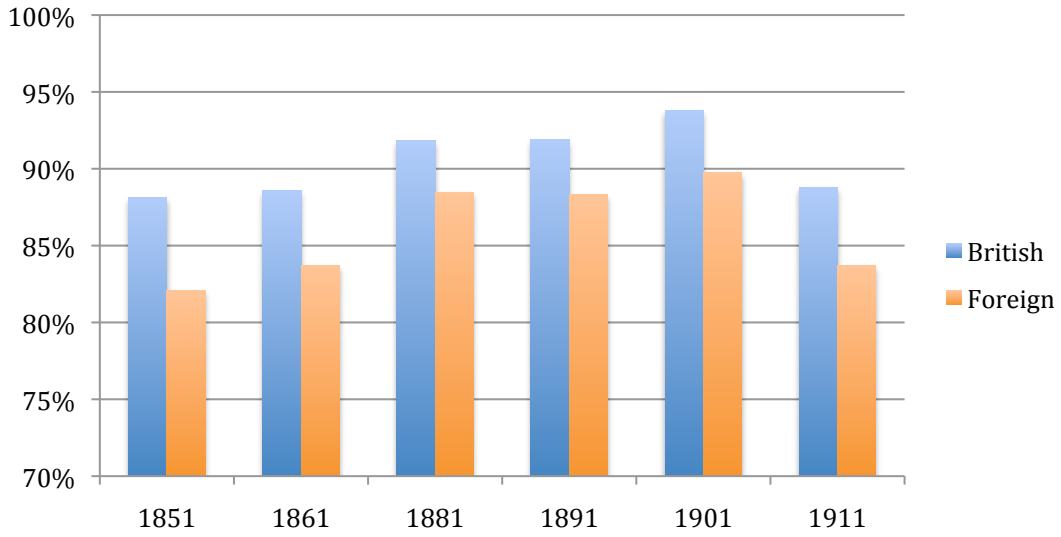



**Figure 9: Proportion of British and foreign unmarried servants**

[39] 1901: $\chi^2$ value is 175.94, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01; 1911: $\chi^2$ value is 176.95, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01.

Broken down by nationality, there was a little more variation (Figure 10). The proportion of single women rose in each regional group from 1851 until the end of the century, with more than 95 per cent of the Scandinavian and Swiss women being unmarried in 1901. By 1911, however, the proportion of single women of all nationalities fell (including among the British), with the Eastern Europeans and those from the British Dominions and Rest of World least likely to be single at 71%, 76% and 78% respectively.

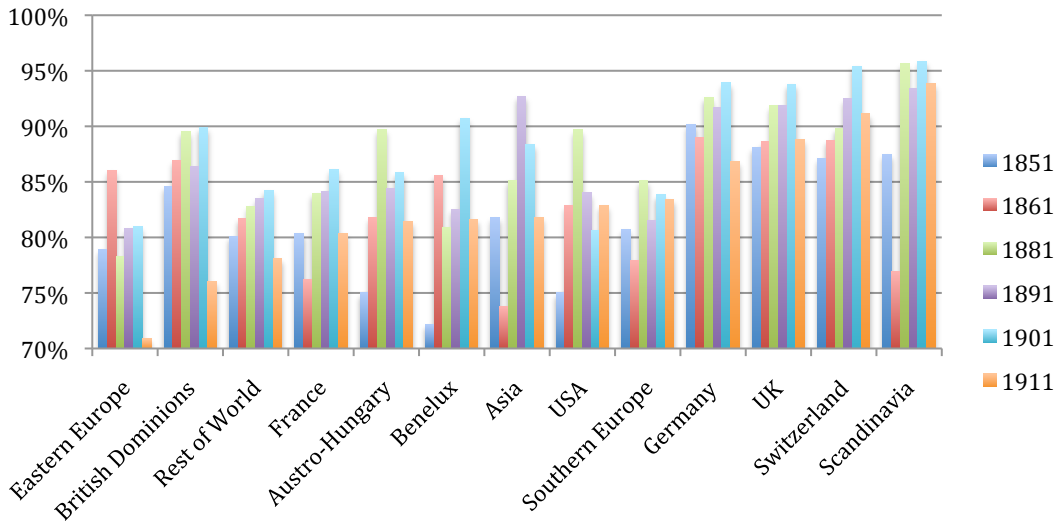



**Figure 10: Proportion of unmarried servants by region**

The high proportion of unmarried foreign-born servants seems to conform to the lifecycle service model expounded by Laslett, McBride and other historians of service and population. Although the age distribution of the servants gradually converged on that of the British-born servants, so that by 1911 a quarter of both cohorts were aged 20-25, foreign domestics remained on average older than their British counterparts throughout the period, with only the Asian and Eastern European servants being younger on average than the British. Horn connects a generally ageing servant population at this time with different a change in deferent behaviour: older servants were, she writes, 'more self-assured and less willing to be controlled by mistresses especially in their leisure hours.'[40] Older servants may therefore bring with them behavioural challenges, the consequences of which are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

[40] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 36.

**Occupational composition**

Horn, one of only a handful of scholars to recognise the existence of foreign servants during this period, claims that at the start of the twentieth century foreign women 'formed a small specialist sector of the domestic labour force', and were associated with particular roles in domestic service, such as cooks or lady's maids, prized for their neat sewing and elegant ways.[41] To examine the propensity of foreign servants to be employed in these more skilled positions, descriptions written in the 'personal occupation' columns of the census data were analysed. This is a free text field in which the description given by the householder is then allocated a code by the enumerator or clerk according to a pre-printed list supplied by the General Registrar. The occupational code which categorises indoor domestic servants was 010; however, many job types fell into this category, each with different levels of skill and, accordingly, pay and benefits. Certain job types were specifically entered, such as 'cook general' or 'parlourmaid', but many were described as 'domestic servant general' or the section was often left blank altogether. The proportion of servants with an occupational description in the census datasets increased significantly after 1881 (Figure 11) when at least two thirds of all those enumerated were described in some way. For this reason, the data analysed in relation to occupational titles omits data from the 1851 and 1861 censuses to avoid inconsistencies. It is statistically challenging to draw conclusions about the type of work each servant was actually engaged to perform, given only a proportion of them stated occupational titles, but certain trends emerge from the data which point to connections between nationalities, ages and job types.

[41] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 169.

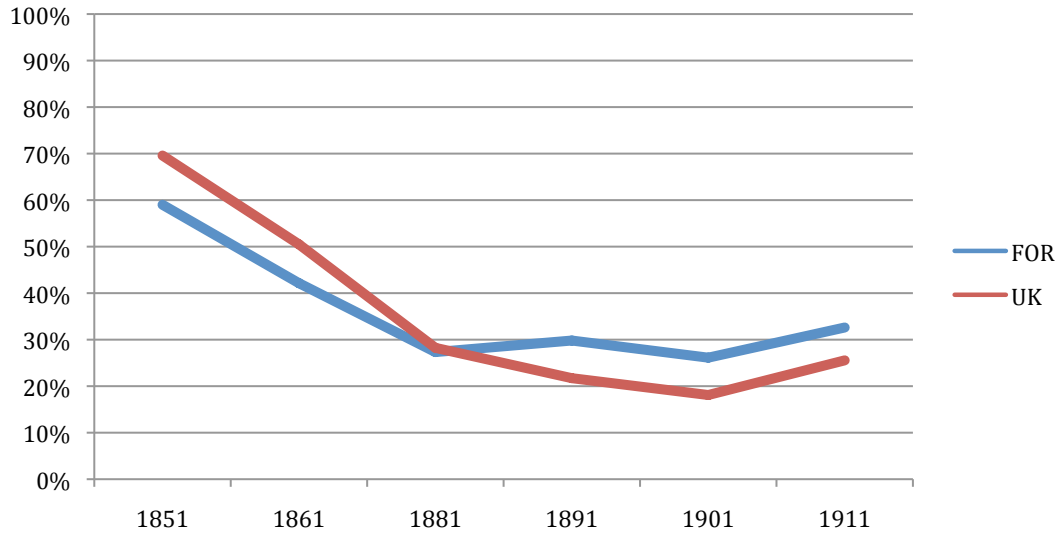



**Figure 11: Proportion over time of foreign and British servants with no occupational description**

*Upper servants*

From the perspective of an employer, the purpose of employing a servant was not restricted to the chores she was expected to carry out. For many households, the presence of a servant, and particularly an upper servant, was a marker of social status; a symbol of wealth and prosperity. An upper servant was seen as skilled, experienced and quite often conspicuous: cooks, lady's maids, housekeepers or children's nurses fell into this category being charged with important and visible responsibilities. In contrast, those whose work was hidden from public view included the (silent) parlour-, house-, kitchen-maids and general domestics. It is unlikely that householders would fail to record an upper servant in a census, given their social function, and as a result it is assumed here that upper servants were less likely to be under-recorded in the data than the general domestic. Of those foreign servants stating an occupational title, almost two thirds were upper servants in 1881 but this figure fell to almost half by the end of the century. Despite this drop, the foreign women were throughout the period far more likely to be employed as upper servants than their British counterparts, no more than 38 per cent of whom were engaged in these more skilled roles.

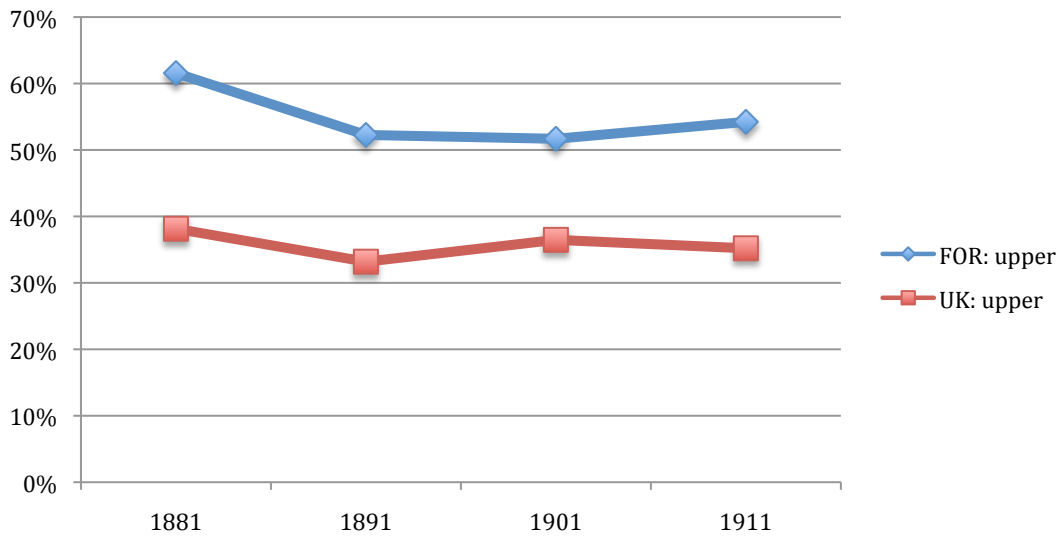



**Figure 12: Proportion of foreign and British women working as upper servants (where stated) over time**

Throughout the period, more than half of all foreign servants were employed as upper servants. In 1901, 25 per cent of them were cooks, 12 per cent were lady's maids, four per cent were housekeepers and a further ten per cent were involved in childcare of some kind: children's nurses or nursemaids. In the British context, a similar percentage of women worked as cooks (23%) and housekeepers (4%) but much lower proportions worked as lady's maids (<3%) or nurserymaids (<7%). These proportions tally with those of Booth's assessment. In 1903, Charles Booth carried out a sample survey collating the ages and wage levels for different types of indoor servants (Figure 13) and his findings suggest an occupational hierarchy according to both job title (according to wages) and servant ages. In his sample, those engaged in skilled work as cooks, lady's maids and nurses (here children's nurses rather than medical nurses) comprised 38 per cent of his sample.

| Description of Servant. | Average Wages. | Average Age. | Number of Servants. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Years. | |
| General servant ..... | £15. 10*s*. | 25·7 | 97 |
| Kitchen-maid ..... | £12. 6*s*. | 19·1 | 23 |
| Nurse-housemaid ..... | £15. 4*s*. | 22·7 | 6 |
| Housemaid ..... | £16. 10*s*. | 23·9 | 212 |
| Parlour-maid ..... | £20. 2*s*. | 26·8 | 76 |
| Nurse ..... | £18. 18*s*. | 28·1 | 51 |
| Lady's maid ..... ..... | £24. 14*s*. | 32·3 | 22 |
| Cook ..... | £21. 18*s*. | 32·5 | 187 |
| Cook-housekeeper ..... | £22. 10*s*. | 43·0 | 4 |
| Combined average ..... | £18. 12*s*. | 28·2 | 678 |

**Figure 13: Indicative domestic service ages and wages in London 1903 (Booth)[42]**

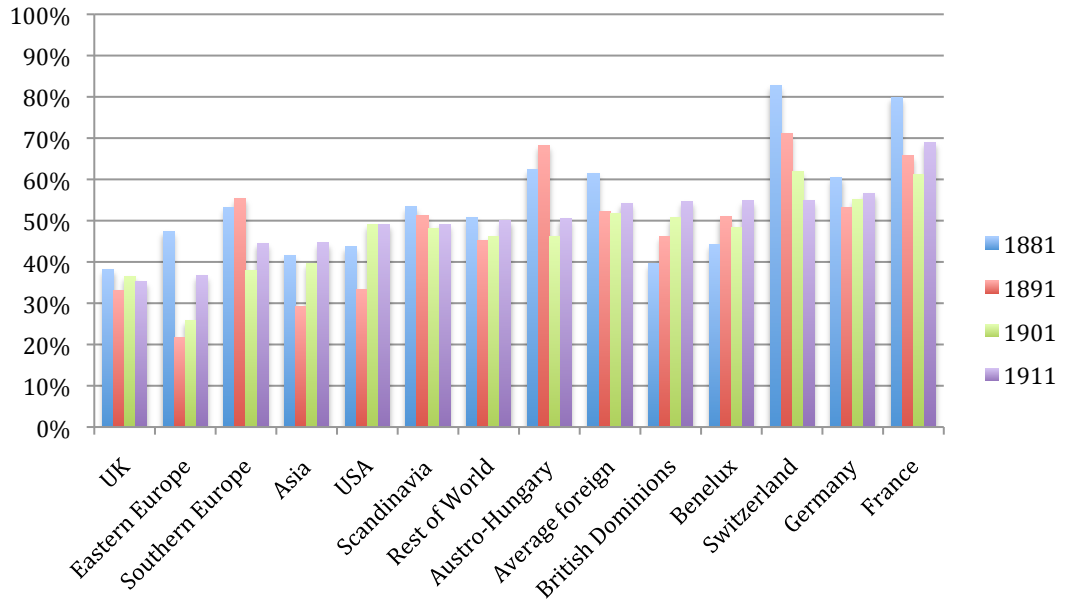



**Figure 14: Proportion of foreign servants working as upper servants (where stated) by region, 1881-1911**

Figure 14 illustrates how all nationality foreign servants were more likely to be upper servants by 1911 than their British counterparts, although most nationalities experienced a decrease in the percentage of women working as such; all but those from Asia, the USA, the British Dominions and the Benelux countries reduced from 1881 to 1911. Nevertheless, apart from the Swiss and the Scandinavians, the number of foreign upper servants was on an upward trajectory by 1911. To illustrate this, Figure 15 shows the proportion of upper to ordinary servants enumerated in the 1901 census for each of the servants' regions.

[42] C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London. Second Series: Industry* (London, 1903), p. 223.

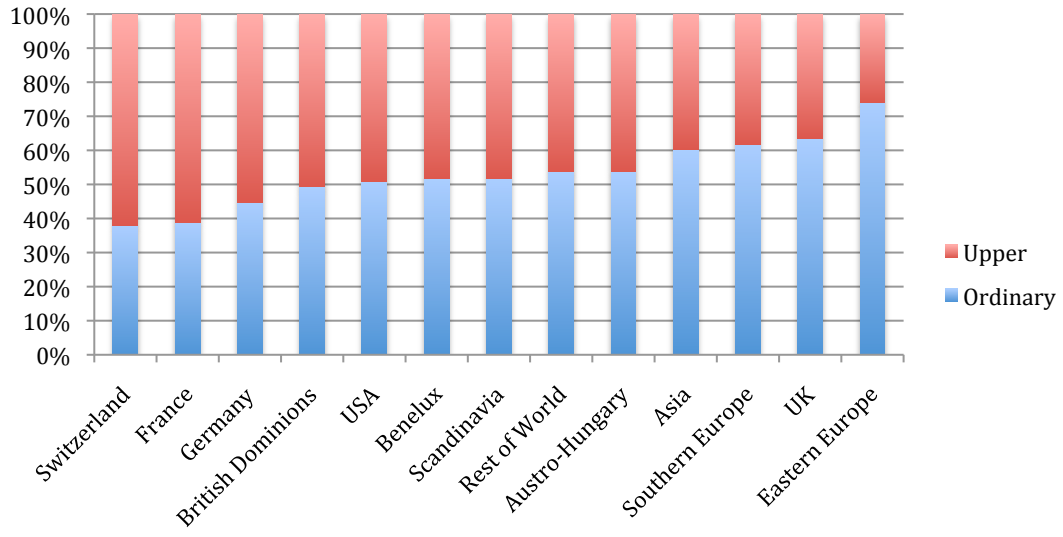



**Figure 15: Proportional split of upper and ordinary servants (where stated) by region, 1901**

It shows that only the Eastern Europeans were less likely to be upper servants than the British-born, but also that only four regions (the Swiss, French, Germans and those from the British Dominions) were more likely to be upper servants than ordinary ones; more than half of all other nationalities were ordinary servants.

The French, Germans and Swiss were more likely to have been upper servants from the early period but gradually lost share to other regional groups. Figure 16 shows how these roles appear to have become more fragmented over time, as increasing numbers of other nationalities arrived in London to work. In 1881, the Germans, French and Swiss made up almost three quarters (74%) of the foreign upper servant population, but by 1911 their share had dropped to 58 per cent, with the Scandinavians, Southern Europeans and others increasing to absorb the difference.

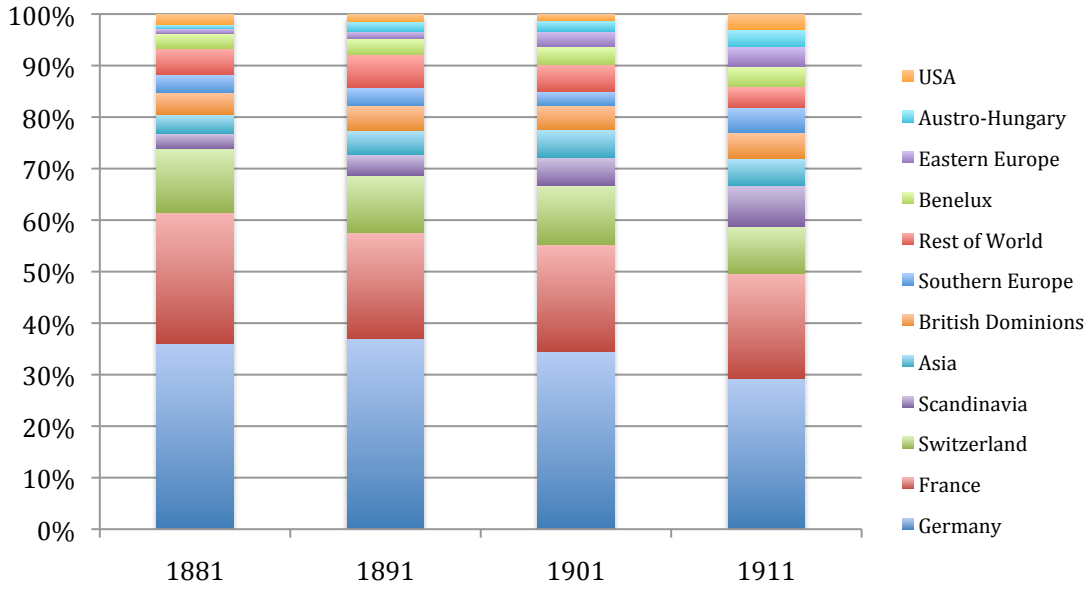



**Figure 16: Proportion of all foreign servants employed as upper servants (where stated) over time, by place of birth**

*Ordinary servants*

In comparison to London servants as a whole, the data from I-CeM and Booth's contemporary figures suggest a greater propensity for foreign-born women to be employed in specialised or highly-skilled positions than their British counterparts. But how did that affect the non-upper servant roles? Figure 17 shows the distribution of occupational subtypes for both the foreign and British servant data, revealing that parlourmaids and kitchen maids were the least likely roles held by foreigners, which is in line with assumptions about their propensity for more skilled positions.

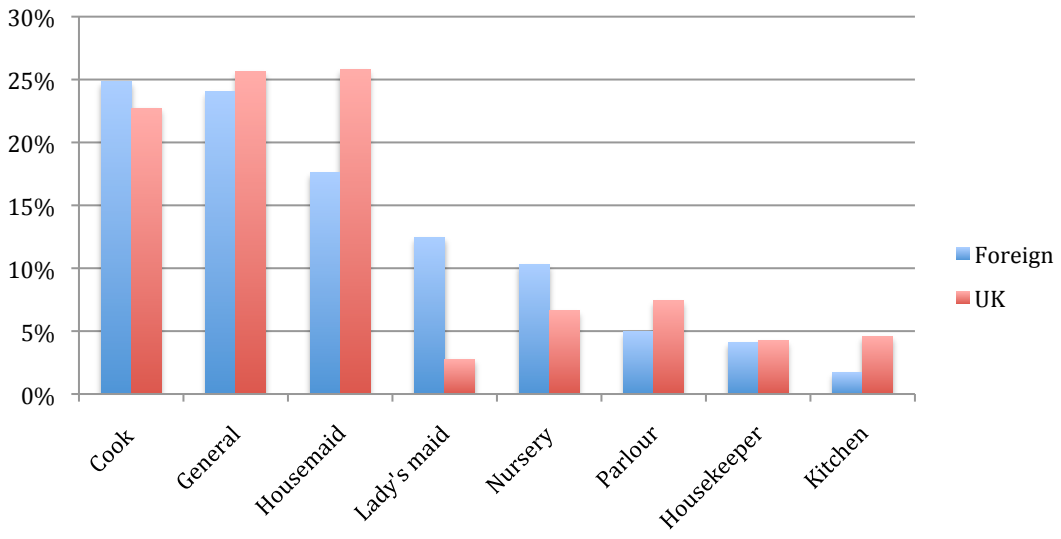



**Figure 17: Proportion of foreign and British servants of particular occupational subtypes (where stated) in 1901**

The data suggests that foreign servants in 1901 were more likely to be cooks, general domestics or housemaids than lady's maids or nursery nurses, despite certain nationalities dominating the upper servant categories. Since skilled servants were more likely to be described as such in the census returns, it might be possible to suggest that the actual figure (and thus proportion) of the more general and less prestigious roles is far greater than that presented here.[43]

For the end of the period, Table 9 shows the most commonly-held role for each nationality group, revealing more mixed roles among foreign domestic workers than Horn has suggested for this time. Between a quarter and a third of servants from Benelux, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and the USA were cooks, and at least a quarter of the French and Swiss were lady's maids, but the largest occupational subtype among the other nationality regions was not an upper servant role at all. This suggests that although certain nationalities might be more likely to carry out certain job types than others, as a whole foreign-born servants were most often listed as a domestic servant general than as a cook or lady's maid. In comparison to their British counterparts, they were more likely to work as upper servants, but this fluctuated over the period; more common, however, was that at least a quarter of both cohorts were engaged in general domestic work.

| Region | Top occupational subtype | Proportion |
|---|---|---|
| **Asia** | Housemaid | 26% |
| **Austro-Hungary** | General domestic | 33% |
| **Benelux** | Cook | 28% |
| **British Dominions** | General domestic | 21% |
| **Eastern Europe** | General domestic | 64% |
| **France** | Lady's maid | 25% |
| **Germany** | Cook | 34% |
| **Scandinavia** | Cook | 31% |
| **Southern Europe** | General domestic | 36% |
| **Switzerland** | Lady's maid | 31% |
| **UK** | Housemaid | 26% |
| **USA** | Cook | 31% |
| **Rest of World** | General domestic | 26% |

**Table 9: Most commonly held occupational subtype (where stated) across servants' nationality regions in 1911**

[43] In 1901, the census recorded 1,041 cooks, 522 lady's maids, 432 nursery staff, 172 housekeepers, 209 parlourmaids, 738 housemaids, 1,007 generals and 72 kitchen maids among the foreign servants. Up to a third of all enumerated servants had no occupational subtype description. See Figure 11.

There were strong correlations too between the different occupational subtypes and the ages of those employed so. Using Booth's assessment, it was possible to use average ages of the various occupational subtypes to explore any role differences between the British and foreign servants. It would be reasonable to expect average ages to increase in line with Booth's occupational hierarchy, e.g. kitchen maids would have a lower age than cooks, and this is largely borne out in the data. Figure 18 shows the average ages of each servant subtype, and these are consistent with the age:occupational hierarchy as outlined in Booth, with the kitchen maids being the youngest and the housekeepers the oldest.

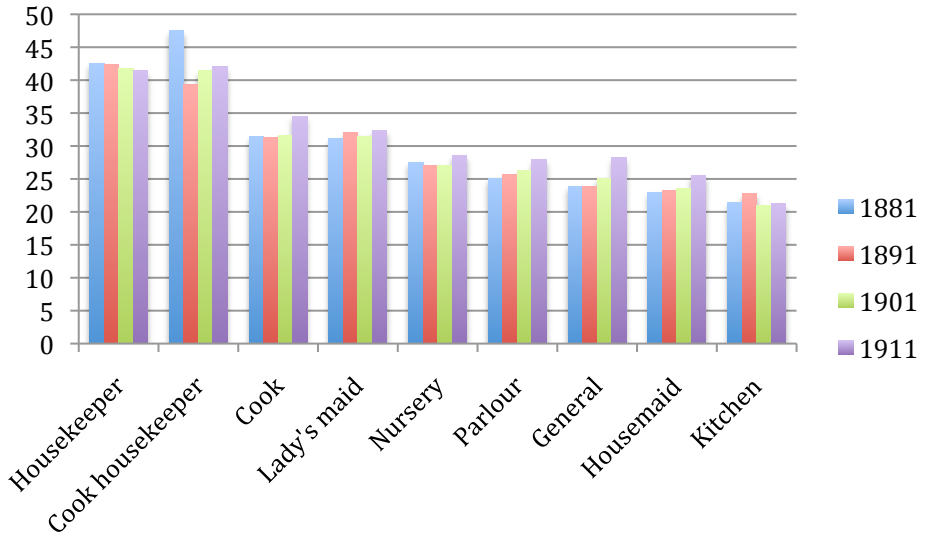



**Figure 18: Average ages of foreign servants by occupational subtype (where stated) over time**

Apart from the housekeepers and kitchen maids whose average ages fell over the period, average ages for all other jobs increased. Comparing this to the British context and the Booth figures of 1903, Figure 19 shows the average ages of each cohort for each occupational type as being broadly similar, confirming the importance of age in accessing the servant hierarchy (whether a British or foreign servant).

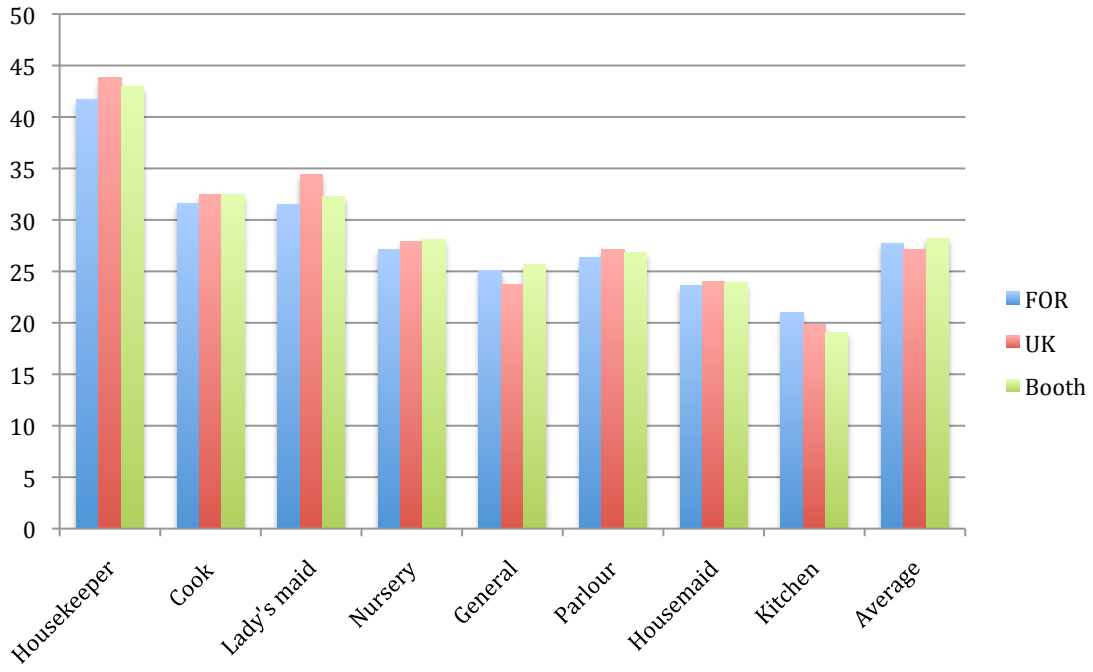



**Figure 19: Average ages of foreign, British and servants surveyed by Booth by occupational subtype (where stated) in 1901**

The data in Figure 14 suggests that the foreign women were more likely to be a little younger than their British counterparts when employed as upper servants, and a little older when employed as ordinary domestics. Furthermore, the age differential between the foreign upper and ordinary servants was considerable: in 1911, there were over five years between them (Figure 20).

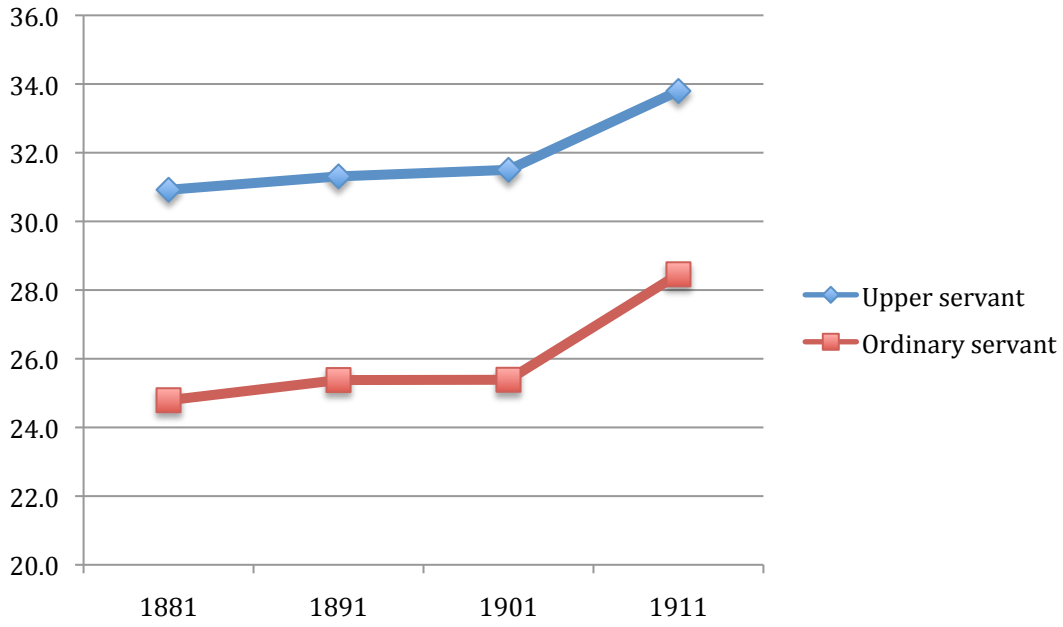



**Figure 20: Average age of upper and ordinary foreign servants (where stated) over time**

From 1881 onwards, the average age of both upper and ordinary servants gradually increased up until 1911. Together these are important demographic findings when assessing the connections between nationality, age and perceived skillsets in recruitment mechanisms, and one that will be further explored in subsequent chapters on servant backgrounds and motivations for migration.

*National stereotypes*

As well as the types of roles foreign servants performed, Horn also connected these to certain nationalities, noting in particular the French, Swiss or German children's workers and French or Swiss lady's maids.[44] To investigate these stereotypes, Figure 21 shows the changes over time in the proportion of French servants engaged as lady's maids and German and Swiss servants as nursery maids.

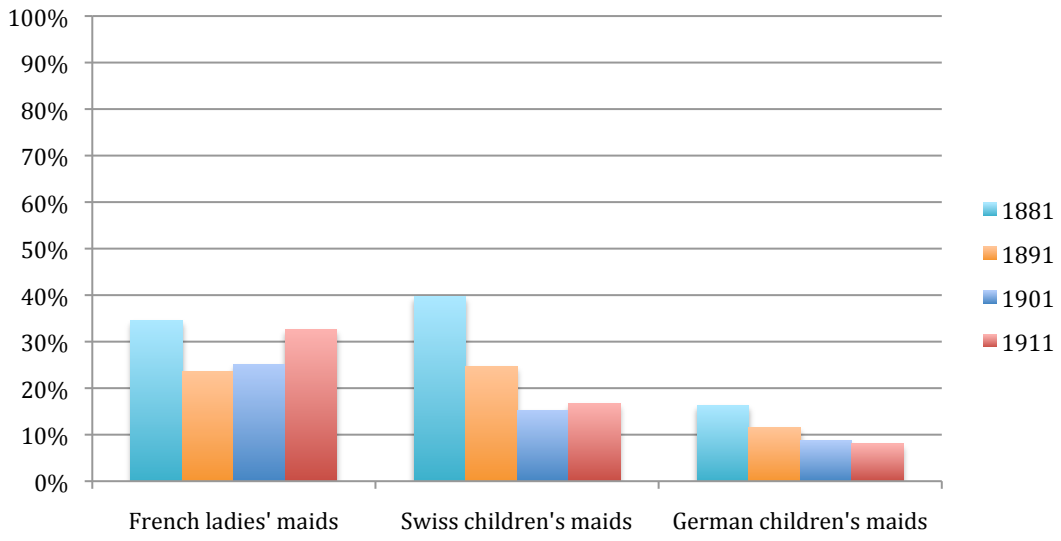



**Figure 21: Proportion of all French, Swiss and German servants employed in specific roles (where stated) over time**

Between a quarter and a third of the French-born servants do appear to be working as lady's maids throughout the period, showing an increase after dropping in 1891. Apart from the French, however, other nationality-specific upper servant roles went into decline: in 1881, three quarters of all Swiss servants were lady's or nurserymaids but by 1911 this had fallen to 39 per cent; and while 16 per cent of all Germans in 1881 worked with children, this fell to just eight per cent in 1911. These figures seem to suggest that while considerable numbers of French, German and Swiss

[44] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 169.

servants were engaged in these particular roles during the nineteenth century, the majority of their compatriots worked in other occupational subtypes and indeed an increasing number of other nationalities were also working in these more coveted positions Focusing on just one census year (1901), Figures Figure 22, Figure 23 and Figure 24 offer a nationality breakdown for each specialist servant role: cook, lady's maid and nurserymaid.

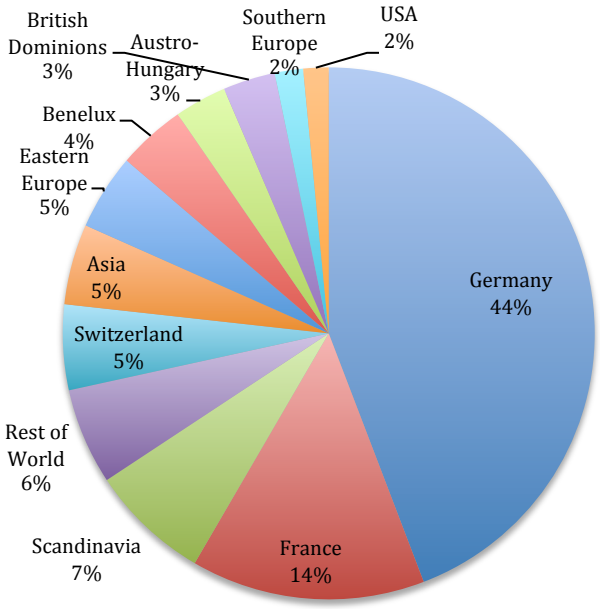



**Figure 22: Nationality breakdown of foreign servants working as cooks (where stated) in 1901**

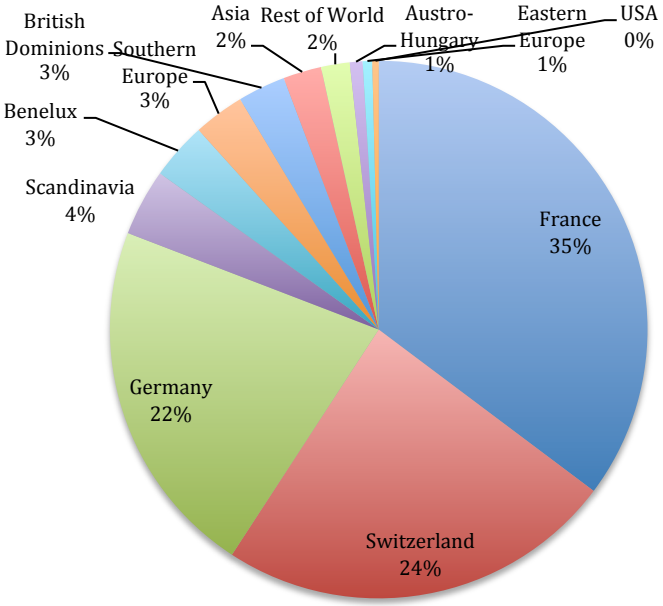



**Figure 23: Nationality breakdown of foreign servants working as lady's maids (where stated) in 1901**

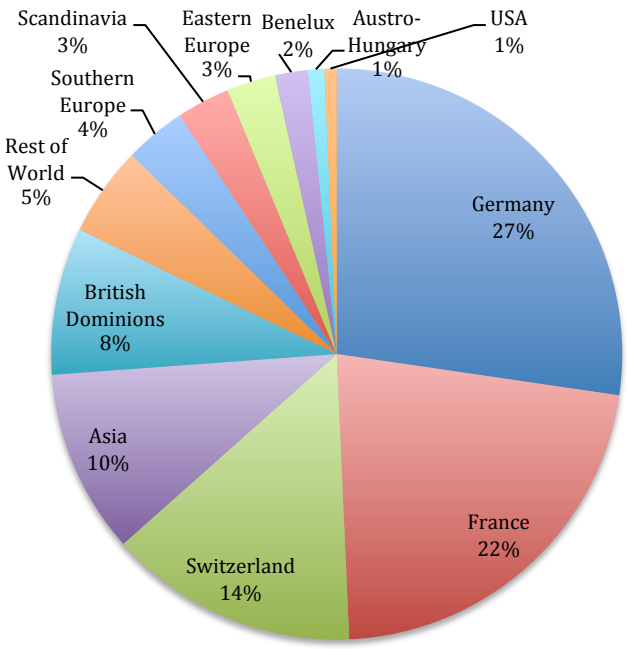



**Figure 24: Nationality breakdown of foreign servants working in nursery roles (where stated) in 1901**

These charts confirm that the largest nationality groups employed in lady's maid and childcare roles were the French, Germans and Swiss. They by no means dominate the sector, though, with only a little over third of lady's maids being French-born and no more than 14 per cent of nursery workers being Swiss. Since these three nationalities were the most numerous servants overall, these results should not be surprising.

Figure 25 shows that apart from the French, who increased their share of the foreign upper servant market as lady's maids, the Swiss and German national stereotypes linked to these upper servant roles went into decline. Although cited as a national stereotype, barely 15 per cent of nurserymaids were Swiss and a falling share of Germans worked as children's maids. By contrast, the French represented throughout the period more than a third of all lady's maids, peaking in 1911 at 43 per cent. As a proportion of all lady's maids, however, they still represented just five per cent, a number which is out of proportion to the dominant stereotype.

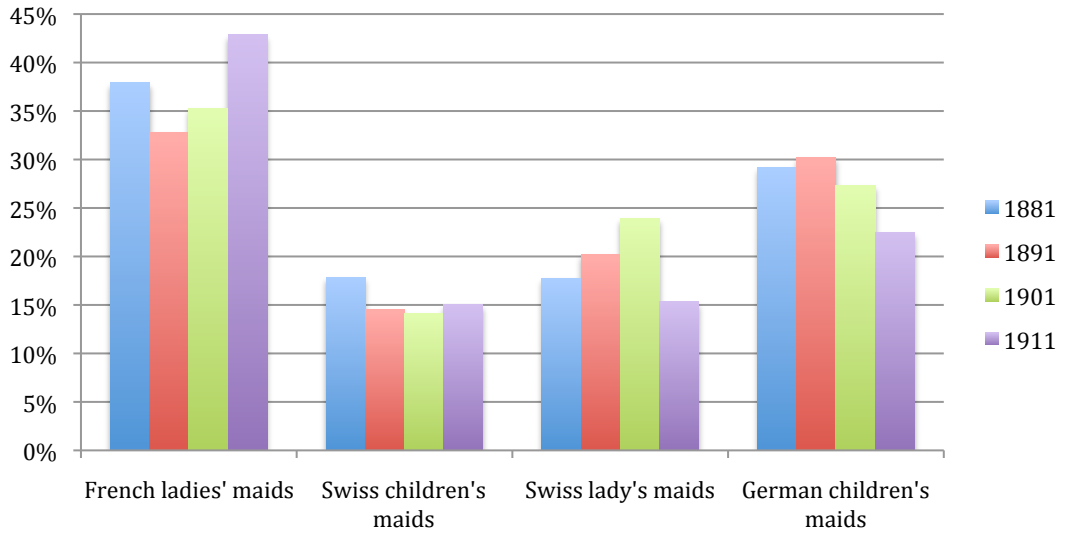



**Figure 25: Foreign proportion of lady's maids being French, of children's maids and lady's maids being Swiss and of children's maids being German (where stated) 1881–1911**

**Household profiles**

Pamela Horn claims that foreign-born domestics in the Victorian era were largely the preserve of the wealthy and socially elite. 'Many well-to-do mothers […] employed […] nannies and nursery governesses', she observes, and foreign lady's maids were much in demand among fashionable ladies.[45] To assess this claim that foreign servants were the preserve of the well-to-do, both the foreign and British datasets were analysed for socioeconomic, demographic and geographic correlations between the household head (as proxy for employer) and their residential servant.

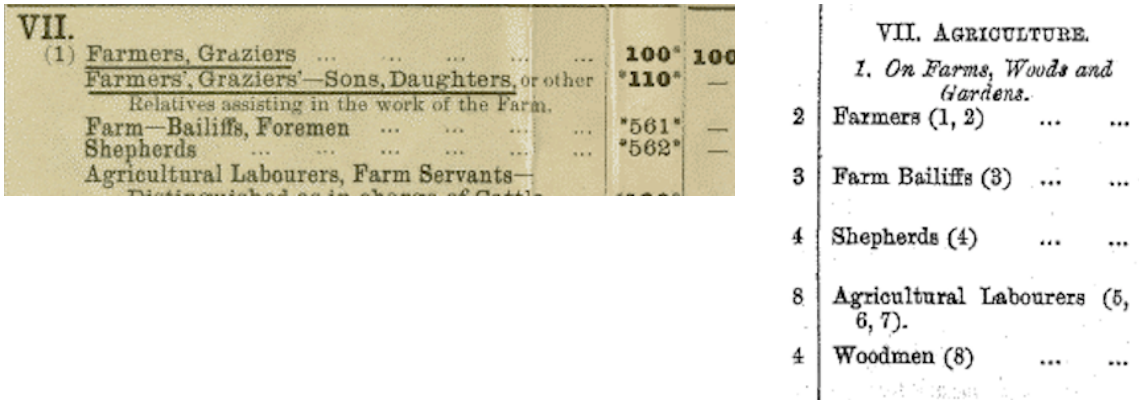
*Class*

The types of families in whose households foreign women were employed varied enormously, from the 25 servants in the Marchioness of Downshire's residence in 1851 to the single maid-of-all-work for an ice-cream vendor in 1911. To determine the socioeconomic wealth of the families, it would have been impossibly time-consuming to assess, record and arbitrarily assign it 'middle-class', for example. Instead, an eight-level class classification was used, originally designed after the 1911 census to assess class-based fertility in England and Wales:

> Class I – the upper and middle class… aims at excluding the artisan
> Classes III-VIII – as a whole are meant to represent the 'working class', those employed in manual labour, skilled or unskilled.

[45] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 169.

At the time, a detailed table was published designating one of the eight classes to each of the 1911 census occupation codes. As shown in Figure 26 (R), the social class (1-8) was listed in the left column, the occupational description in the second, and the census occupational code (derived from the 1911 census occupations, Figure 26 (L)) in brackets.[46] If a household head were enumerated a farm bailiff, for example, his occupational code would be 561 and his social class 3.



VII.

(1) Farmers, Graziers ... ... ... ... ... 100* 100

Farmers', Graziers'—Sons, Daughters, or other Relatives assisting in the work of the Farm. *110* —

Farm—Bailiffs, Foremen ... ... ... ... *561* —

Shepherds ... ... ... ... ... *562* —

Agricultural Labourers, Farm Servants—

VII. AGRICULTURE.

*1. On Farms, Woods and Gardens.*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Farmers (1, 2) ... ... | |
| 3 | Farm Bailiffs (3) ... ... | |
| 4 | Shepherds (4) ... ... | |
| 8 | Agricultural Labourers (5, 6, 7). | |
| 4 | Woodmen (8) ... ... | |

**Figure 26: Detail of the 1911 Code for Occupations Table[47] (L) and Fertility of Marriage social classification[48] (R) for a subsection of the Agriculture sector**

Each occupational code in the Code for Occupations table was cross-referenced to the Fertility of Marriage social classification and simplified the social classes to just five (see Table 10).

| No. | Class type | Example occupations |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Middle and upper class | Bank managers, insurance clerks, 'private means' |
| 2 | Intermediate class | Shopkeepers, dealers, actors |
| 3 | Artisans and skilled working class | Tailors, electricians, hairdressers |
| 4 | Semi-skilled working class | Engine stokers, animal skinners, cap makers |
| 5 | Unskilled working class | Carters, porters, costermongers |

**Table 10: Class distinctions adapted from Fertility of Marriage Table XLIV**

For comparison purposes across census years, the I-CeM occupational codes are allocated a HISCO code (in the bailiff example above, this would have been 61400).[49] For the purposes of this

[46] *Parl. Pap.* (1911), Cm 6578, Seventy-Fourth Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England and Wales (1911), pp. 74-87.
[47] *Parl. Pap.* (1911) Cm 6578, pp. 74-87.
[48] *Census of England and Wales, 1911, Vol. XII. Fertility of Marriage. Part II* (London: HMSO, 1923) pp. lxxvi-lxxvii.
[49] 'Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations (HISCO) is an historically sensitive and internationally valid occupational classification allowing researchers from a variety of countries to communicate with each other and make international comparisons across the nineteenth and twentieth

research, therefore, the social groups in Table 10 were transposed onto the HISCO codes and used to assess the socioeconomic class of each household across all census years. Minor adjustments were made to the raw data to ensure all occupations were allocated a code. For example, diplomats were allocated to Class I, as were Catholic priests and women in religious orders, who had not been of interest in the original fertility calculations!

The results of this classification exercise on the household data indicate that, overall, a larger percentage of foreign servants worked in Class I households compared to their British counterparts. This gap closed over time, though, such that by 1911 the British and foreign servants were both as likely as each other to be working for the wealthiest Class I households (Figure 27). Might this suggest that British servants were increasingly taking better quality positions, and foreigners were being forced into less prestigious ones?

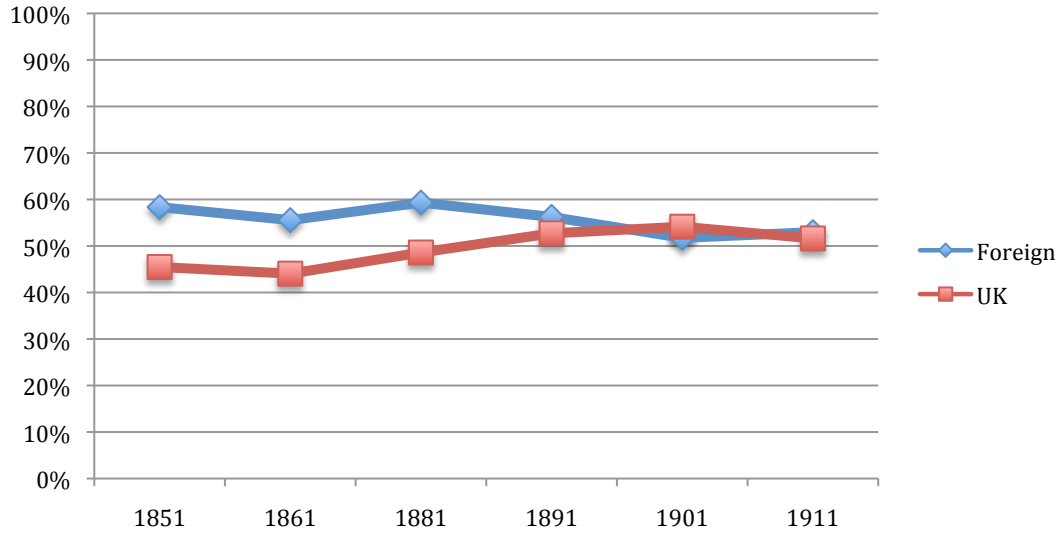



**Figure 27: Proportion of foreign and British servants employed in Class I households**

Figure 28 confirms that the largest class of household heads to be employing foreigners was that of I (middle and upper class), in line with Horn's assumptions about the social standing of foreign-servant-employing families. However, as many as 42 per cent of households fell into Classes II–V, suggesting that foreign servants were not always employed by the wealthiest. Additionally, the proportion of those employed in Class I households decreased over the period, dropping below 52

centuries in social, economic and other fields of history' (Higgs et al., *I-CeM Guide v2*, p. 183). HISCO codes were derived from the I-CeM Occupational Matrix spreadsheet, available at https://www1.essex.ac.uk/history/research/ICeM/documentation.html (4 Sep 2016).

per cent in 1901. These are key findings in showing the socioeconomic diversity among foreign servant employers, prompting further questions about their appeal for wider sections of London society.

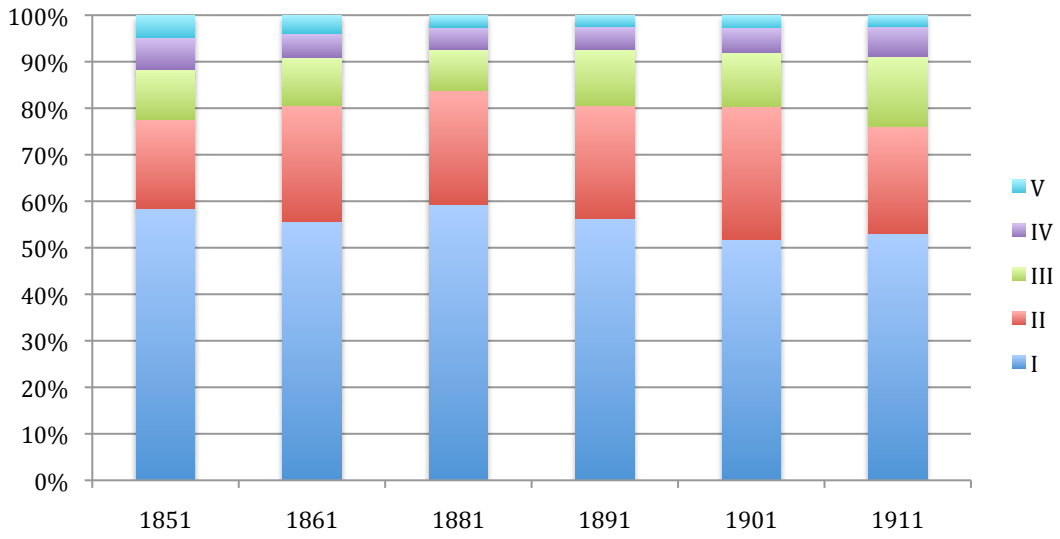



**Figure 28: Proportion of household heads in each socioeconomic class (where available) over time**

**(Observed numbers for each census were n=1851: 982 1861: 1449 1881: 3786 1891: 4065 1901: 5240 1911: 4246)**

To explore this further, the dataset was divided into regions.

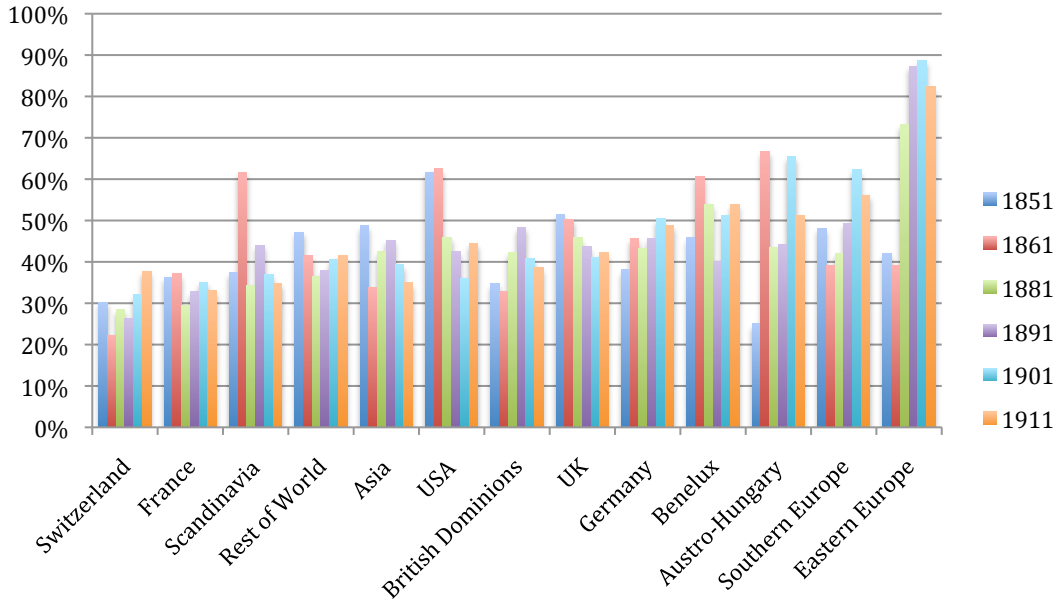



**Figure 29: Proportion of servants by region employed in non-Class I households**

Figure 29 shows the proportion of non-Class I households employing servants of different nationalities over time, revealing that households employing Eastern European servants were the most over-represented in the non-Class I household data from 1881 onwards. Nevertheless, servants of all nationalities could be found in at least a third of all non-Class I households over the period. Over time, the proportion of servants employed in non-Class I households, and born in Britain, the Dominions, Asia and Scandinavia, fell, a pattern that suggests these servants were increasingly concentrated in the wealthier establishments. These findings may indicate a national hierarchy of servant preference which will be addressed later in the thesis.

*Geography*

Occupations in census returns, being self-described and then coded by an external enumerator or clerk, can be notoriously unreliable. Edwin Tate, partner in Tate and Lyle Sugar, for example, was coded 927 (sugar refiner) which relegated him to class V.[50] The process of data-cleaning found many such anomalies, but to further triangulate the evidence of high numbers of non middle classes employing foreign servants, the metropolitan borough in which each household was enumerated was recorded and mapped, the assumption being that wealthy households would be more likely to live in affluent boroughs. Just as with their British counterparts, foreign female servants were recorded in all of the metropolitan boroughs across the city.[51] The maps in Figure 30, Figure 31 and Figure 32 illustrate the shift in distribution of servants across the city every thirty years from 1851. While less pronounced in the foreign data, both British and non-British servant distributions seem to move from a central and northern concentration towards West London, and eventually spreading out to the suburbs. While British servants are increasingly clustered in Kensington, the foreign servants become less intensely populous in the West End boroughs over time.

[50] Occupation codes allocated classes II–V were randomly checked to ensure these types of misclassifications were minimized.
[51] The boroughs referred to throughout are the 28 metropolitan boroughs created by the London Government Act 1899 along with the City of London.

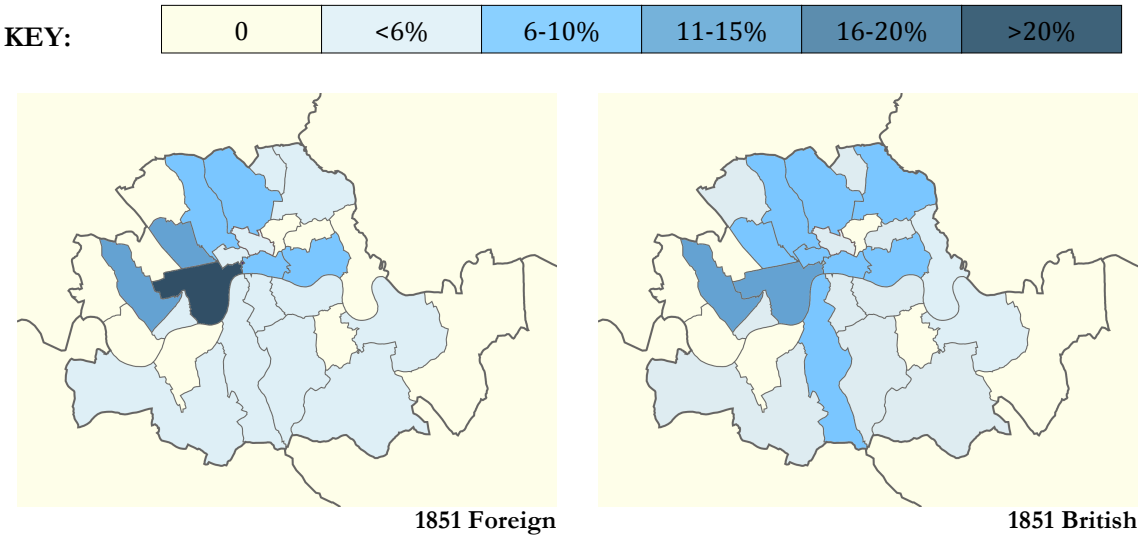



**Figure 30: Foreign and British servant distribution across London 1851**

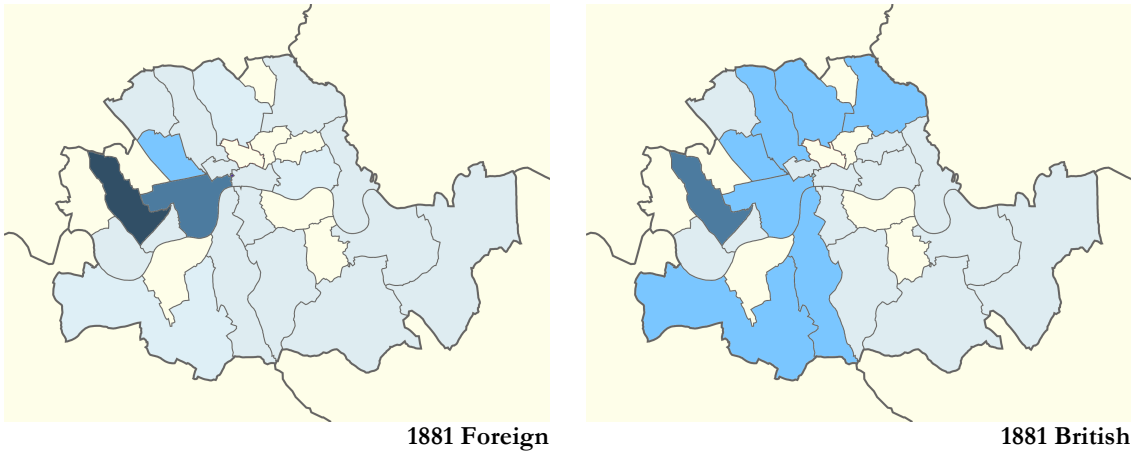



**Figure 31: Foreign and British servant distribution across London 1881**

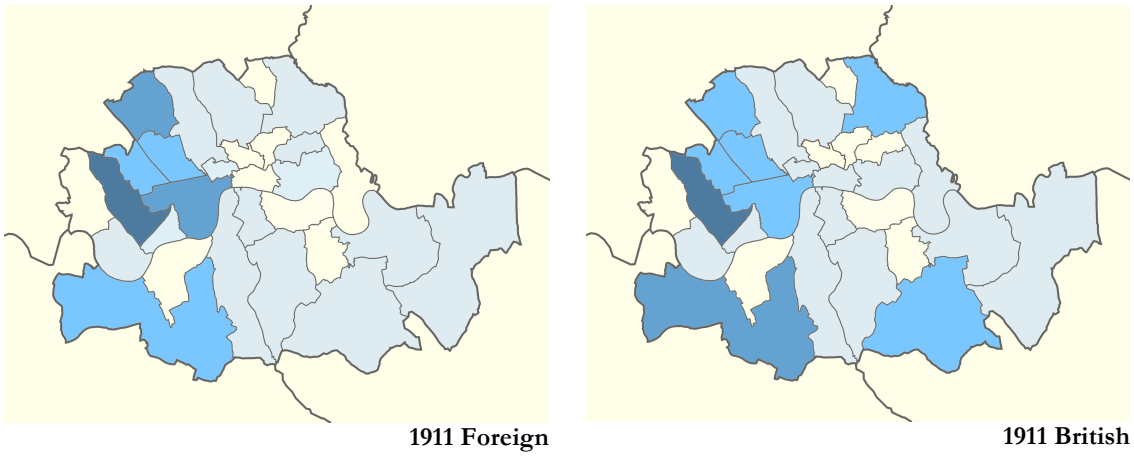
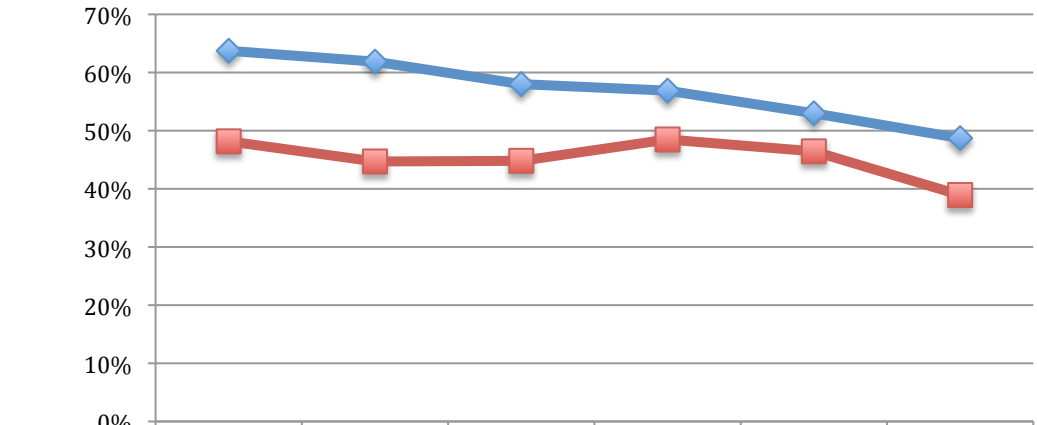



**Figure 32: Foreign and British servant distribution across London 1911**

To understand the socioeconomic characteristics of the boroughs as close to the period as possible, rather than relying on a modern understanding of the districts, Smith's *New Life and Labour of London* was consulted. Smith's was a less well-known, but no less useful, survey of London that that of Charles Booth's.[52] He singled out six boroughs–Chelsea, Hampstead, Kensington, Paddington, St. Marylebone and Westminster–as being wealthy, named 'West End'; four boroughs–Greenwich, Lewisham, Stoke Newington and Wandsworth–as being 'middle class';[53] and the remaining 19 boroughs being termed 'ordinary'. This three-zone borough classification has been used to compare the foreign and UK datasets to identify any differences in distribution of servants across London and across the period. Figure 33 shows the proportional change of those enumerated in all boroughs outside the West End from 1851 to 1911.




| | 1851 | 1861 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| UK | 64% | 62% | 58% | 57% | 53% | 49% |
| Foreign | 48% | 45% | 45% | 48% | 46% | 39% |

**Figure 33: Proportion of foreign and British servants working in non-West-End boroughs**

It is clear that foreign servants were more likely to be clustered in the West End areas than the British servants, though both groups of servants see a pattern of increased West End presence over time.

Table 11 ranks the top five boroughs for each servant population in proportional terms for the 1901 data, with those of the West End featuring prominently in both samples. However, there are significant differences in population distribution, with 'middle-class' Wandsworth featuring high up

[52] H. L. Smith. *The New Survey of London Life & Labour Vol. II London Industries* (London, 1930), p. 465.
[53] Stoke Newington is part of Hackney, but due to classification issues within the data files, these two have been merged for the sake of comparison.

in the British servant data but not in the foreign sample; and the reverse being true for Stepney, an 'ordinary' borough which is not a significant proportion of the London servant population in general yet appears alongside the West End boroughs in the foreign servant data.

| Rank | British servants | Foreign servants |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Kensington (13%) | Kensington (15%) |
| 2 | Wandsworth (10%) | Westminster (12%) |
| 3 | Westminster (9%) | Hampstead (9%) |
| 4 | Paddington (7%) | Marylebone (8%) |
| 5 | Hampstead (7%) | Stepney (8%) |

**Table 11: Top five boroughs, ranked, for British and foreign servants, as a proportion of each cohort's population**

But are these statistically significant deviations? To test this, a chi-square test was used, the results of which indicate that the difference in distribution of foreign servants compared to the distribution of British servants in London (for the 1901 data) was statistically significant at both the 95% and 99% confidence levels.[54] Those boroughs where foreign servants were particularly over-represented as a proportion of all foreign servants were Stepney and Westminster; those areas where there were fewer than expected included the middle-class boroughs of Wandsworth, Lewisham and Greenwich as well as the rapidly expanding suburban boroughs of Lambeth and Camberwell.

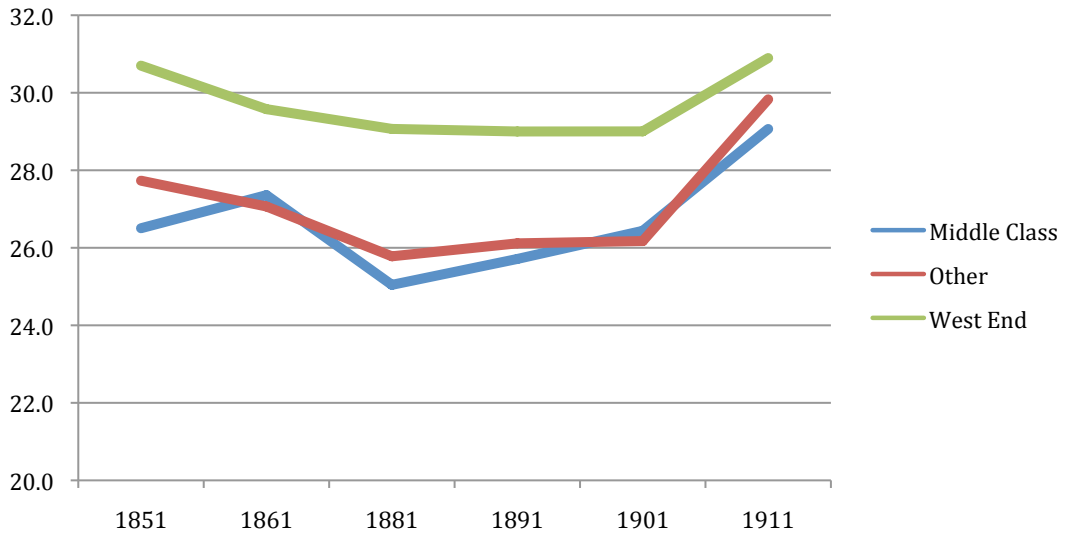



**Figure 34: Average ages of foreign servants by Middle-Class, West End and Other geographic zones over time**

[54] $\chi^2$ value is 226.74, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01.

Age also played a factor in where servants were located. The average ages of foreign servants in each of Booth's three geographical zones show that those working in non-West End households were up to three years younger than those working in the West End (Figure 34). This suggests that younger and, given the connection between age and job type, consequently less experienced servants worked in less wealthy households. But was this as a result of their foreignness, or regardless of it? Chi-square test results for 1901, testing both against the foreign servant population and against the distribution of the under-25-year-old servant population, were statistically significant at both the 95% and 99% confidence levels:[55] the likelihood of working in less wealthy districts was thus, for young foreign women, because of their foreignness and not just their age. More likely to be working in non-West-End households than either their British (same age) or their foreign (older) counterparts, this hints at a more diverse recruitment and service experience for foreign women than previously assumed.

*Staff and household size*

A further check on the socioeconomic status of employers is to consider how many other servants were employed in the household and indeed how large a household they served. In Charles Booth's survey, he found that less than a quarter lived in households of four servants or more.[56] For the foreign-born women to be considered part of much wealthier families, one would therefore expect the data to show more than 25 per cent of households to have more than four servants. The data across the period bears this out, with 40 per cent of women in 1881 working in households employing four or more staff, 34 per cent in 1891, and between 31 and 32 per cent in 1901 and 1911. However, from the turn of the century there were correspondingly even larger numbers of women working as single servants (32% in both 1901 and 1911) and in small 2–3 servant households (37% in 1901 and 36% in 1911).

[55] Compared to the British under-25 servant population, $\chi^2$ value is 46.69, and the $p$-value is $< 0.001$. The result is significant at $p=\leq 0.01$; compared to the foreign servant population as a whole, $\chi^2$ value is 96.64, and the $p$-value is $< 0.001$. The result is significant at $p=\leq 0.01$.
[56] Booth, *Life and Labour*, p. 212.

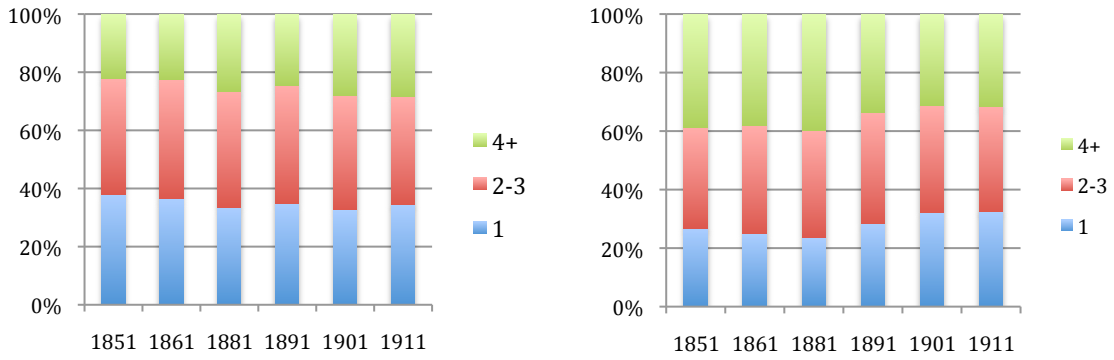
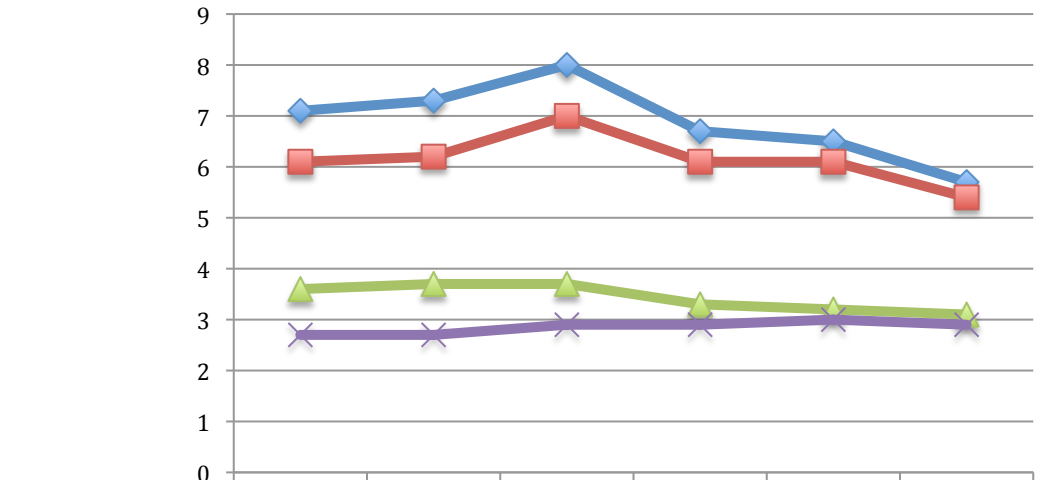



**Figure 35: Proportion of households over time employing British (L) and foreign (R) servants according to staff size**

In comparison to the British servants, foreigners were decreasingly likely to work in the larger establishments of more than four servants, in stark contrast to the British-born data, for whom the trend of working in larger staff sizes of four or more was on the increase (Figure 35). This trend is similar to that of the foreigners losing market share to the British working in skilled roles, in West End boroughs too. Nevertheless, a consistently higher proportion of foreign servants were employed in well-staffed households compared to the British-born, though the discrepancy between the two converged by 1911.

In 1881, households employing foreign servants consisted of on average 3.7 staff whereas those employing British servants comprised 2.9. By 1901, although the gap had narrowed, foreign-servant households were still larger on average (3.2) than those employing British servants (3). But both household sizes as a whole and the difference between the British- and foreign-servant household sizes decreased over time, such that by the turn of the century, foreign and British servants were working in more similar sized households, both in terms of staff size and total household size than previously (Figure 36).




| | 1851 | 1861 | 1881 | 1891 | 1901 | 1911 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FOR household | 7.1 | 7.3 | 8 | 6.7 | 6.5 | 5.7 |
| UK household | 6.1 | 6.2 | 7 | 6.1 | 6.1 | 5.4 |
| FOR staff | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 3.1 |
| UK staff | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 3 | 2.9 |

**Figure 36: Average sizes of staff and households employing foreign and British servants over time**

There was also variation across servant nationalities. Over the period, the French and Swiss tended to work in homes with much larger staff while the Eastern Europeans and Austro-Hungarians worked with the fewest (Figure 37). In 1901, the average household size served by foreign servants was 7; for the British servant cohort this was 6. But those born in Austro-Hungary and Eastern Europe served large households with very few staff.

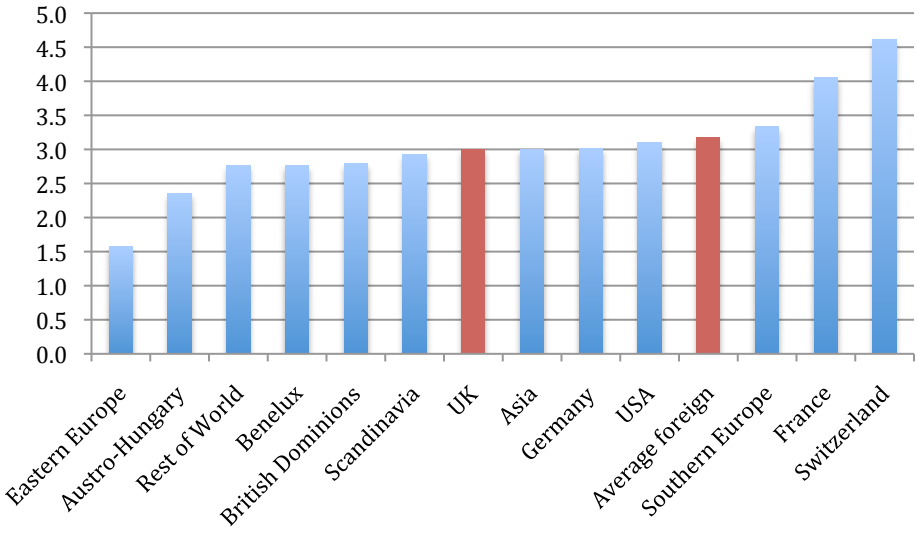



**Figure 37: Average staff size per servant's region of origin in 1901**

**(average UK and foreign sizes highlighted in red)**

To assess the socioeconomic standing of a household in this section, three variables were analysed. The class of the head's occupation, the geographic location of the household in London and the size of the staff and household in which servants worked. The findings are partially consistent with what Horn supposes, which is that most foreign servants worked for elite employers, but the picture was more diverse than imagined, with many others, especially the youngest, working in less prestigious jobs and homes. Over time, geographical and socioeconomic patterns in the British and foreign data converge, whereby both household size and staff sizes start to resemble one another. However, while British servants were increasingly likely to work for a Class 1 household as time went by, the foreign data indicates the reverse: by 1911, more foreign servants were working in non-elite households than ever before, with more than two thirds (68%) working alongside no more than two other servants and 47 per cent employed in non-Class I homes. A mixed picture thus emerges of the households employing foreigners.

**Household composition**

Scholars have successfully demonstrated that kinship ties played a role in the recruitment of (British) servant girls, often from nearby parishes,[57] and that finding work through chain migrant networks is a common method for the newly arrived.[58] It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that unaccompanied foreign girls and women might have found work with either members of their own extended family already settled in London, or at the very least with their own compatriots. Flexible use of the Hadoop platform made it possible to assesses this possibility, using matching techniques to seek pre-existing national connections between servant and employer. Concatenated strings of data (consisting of an individual's position in the household schedule, their gender and their relationship to the head) were generated for each member of a household in which a foreign servant was listed. This was used to track the birthplaces of other household members, particularly those who were born in the same country as the servant, and was used to show how country of birth might be an indicator of servant isolation, recruitment practices and employer preferences.

[57] Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers', p. 407.
[58] D. Baines, 'European Emigration, 1815-1930: Looking at the Emigration Decision Again', *The Economic History Review*, 47/3 (1994), p. 530.

*Foreigners in the household*

As time went by, it seems foreign servants were more likely to find themselves in households with at least one other person from a foreign country. Figure 38 shows the proportion of foreign servants living in households with foreigners increased considerably from 29 per cent in 1851, reaching almost a half in 1901 before dropping back to 44 per cent by 1911. This was also mirrored in the proportion who worked for foreign households heads, which rose dramatically from under a quarter in 1851 (24%) to almost half (49%) in 1911. Among the British-servant-employing households, the proportion of foreign heads also increased, but from a very low four per cent to just 12. These 'international' home environments might reflect the increasingly multi-national nature of London as a global and imperial city, but also perhaps the possibility that foreign employers found it easier (or cheaper) to hire other foreigners, rather than British women whose numbers were not only decreasing but could afford to be selective about who they worked for.

It is clear that there is a correlation between foreign employers and foreign servants, but how closely were their national origins aligned? Table 12 lists the most common origins of household employers by their servant's own country of origin. Despite large groups working for the British, there were significant numbers employed by their own compatriots. Taking census data from 1911, the largest contingent of each group of servants worked for British heads of household, except for German, Russian and Italian servants who were more likely to work for their own countrymen. The proportion of each servant region working for British heads varied considerably, from just 49 per cent of Swedes up to predictably high percentages of British, Indians and Australians. There certainly seems to be a correlation between certain nationalities, and considerable variation among the different regional origins of employers.

| Servant's country of birth | Regional origin and proportion of most common household head | Regional origin of 2nd most common household head | Regional origin of 3rd most common household head |
|---|---|---|---|
| British | **British** (86%) | German | Indian |
| German | **German** (39%) | British | Austrian |
| France | British (54%) | **French** | German |
| Switzerland | British (62%) | **Swiss** | German |
| India | British (83%) | **Indian** | German |
| Russia | **Russian** (64%) | British | Poland |
| Italy | **Italian** (43%) | British | Swiss |
| Austria | British (32%) | **Austrian** | German |
| USA | British (79%) | **USA** | Australian |
| Norway | British (74%) | **Norwegian** | Indian |
| Sweden | British (49%) | **Swedish** | German |
| Denmark | British (58%) | **Danish** | Austrian |
| Australia | British (82%) | **Australian** | Indian |

**Table 12: Top three nationalities most likely to be heads of foreign servant households by the most numerous servant nationalities in 1911**

### *Shared origins*

Oral histories of twentieth-century servants 'dwell on the loneliness of domestic service', according to Delap.[59] Hidden behind the walls of their employer's household, and working in unfamiliar settings, it is important to gauge to what extent a servant might have been isolated by her foreignness and, as explored later in Chapter 6, how that impacted her. The census data reveals that sharing a home with someone (anyone) from the same country accounted for somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of foreign servants, a relatively steady 26 per cent shared origins with the household head or his wife but from 1881 onwards, they were decreasingly likely to work alongside other servants of the same nationality. Were certain foreign traits to have been positively regarded by employers, we might expect to see households with multiple women from the same countries; this was not the case, though. No more than 18 per cent of foreign women in each of the six census years worked with another servant from the same country, falling to 14 per cent by 1911. The fact that so few households contained more than one servant of a given nationality suggests women from the same place, perhaps friends or former colleagues, were not hired together and

[59] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 48.

may not have helped to recruit others of her background into the household, as we might expect in a chain migration scenario.

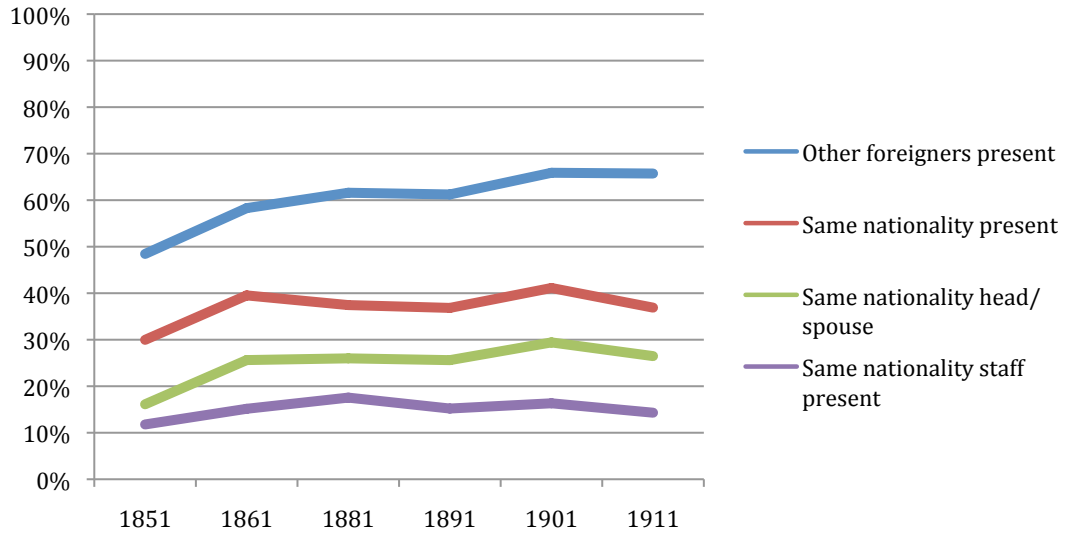



**Figure 38: Proportion over time of foreign servants in households with other foreigners; with other people of her own nationality; with employers of the same nationality; and with other staff of the same nationality**

What was more evident was the servant sharing her country of origin with the household head. Studies of domestic service in Rochdale, Exeter and Lancaster, though based on smaller data samples, have found that at least 40 per cent of all servants were in some way connected to their employers through kinship ties or shared geographical or class origins.[60] Such a strategy for a foreign servant would make for a less traumatic introduction to work in a new country, and a shared language would smooth communication issues, benefiting both parties. Comparing those women who worked for their own compatriots (about one in four) with those who did not (three quarters) offers an opportunity to explore any significant differences between their potential experiences. Although the majority of household heads were male,[61] in most cases it was the mistress who was responsible for hiring staff, so her country of origin was also captured and analysed.[62]

[60] See for example Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers'.
[61] Female household heads increased from 23% in 1851 to 29% in 1911
[62] This was made possible by matching the birth country of the first-mentioned woman on the census schedule, in households where the head was male.

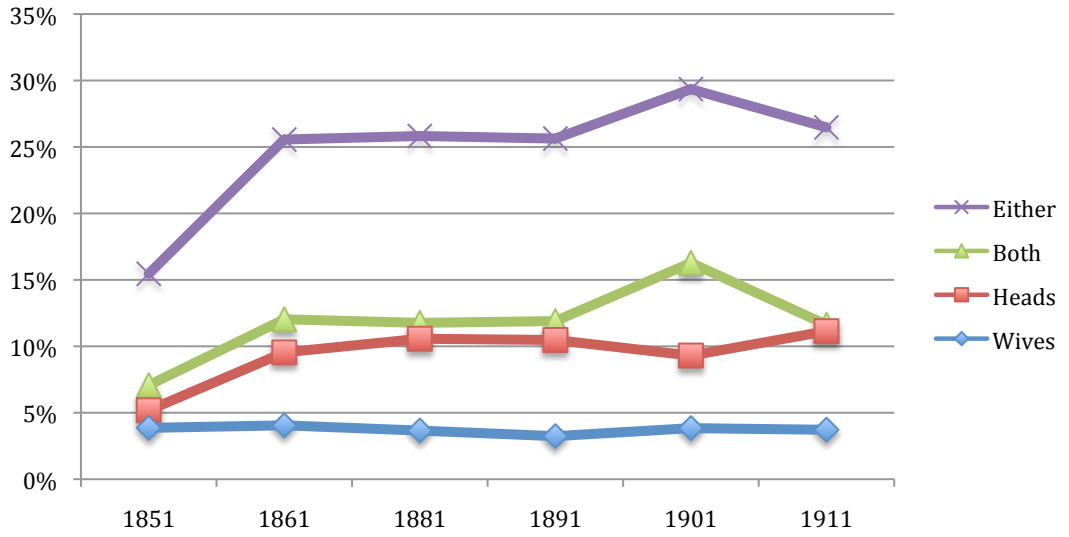



**Figure 39: Proportions of foreign servants working for household heads, wives, couples and either head or wife of the same nationality**

Data was collected for households where the household *head* alone matched the nationality of the servant (i.e. not the wife); the nationality of the *wife* alone (i.e. not the head) matched the servant; the nationality of the servant matched *both* that of the head and the wife; and a cumulative figure where the servant's nationality matched *either* the head or the wife's nationality (Figure 39). The data suggests that the proportion of households where a servant's nationality matched one of her employers remained from 1861 relatively steady at well below a third. The proportion of servants in households where wives were the only people with whom they shared their nationality stayed low at less than five per cent. This suggests that overall there was a stronger correlation between a head's place of birth and that of the servant than that of the servant and her mistress.[63] However, since the number of foreigners employing staff increased rapidly over the period, it is surprising that these proportions are stubbornly low. The connection between a servant's country of origin and that of her employer's is not as significant as expected, or at least not significant across *all* foreign servants.

*Chain migration?*

These figures conceal a degree of variation, and are ripe for analysis in understanding any differences in context for women working for foreigners and those working for their own compatriots. Figure 40 shows that the servants most likely to be working for someone with the

[63] Because this exercise relies on countries of birth as a proxy for nationality, the legal framework forcing women to adopt the nationality of her husband upon marriage does not apply here.

same birthplace were those from the regions of Eastern Europe, Germany and Southern Europe. Those least likely to be working for their own countrymen were those from the USA, the British Dominions, Asia, the Rest of World and Switzerland.

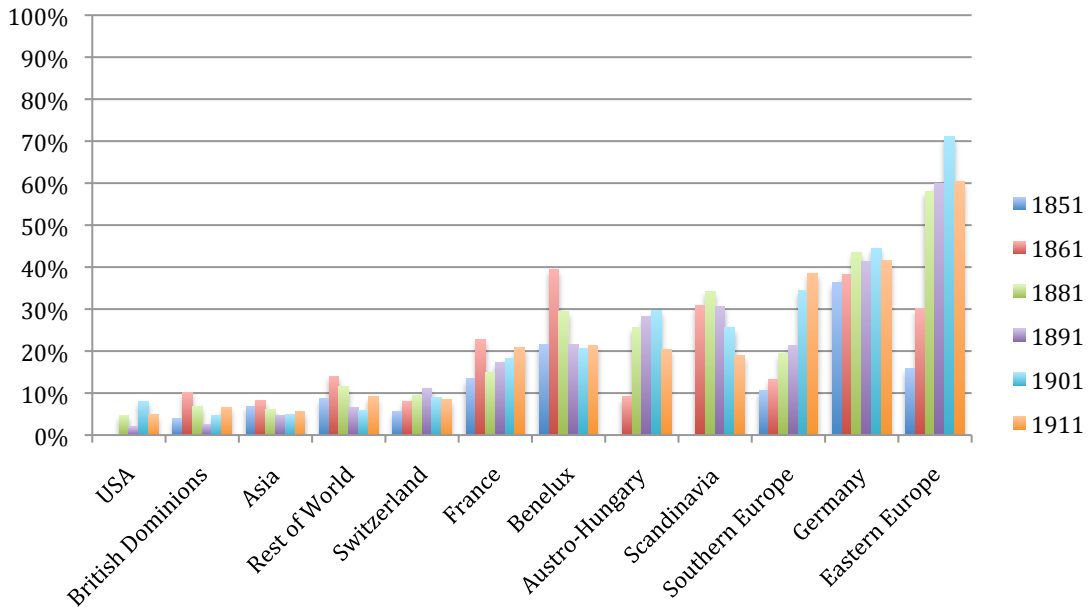



**Figure 40: Birth places of foreign servants working for employers born in the same country**

It may be the case that newly-arrived servants sought work with their own compatriots or that they were hired direct from their homes, rather than being recruited in London after arrival. If this is the case, one would expect them to be younger than their counterparts who were working for other groups. By comparing the age distribution of each set of women (Figure 41), this theory is borne out, with the data showing that from 1861, women working in same-nationality households were more likely to be aged under 25 than their counterparts working for other nationalities. Further, the largest group of women working for same-nationality heads from 1881 to 1901 were those in the 15–25 age group. A chi-square test for 1911 confirms that the age distribution of same-nationality servants compared to both the foreign servant cohort and the London servant population as a whole is statistically significant at the 95% and the 99% confidence levels.[64] The age-range that was most over-represented in both tests was 20–24, hinting at an age-based connection to familial and potential kinship that has not previously been possible to establish.

[64] Compared to the foreign servant population: $\chi^2$ value is 357.7, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01; compared to the London servant population as a whole: $\chi^2$ value is 176.31, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01.

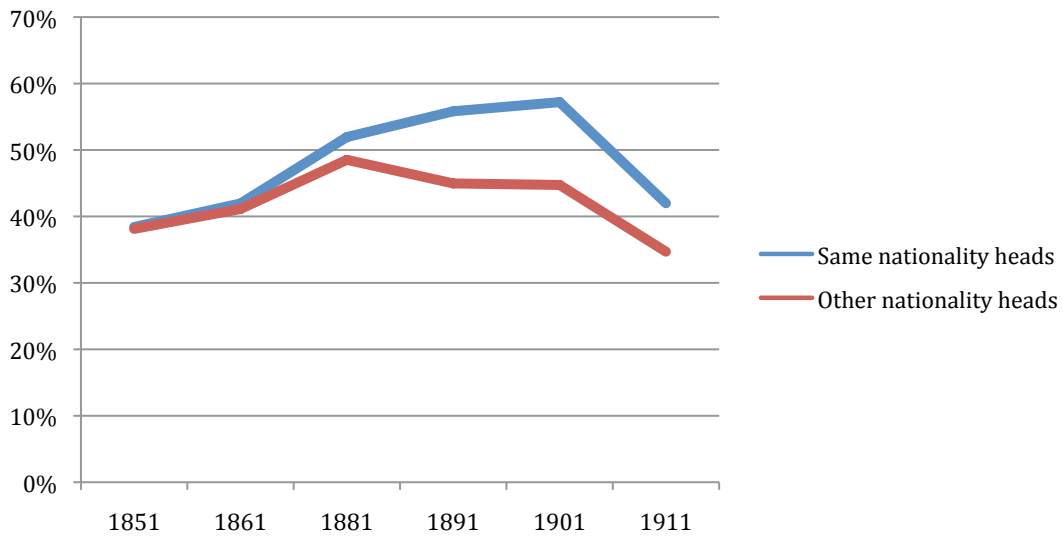



**Figure 41: Proportion of servants aged under 25 enumerated with same-nationality and other nationality heads over time**

Comparing the average ages for these two cohorts with that of the British data further reveals how distinctive a group the same-nationality category of women is. While the average age increases for the non-same-nationality foreign servants and the British servants from 1881, it takes a further 20 years for the same-nationality servant data to show a similar increase (Figure 42).

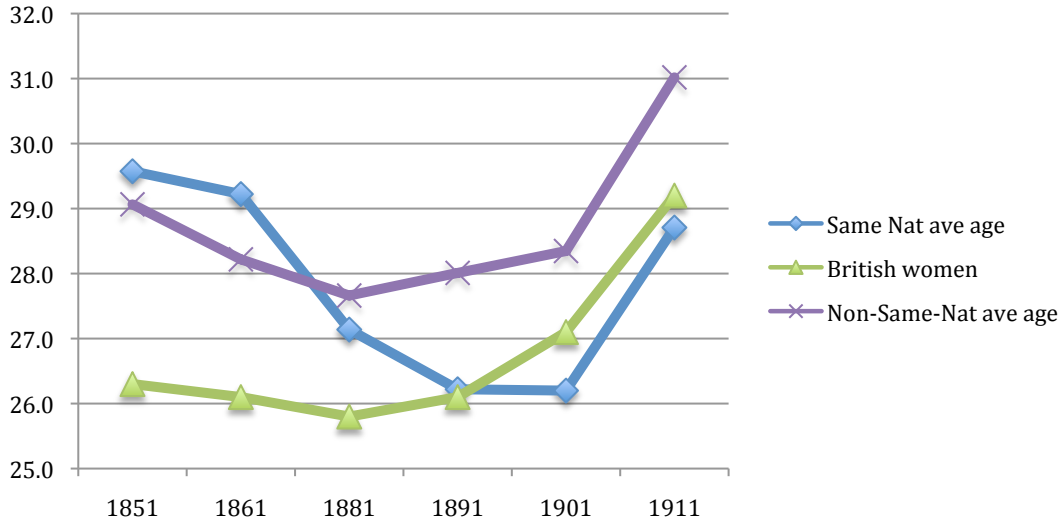



**Figure 42: Average ages over time for foreign servants (working for same and different nationality employers) and British servants**

The type of work carried out by women in households where they shared their national origins with the head or his wife was also thought likely to be significant. Figure 43 tracks the proportion of women working as upper servants in both groups of women and reveals a very large gap between the two. In 1911, fewer than one in ten women were employed as upper servants among the same-nationality group, against more than one in three working for other nationalities. It appears that women working for compatriots were much less likely to be specialising in skilled domestic roles than those working for foreigners.

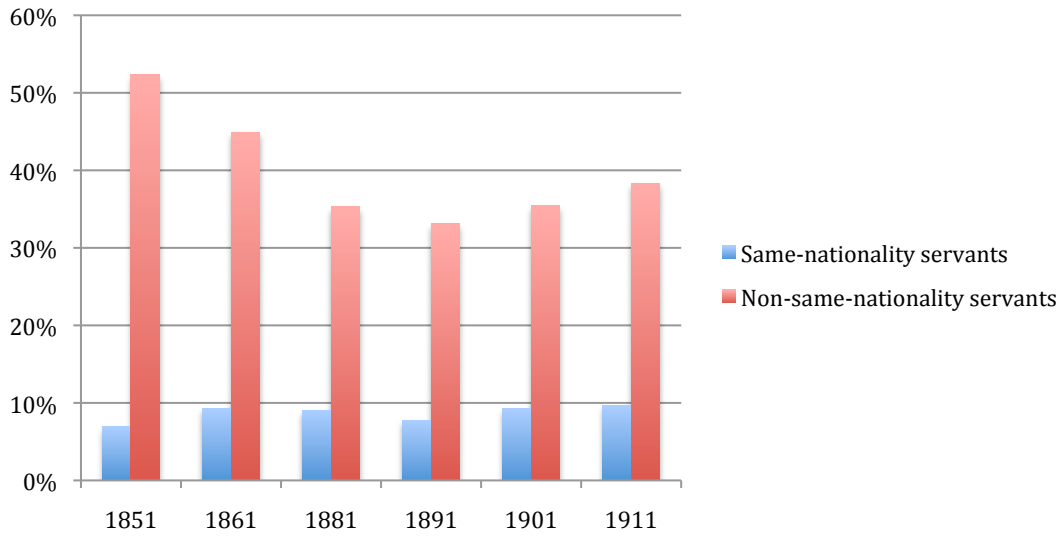



**Figure 43: Proportion of upper servants employed in same-nationality and non-same-nationality households over time**

Assessing the household in which they worked can also reveal key characteristics about the employer's socioeconomic status in cases where servant and head came from the same country. Of those households which employed a servant of the same nationality as the head or his spouse, only a relatively small proportion (20% in 1911) were employed in Class I occupations throughout the period, compared to all servant households (53% in 1911 as shown in Figure 27).

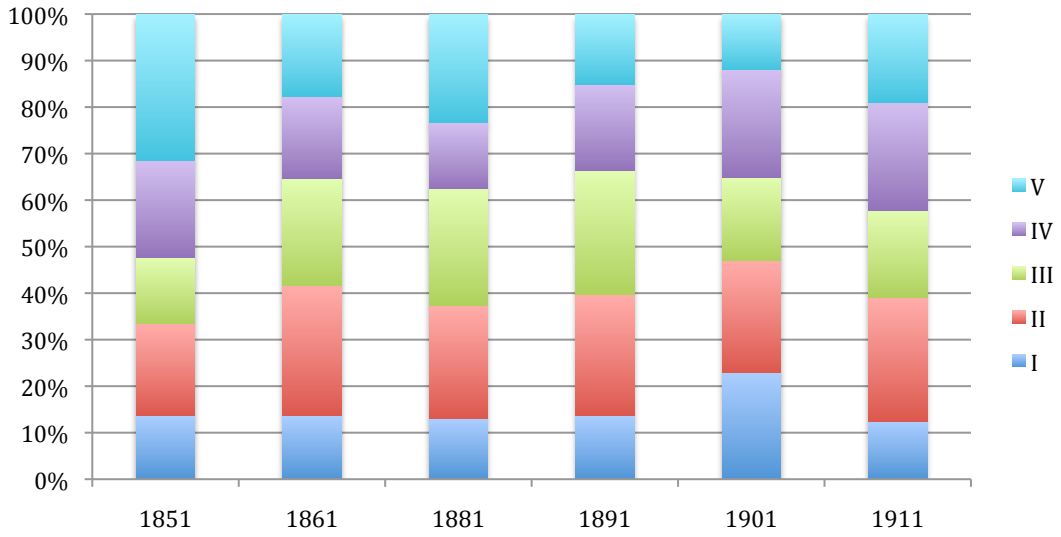



**Figure 44: Socioeconomic class of households employing servants of the same nationality as the heads and/or spouses**

Yet did this lower socioeconomic profile extend to lower staff sizes, another proxy for relative affluence? Figure 45 shows the proportion of single servants serving employers born in the same country as them was higher than for those working for other nationalities: in 1901, the figure was as high as 49 per cent, compared to 25 per cent of foreign servants working for others. Throughout the period, more than three quarters of women of the same nationality as the head(s) were employed in households with fewer than four staff, compared to no more than two thirds of those employed by foreigners.

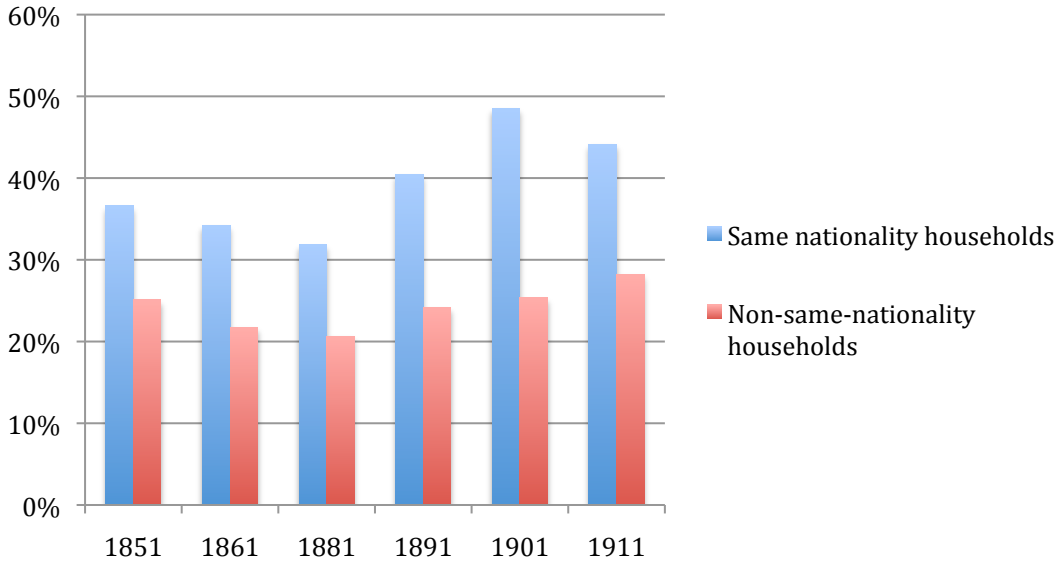



**Figure 45: Proportion of same-nationality servants and non-same-nationality servants working in single-servant households**

Along with the socioeconomic class and staff size, the geographic spread of these households is an important indicator in assessing the social standing of employers. Using the same district classification used by Smith, Figure 46 tracks the proportion of households in the West End employing staff of the same nationality compared to those employing different nationality staff. The data shows that a much lower proportion of the same-nationality households were to be found in the wealthier districts of London throughout the period.

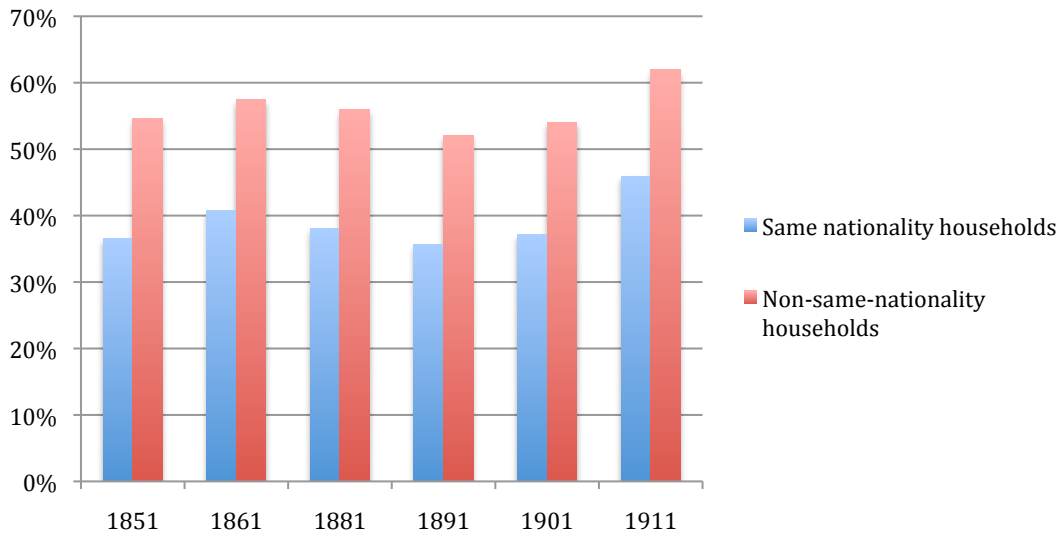



**Figure 46: Proportion of households located in West End boroughs employing same-nationality servants and non-same-nationality servants over time**

The difference between the geographical distribution of those servants who worked for employers of the same nationality compared to all foreign servants was also statistically significant at both the 95% and 99% confidence levels.[65] Those boroughs where same-nationality pairings were over-represented were Stepney and Hackney, and where they were most under-represented were the West End boroughs of Kensington, Westminster, Paddington, Marylebone and Chelsea. This is a strong indication, therefore, that servants hired by their own compatriots were least likely to be working in the wealthiest homes in the wealthiest districts.

Throughout the period, the number of foreign servants and the number of foreign employers increased reflecting a more diverse London in the late Victorian period. Of those women who were

[65] $\chi^2$ value is 410.18, and the $p$-value is < 0.001. The result is significant at $p$=≤0.01.

employed by people from their own countries, a distinct cohort of mostly under-25 year olds was found to have worked as ordinary servants in a small staff for lower socioeconomic households located in the least wealthy areas. By 1911, at least a fifth of all servants from non-English speaking regions (except the Swiss) were working for others of the same nationality. While it might therefore be supposed that these women were experiencing a similar entry to the domestic service market as their British peers by using kinship or geographic ties to secure work in the early part of their work lives, the total proportion found doing so falls well below that cited in the British literature. These findings are therefore important when considering how different foreign servants accessed work in London, and how recruitment systems may have operated, topics considered in Chapter 4.

## Conclusion

What emerges from this detailed examination, both of the I-CeM datasets and the surveys and reports issued by the General Registrar and government ministries over more than 60 years, is a much richer and more complex picture of the foreign domestic servant population than has previously been understood. Although they represented a small percentage of the total number of women employed in the domestic service sector during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a better understanding of the short-term nature of their time in London has made it possible to generate a more accurate estimate of individual foreign women who experienced domestic service in London; at over 200,000, they represent a sizeable group of migrants, particularly compared to their male counterparts. Over-represented in the nation's capital, they also constituted the largest occupational category for foreign women throughout the period and discernible shifts in both numbers and trends from the 1881 census onwards, linked to socioeconomic and political upheavals in the sending countries, explains its selection as the starting date for the focus of this study. The high proportion of single servants among the foreign population shows that rather than accompanying emigrating husbands, as it is assumed migrating women do in the literature, foreign servants migrated as unaccompanied females, which thus represents a gendered experience that is poorly addressed in the current literature on historical migration to Britain.

The numbers hide more diversity than previously imagined. Although it might be possible to conclude that service was still dominated by the young, unmarried woman at a pre-marriage life stage, as experienced by millions of others, the older ages of most of the foreign servant cohort hints at a group that differs from the British working in London. Analysing the occupational distribution of foreign servants revealed that, in line with assumptions held by Horn, proportionally more foreign than British women were engaged as upper servants (even though the gap narrowed over time) but were more often enumerated as ordinary servants, complicating the idea that foreigners were usually employed at the top of the servant hierarchy. The findings also confirm Horn's observations that certain nationalities were most likely to be employed in specific occupational roles, particularly the French lady's maids. However, they were not as numerous as expected; with these roles increasingly taken by women from other regional groups, the picture for these stereotypical job types is more mixed than the literature has hitherto recognised.

The majority of foreign servants were enumerated in Class I households in increasingly West End locations and working in a staff of more than four people. However, this picture is fragmented according to the servant's nationality and her age, both of which played a major part in how likely she was to work for the wealthiest group of households. This hints at the role of some sections of the foreign servant cohort functioning as cheap labour to fill rapidly-appearing gaps in the market, perhaps the effect of the 'servant problem' that saw those British women, who did choose service, increasingly engaged in upper servant roles in wealthier districts. The distribution both socioeconomically and geographically of foreign-servant-employing households during this period suggests a much more varied picture than previously imagined, offering an insight into a rapidly developing city, replete with an expanding middle class and aspirational ideals of the home and those who served in it.

Taking full advantage of the flexibility of I-CeM and the SQL queries on Hadoop, the chapter identified cases where servants shared the same national origins as others in the household. Foreign staff were more likely to work for foreign employers than the British cohort, which suggests that British women may have been less interested in serving this type of employer, based away from the West End and emerging suburbs in small-staffed households. Most likely to be working in households with no-one else from their own countries, most foreign servants were likely working in

linguistic and cultural (if not actual) isolation. In contrast to Pooley's findings, the proportion of households with the same geographic origins was not as high as expected, never constituting more than 30 per cent. However, that group of women varied significantly from the rest of their foreign peers in age, occupational role, geographical location, household staff size and socioeconomic class. Could it have been that certain sectors of the foreign servant cohort were stepping in to work for households the British women had shunned? This hints at a function of service for foreigners that differed not just from the British cohort, but between those women who worked for their own countryfolk and those who did not.

A group of women whose experiences closely mirrored those of the British were connected by empire, language or economy and came, perhaps unsurprisingly, from America, Canada, Australia and indeed the British in India. Not segregated or othered in the same way as those women born in countries speaking different languages, for the purposes of the thesis, they do not form part of the subsequent analysis. Among those whose profiles were found to diverge significantly from the British, a pattern has emerged of two groups of women: (1) those whose servant experiences were largely connected to upper servant roles in wealthy households (most often the Western Europeans); and (2) those whose experiences were connected more often to youth, inexperience, poorer households and general service jobs (most often Southern and Eastern Europeans). These categories are not rigid, but understanding the diversity of the demographics, geographical spread and socioeconomic environment of the foreign female servants will help to frame subsequent findings in the research. With a firmer understanding of the shape and size of the foreign servant group, the thesis now shifts its unit of analysis from the foreign servants as a numerical datapoint, to the lived experiences of individuals. Chapter 3 explores how and why these women moved to London and how structural mechanisms helped or hindered them in their endeavours.

# Chapter 3

## White armbands and red tape: Regulations, infrastructure, departures and arrivals

The foreign servants who appeared in the census returns up until 1901 will have been able to have travelled to Britain largely unimpeded by state controls. Movement across national borders in the period leading up to 1905 is widely understood to have been unregulated at a national level, and it was not until after World War I that restrictions were applied systematically or with any kind of political intent. Before 1905, local conditions on movement applied, such as the provisions of the poor laws which prevented settlement of those from outside a parish, as explored in Chapter 1. It was not until concerns surrounding the arrival of large numbers of Eastern European Jews in the late nineteenth century that central government had any appetite for curbing entry to the UK.[1] It would be another fifteen years, at the close of World War I, before national borders ossified and formal passports and permits were required to pass across political, and often invisible, boundaries. In trying to understand how foreign servants experienced being 'other', this chapter examines how they were affected by structural mechanisms of migration: what permitted, caused, enabled or prevented them from leaving their own countries to work in London?

What follows is firstly a survey of government legislation that affected foreign female domestic servants, either directly or indirectly, up until the outbreak of World War II, paying particular attention to the interplay between immigration and labour market controls as they applied especially to women from overseas. This is followed by an analysis of how young single women were 'protected', in their vulnerable state in transit, by mechanisms that would became intricately connected to their lives. The chapter then alters perspective to understand the motivations of the women in migrating and to what extent they were able to successfully navigate the regulatory and protection infrastructure that surrounded them.

[1] For a fuller discussion of the origins of the 1905 Aliens Act including a number of non-Jewish groups bound up in a more general anti-alienism sentiment of the period, see B. Gainer, *The Alien Invasion?: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London, 1972); D. Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti Alienism in British Society before 1940', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 11/3 (1992).

## State regulations

Until the start of the twentieth century, there was very little regulation on the movement of non-British citizens in and out of the UK. Entitlement to support was defined at the parochial level, and as such, controlling who crossed national borders was of little consequence to central government. Indeed, although the Aliens Act of 1848 allowed the Home Secretary to control the entry of aliens and provided for their deportation, it lay for two years on the Statue Book and was never used.[2] Notwithstanding in-country registration of foreigners, a system that sought periodically (usually during times of war) to identify and control certain nationality aliens in Britain, it was not until after the Aliens Act 1905 that immigration officers were stationed at designated ports across the country and given powers to admit or reject landings under the authority of the Home Office.

### *The Aliens Act (1905)*

By the close of the nineteenth century, there was increasing concern in some circles about the large number of Russian Poles entering the UK and in particular causing perceived overcrowding, hygiene problems and wage devaluation in eastern districts of London. This prompted a Royal Commission on Alien Immigration whose report in 1903 recommended that '"undesirable" aliens should be kept out of Britain'.[3] After considerable amendments, the Aliens Act, now considered to be the birth of today's border control mechanisms, was finally enacted on 10 August 1905 and committed to barring 'undesirable and destitute aliens'. The Act only applied to those arriving in steerage where there were more than 20 passengers on the ship; the better class traveller continued to enter Britain unimpeded. Once landed, there were no further restrictions or conditions which immigrants were required to meet.[4] If it appeared to be in the public interest, the Home Secretary could deport an alien even if not convicted of a criminal offence, though this was reliant on a court order.[5] Once deported, re-entry was not allowed. Despite it being poorly enforced (although not repealed) by the subsequent Liberal government, the Act was pivotal; from 1905, entry to the sovereign state of the United Kingdom would until the Immigration Act (1971) be discretionary. But it was not until World War I, when an increasing international appetite for border control was

[2] C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 71.
[3] Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p. 71.
[4] Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p. 72.
[5] R. Kershaw and M. Pearsall, *Immigrants and Aliens: A Guide to Sources on UK Immigration and Citizenship* (Kew, 2004), p. 41.

given political justification, that state regulations impinged on the lives of foreign servants in London.

### *First World War legislation*

In a bid to restrict enemy aliens at the outbreak of the war, the government imposed new restrictions under the Aliens Registration Act, 1914. It did not prevent their entry to the country, but required all adults over 16 to register with the police, providing detailed information on immigrants for the first time: names, professions, ages, races and their locations within the country. They were required to register at their local police station within 48 hours (for those living in London this was usually Bow Street) and had their registration cards annotated each time they moved address (an example of which is shown in Figure 47); failure to do so was an offence.

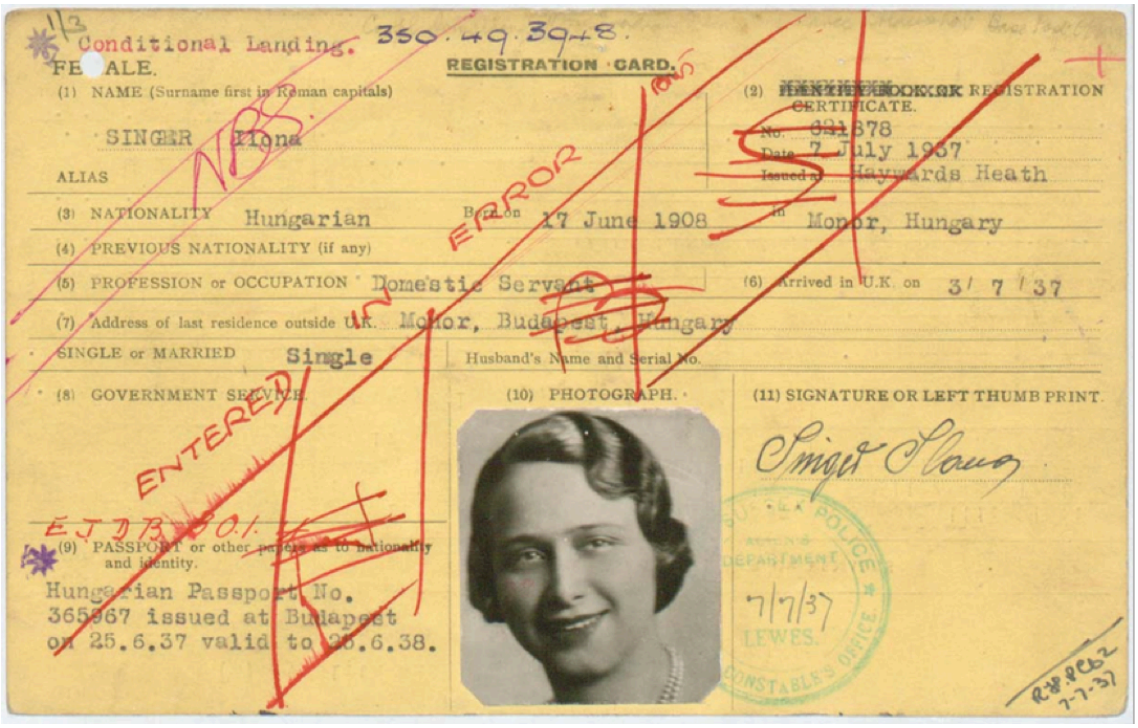



**Figure 47: Alien registration card for Ilona Singer, issued 1937 at Haywards Heath (TNA, MEPO 35/34/6)**

At the end of the war, there were renewed concerns about aliens and their potential harm to Britain and its interests. The wartime restrictions introduced in 1914 were further amended by an Order in Council in 1915, making foreigners subject to passport control, and subsequently consolidated and extended under the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1919. This was designed to prevent foreigners from undercutting wages or entering certain professions, and granting unprecedented powers to the Home Secretary. The Aliens Order, 1920, made under the Act, set out stringent

restrictions on alien entry to the UK and is a pivotal piece of legislation in the history of foreign domestic servants in Britain.

## *The Aliens Order (1920)*

**Applying the Aliens Order, 1920-1929**

The 1920 Aliens Order made the first explicit connection between immigration and labour control, with huge implications for the domestic service sector. In accordance with Article A (3) (b) of the Aliens Order, 1920, the Employment and Insurance Department of the Ministry of Labour was responsible for issuing work permits to foreign workers seeking employment in the UK on application by prospective employers. If a foreign woman were already in the UK and sought to renew a domestic service work permit, she applied instead directly to the Home Office, which would cross-check with the Ministry of Labour for any adverse reasons affecting the renewal. The DSPs granted an individual the right to work for a specific employer for a set time (usually a year); they could move jobs, providing a permit was applied for by their new employer, but they had no right to engage in any other form of employment. Essentially, the system confined these foreign women to domestic work, since their permission to be landed in Britain was predicated on them having a place.

The Order was intended to restrict foreign labour, and the Ministry of Labour's function was to control foreigners' access to certain trades or sectors. Musicians, for example, could be admitted for playing music but not for dancing; milliners, dressmakers and agricultural labourers could not be hired for seasonal work; and tight restrictions applied to foreign male workers. Before 1914, most of the leading hotels and restaurants, particularly in the West End of London, employed only foreign waiters but '[s]ince 1920 permits for waiters have been generally refused'.[6] Permits for domestic servants, governesses and foreign correspondence clerks, however, were 'issued with somewhat greater freedom',[7] though former enemy aliens (meaning any citizen of the German Empire: Hungary, Austria, Bulgaria, Turkey etc.) were not, without special permission from the

[6] *Parl. Pap.* (1928/9), Cm 3318, Procedure Regulating the Entry of Foreigners for Employment in Great Britain (Aliens Order, 1920, article 1 (3) (b)) April 1929. Memorandum by the Minister of Labour, p. 4.
[7] *Parl. Pap.* (1928/9), Cm 3318, p. 4.

Home Secretary, permitted to land in the UK for at least three years after the Act; it would not be until 1925 that Germans were once again issues DSPs.[8]

Deciding which occupational groups were eligible for permits lay with the Minister of Labour, and thus foreign entrance to the UK for employment purposes began to be connected to over-supply or shortages in the labour market, a significant shift from the free movement of labour in existence before the outbreak of World War I. These policy directives were occurring against a domestic backdrop of high post-war unemployment and a significant drop in the numbers of British women (re-)entering domestic service. In an attempt to redress the supply imbalance, in a particularly unwelcome policy, unemployed women claimants were forced by Employment Exchanges to take domestic work, whether they were servants or not, or forfeit their 'dole' money.[9] With overtones of the masterless women legislation of the fourteenth century, the state continued to consider service to be 'suitable employment for any woman, whatever her previous training or lack of training.'[10]

Although British women were refusing to return to the parlours and kitchens in domestic work, foreign women continued to apply. In the early days of the Order, with official numbers of total job seekers outstripping demand, a policy directive in 1922 sought to curb domestic service applications from abroad, seen as surplus labour. Under this short-lived policy, all permits for foreign domestic servants were refused unless the services of the alien were required on the grounds of language (e.g. a German-teaching mother's help). The Department staff immediately ran into problems and the situation was deemed 'untenable'. The directive came into effect on 30 September 1922 and resulted in 190 cases out of 248 being rejected in just five weeks.[11] The Department had discovered that Employment Exchanges were reporting a genuine shortage of British domestic servants, so from 3 November it was decided to relax the policy, providing that employers committed to paying a minimum annual salary to their foreign staff, equivalent to what

[8] *Parl. Pap.* (1926), Cm 2698, Aliens Order 1920, Statistics in Regard to Alien Passengers who Entered and Left the United Kingdom in 1925, p. 14.
[9] Under the Labour Exchanges Act in 1909, Employment Exchanges were set up in local areas to place unemployed men and women in work.
[10] *Parl. Pap.* (1920), Cm 1054, Ministry of Labour. Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Work of the Employment Exchanges, p. 92.
[11] '[Article 1 (3) (h) of the Aliens Order 1920: considerations governing the procedure regarding issue of permits in respect of foreign domestic servants (58)]', 1922, TNA, LAB 2/1187/11 EDAR 2718, 1922 (amended).

was expected by a British maid. This was set in 1922 at £26pa,[12] and in the three weeks that followed, the application rejection rate dropped from 77% to 28%, or 16 out of 58 permits.

However, even after this adjustment, the process governing permits was far from smooth. From an early stage, the Department staff faced a disparity between stated unemployment figures and numbers of suitable candidates for domestic work. In a file note to the Minister (at the time, Anderson Montague Barlow), a departmental assistant secretary explained how the lack of a trade body for domestic servants was hampering efforts to issue appropriate numbers of permits.

> In the case of applications for the admission of musicians, it is open to the Department to seek the advice of the Musicians Union before granting or refusing a permit, and if is it is practicable for the Musicians Union to provide suitable musicians to fill the vacancy we have a fairly tenable ground upon which to refuse a permit; but in the case of domestic servants, not only is there no Union to which we could have recourse for candidates, but we are told by the applicants (and the evidence is such that the statement cannot be doubted) that the ordinary Registry Offices are unable to provide suitable people.[13]

By the end of January 1923, however, the Minister and the Department staff finally agreed on a uniform application of the Order as follows: given that '*satisfactory* British servants cannot be obtained in sufficient numbers to meet the demand',[14] a permit would be issued if (a) the applicant had made a reasonable effort to hire a local woman and (b) would offer wages at the correct rate, or (c) that there were 'some special reasons either of personal attachment between the alien and the prospective employer or the prospective employer is an invalid'.[15]

**Applying the Aliens Order, 1929-1938**

In April 1929, 'in view of the prevailing volume of unemployment and to safeguard the interests of British workers', the policy governing domestic service work permits changed.[16] Applicants now had to provide evidence of what efforts they had made to secure British labour, alongside ensuring that they would pay no less than that usually paid to British employees. The connection between conditional immigration and the labour market was made explicit, as the Report of the Ministry of

[12] Even this was loosely interpreted at times. See the Secretary of State's comment in a minute dated 20 Jun 1921 in which he 'did not contemplate that £26 was to be taken as a rigid minimum without regard to the special circumstances of each case'. 'Employment Department and Employment and Insurance Department: Minute regarding the question of "alien domestic servants"', 1921, TNA, LAB 2/1187/9 EDAR 2190/2.
[13] TNA, LAB 2/1187/11 EDAR 2718/1922 (amended). For more information on the Musicians' Union, see M. Cloonan and M. Brennan, 'Alien Invasions: The British Musicians ' Union and Foreign Musicians', *Popular Music*, 32/2 (2013).
[14] My italics.
[15] TNA, LAB 2/1187/11 EDAR 2718/1922 (amended).
[16] *Parl. Pap.* (1928/9), Cm 3318, p. 2.

Labour for the year 1930 explains: 'applications for foreign domestic servants were subjected to stricter scrutiny, because there was reason to believe that the difficulty in obtaining this class of labour from within the country had recently decreased.'[17] It is no coincidence that the policy change happened in the year of the Great Depression, a time when large numbers of young women were arriving in London from the economically crippled coalfields of South Wales and Durham.

A final directive was issued in 1938, marking the end of the period affecting this thesis. From August 1938, rather than applying to the Ministry of Labour, those wishing to bring foreign domestic labour from abroad were to apply to their local Employment Exchanges who would then forward the applications and their own recommendations to the divisional offices, then on to the Headquarters to be determined.[18] This marks a shift in the way foreign female labour was being managed, and was likely a response to the sheer volume of applications being handled centrally. Finally, foreign domestic servants would continue to register address or occupation changes at police stations until well beyond the Second World War, but Ministry of Labour permits were from 1938 not required for aliens already in the country, drastically reducing paperwork and releasing many thousands of foreign servants from the uncertainty of short-term permits.

While World War I gave legitimacy to stricter border controls and tightened restrictions on undesirable or 'dangerous' immigrant flows, these seem to have disproportionately affected men. Once peace returned to Europe, Britain saw thousands of women applying through its domestic service permit scheme to work in Britain in numbers that dwarfed those pre-1914 or even pre-1905. As such, the interwar years represent a stimulation of immigration to Britain in this period, albeit a gendered one. This supports McKeown's findings that challenge the notion that 1914 marked the end of mass migrations. Arguing from a global perspective, he demonstrates that migration cannot be so rigidly defined into pre- and post-1914 periods.[19] The findings of both this chapter and of interwar servant number increases in Chapter 2 add extra evidence to his argument.

[17] *Parl. Pap.* (1931/2), Cm 4044, p. 30.
[18] 'Domestics from Abroad: Circulars to Police', 1938, TNA, HO 213/323.
[19] McKeown, 'Global Migration, 1846-1940', p. 155.

**Blacklisted aliens**

A key feature of post-1914 legislation was the increased scrutiny under which foreign women were placed. A series of Ministry of Labour files, entitled 'Employment and Training Department files relating to aliens', contain detailed cases of aliens considered untrustworthy by the government. In most cases the case subjects are workers (e.g. domestic servants, French onion sellers, entertainment or circus performers), but files were also held on people who were considered to be poor employers. Anyone deemed suspect had the word 'BLACKLISTED' written in red next to their name on the file cover. Mostly these were aliens, but they include British names too, often boarding house keepers who attempted to pass off the import of foreign labour as for their own private domestic purposes (and thus in breach of the domestic worker permit conditions). Threaded throughout the files were official judgement calls on how each case was to be treated. The original Order gave power to the Home Secretary for final decisions on deportation, but information, correspondence and even secretly gathered evidence by police are held on file, ultimately to prevent a blacklisted alien being issued with a permit (either to employ or be employed) and, thus, by extension, forcing their repatriation. Read against the grain, these files form the basis for understanding many of the foreign servants' motivations and experiences of migration that follow, both in this chapter and subsequently. The impact of the wartime legislation, and in particular the 1920 Aliens Order, on the foreign female domestic servant, cannot be underestimated, but surveillance and control was not confined to state apparatus alone.

## Protecting the lone female: *in loco parentis*

For the most part, foreign women landing at docks up and down the country prior to World War I faced few state restrictions. However, a raft of social and institutional attitudes shaped these women's experiences throughout the period that had just as an important effect on their lives in London. Sinke reminds us that in the late nineteenth century, 'the definition of a victimized woman was sometimes so broad that almost every woman traveling alone was subject to policing during the migration process.'[20] A remarkable range of philanthropic, religious and voluntary organisations sprang up for the protection of women 'in transit' and, together with government involvement, form the structural mechanisms in which the servants operated.

[20] Sinke, 'Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives', p. 96.

## *The family*

It was a pervading belief, long before the cult of domesticity, among middle-class philanthropic and Christian organisations, that a woman was most appropriately confined to the domestic (see Chapter 1). It thus followed that on leaving her natal family, a young unmarried woman effectively abandoned the care and supervision of her parents and became unprotected and vulnerable; indeed, this was built into the very legal definition of lifecycle service which had in Britain, for many centuries, absorbed vast numbers of women before marriage. McBride observes that servants 'had the same status in the eyes of the law as a child, protected by and subject to the authority of the parent/employer'.[21] The private family structure thus represented safety; what lay beyond was danger. Indeed, one young servant in London explained that her friends were worried when she told them she was leaving Germany to go into service, 'as they thought I might be led astray'.[22] The anxiety around women travelling abroad came particularly from their own families, who were themselves often instrumental in decisions to migrate.[23] The single women migrants in Gordon's work were engaged in a variety of occupations, rather than exclusively service, but when selecting work in the city, the practical aspect of being immediately housed also came with the benefit (for the girls' parents) of a degree of control: the preferred occupations were those that 'provided housing – and thus supervision – as well as income.'[24] That taking a position as servant would afford a daughter immediate access to shelter, food and wages may just have been the reassurance needed for parents to let her leave home at all, a continuous connection to protective domesticity that 'often legitimates a woman's ability to move in the first place'.[25]

Redmond found evidence of these anxieties around single (masterless) women abroad among the Irish in interwar England. Despite 'fervent interest at the time in the media and by the Catholic Church in the status of female migrants,' the same concern was not directed at women working in mixed-gender seasonal agricultural work teams in England, who were 'encased within a traditional,

[21] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 15.
[22] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898,* p. 139.
[23] See Feldman, 'Migration' for the importance of family in emigration decisions and L. Ryan, 'Family Matters: (E)Migration, Familial Networks and Irish Women in Britain', *The Sociological Review*, 2004 for the specific case of emigrant domestics.
[24] W. M. Gordon, '"'What, I Pray You, Shall I Do with the Ballance?"': Single Women's Economy of Migration', *International Review of Social History*, 50 (2005), p. 70.
[25] Georgina Gowans, 'Travelling Home: British Women Sailing from India, 1940–1947', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29/1 (2006), p. 83.

patriarchal unit, working either as wives, sisters, daughters or relatives alongside boys and men'.[26] Placing women under supervision was of primary importance for religious and philanthropic groups, and this '"fear" of single women occurred in tandem with the belief that they were in need of special protections'.[27] Such special protections for foreign women were widespread, and extended well beyond either the family or state policy.

### *Protection agencies*

The National Vigilance Association (hereafter NVA) was a protection and purity organisation formed in response to the public outcry over W. T. Stead's revelations of juvenile prostitution in 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', a sensational quasi-journalistic piece serialised in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1885. In these articles he claimed that young women were at risk of being trafficked into prostitution, or 'white slavery', and both the topic and his journalistic methods generated widespread media coverage. Fundamentally, he managed to tap into deep social fears of the sexual vulnerability of (young) women and the press furore that surrounded the allegations 'probably played upon fears regarding the increased mobility of women', according to Slater.[28] Indeed, they certainly had a much longer history, connected to the negative connotations of mobile, masterless women.

As a direct result of Stead's 'findings', the NVA was initially established 'for the enforcement and improvement of the laws for the repression of criminal vice and public immorality';[29] essentially, to ensure the Criminal Law Amendment Act was rigorously applied. Attwood's detailed account of the early years of this organisation reveals that although ostensibly and primarily concerned with disrupting the prostitution traffic through British ports, the NVA became involved in work with lone foreign women migrants from around 1887: 'Our first concern has been with English girls going abroad. But our attention has also been directed to German girls who are attracted to London by promises of a free passage and high wages'.[30] Workers were briefed to not merely watch for, and […] provide assistance to such wayfarers, but also observe their movements and

[26] Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness', p. 459.
[27] Redmond, 'Sinful Singleness', p. 470.
[28] Slater, 'Pimps Police and Filles de Joie', p. 66.
[29] R. Attwood, 'Stopping the Traffic: The National Vigilance Association and the International Fight against the "White Slave" Trade (1899– c. 1909)', *Women's History Review*, 24/3 (2015), 325–50, p. 326.
[30] *NVA Annual Report 1887*, p. 20.

interrogate them.'[31] Working with other UK organisations such as JAPGAW[32] and the Travellers' Aid Society (TAS),[33] they could justify this uninvited surveillance of innocent passengers by claiming that the 'most flighty, credulous or wayward young female foreigners from the 'unprotected' working classes' were likely to be at highest risk of being duped into a life of crime.[34]

**Dock and station work**

A number of organisations participating in the London Conference on Port and Station Work shared their own work and results on helping vulnerable travellers at major transport thoroughfares, in an attempt to rationalise and share 'best practice' on helping women in transit. Work by the NVA was summarised thus:

> The girls met were given a copy of our booklet "A Friendly Warning", were suitably helped and advised, and if without an address, were placed in Homes according to their nationality and creed.[35]

The Traveller's Aid Society met girls and women by arrangement, but also relied on station officials who, 'sent on to them all girls stranded at the Stations.' They employed 'two lady Workers who gave all their time […] only a few spoke foreign languages.'[36] Warning placards were placed at the various stations, featuring addresses of lodging houses, and a TAS worker would regularly visit the officials and waiting room attendants to supply them with a list of hostels nearest the respective stations, where they could send women in need. In 1906, the secretary catalogued a typical working day:

> two Danes to be fetched from lodgings and seen off on way to Buenos Ayres; Swiss arriving at Victoria Station to be met; German to be met at Liverpool Street Station; a Dutch girl to be met at the docks at Blackwall, going to Devonshire; three English and two French girls to be met at different times and stations later that day.[37]

JAPGAW employed 'regular paid Workers at Liverpool Street Station to meet girls from Russia and Eastern Europe, and at Fenchurch Street Station for those arriving by the Batavier Line;' the workers also met Christian girls on behalf of the TAS, 'whenever there was a question of the

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[31] R. Attwood, 'Stopping the Traffic: The National Vigilance Association and the International Fight against the "white Slave" Trade (1899– C. 1909)', *Women's History Review*, 24/3 (2015), 325–50, p. 336.
[32] This was formed in 1883 as the Jewish Ladies' Society for Preventive and Rescue Work and a Gentlemen's Committee was formed in 1889 to oversee the port work. In 1897 the society became known as the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGAW).
[33] Established by the YWCA.
[34] R. Attwood, 'Stopping the Traffic', p. 336.
[35] London, Women's Library (WL), 4 NVA/5/6 London Conference on Port and Station Work, 9 Feb 1911.
[36] WL, 4 NVA/5/6, p. 2.
[37] 'Travellers' Aid Society', *The Queen*, 12 May 1906, p. 49.

language difficulty'.[38] The International Catholic Association had also placed warning placards at Victoria Station, Waterloo, London Bridge, Dover and Folkestone, though printed in English only.[39] The ayahs, in travelling with their employers to and from England, would disembark the ship while still employed, so had little need for a welcoming committee. Nevertheless, if not accompanying their mistress further, they would be taken to the Ayahs' Home, and usually not need to find her way there themselves.

The type of dock and station work for the European servants echoes what was happening elsewhere. The American National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) gave out cards on ships containing information about white slavery to single women travellers.[40] In Paris, where thousands of young German women arrived annually to find work, nuns were sent to meet them at the largest stations so as to prevent their falling in the hands of fraudulent recruiters before guiding them to reputable hostels or agencies.[41] In the Netherlands, this type of work was carried out by the Dutch Association for the Protection of Young Girls (the 'Dutch Union'). Their workers, ladies 'recognisable by the white armband',[42] would wait for 'girls to arrive in order to warn them against dangers'[43] before inviting them to stay in women-only hostels.[44] In their article on Swiss railway stations, Bieri and Gerodetti explore how the international network of TAS and NVA-style organisations designed to protect single, vulnerable women travellers actually grew into a frictionless mechanism to further promote women's movement. In arguing that social purity groups were a vehicle of internationalism, the authors reveal how improved scrutiny and safety put in place at major transport hubs themselves became more attractive places for women to use. Through a 'network of support, control and surveillance', the station workers in cities across Europe were thus mobilised to prevent the moral and sexual exploitation of women in a 'truly transnational manner'.[45] Nevertheless, the movement, led at the international level by the *Union Internationale des*

[38] 'Travellers' Aid Society', *The Queen*, 12 May 1906, p. 49.
[39] 'The London Conference on Port and Station Work, Feb 9, 1911', 1911, WL, 4 NVA/5/6.
[40] Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration*, p. 147.
[41] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 100.
[42] Henkes, 'Maids on the Move', p. 227.
[43] A. Van Drenth, 'The City and the Self. The Case of Girls' Protection in the Netherlands around 1900', *Educational Review*, 54/2 (2002), p. 130.
[44] Henkes, 'Maids on the Move', p. 227.
[45] Bieri and Gerodetti, '"Falling women"–"Saving Angels"', p. 230.

*Amies de la Jeune Fille*, had to eventually 'confront the critique of being partly a catalyst for increasing migration across Europe.'[46]

**Hostels**

A very specific set of circumstances conspired to trigger the NVA's foundation in the 1880s, but its concerns around the protection of women 'in motion' were shared by many others. While organisations such as the NVA and TAS were operating in a gendered way to protect vulnerable women from falling victim to a particular vice, others existed to provide support to unaccompanied women 'according to their nationality or creed' (see quotation above).[47] Lodging houses, or hostels, were established to cater for mobile women in need of shelter, and came to form part of the infrastructural backdrop to their lives in London. A brief summary of these is given here, but more detailed discussions of their purpose and function are developed throughout this thesis.

*HGWL: Gordon House*

HWGL was a charity established in 1878 after a recognition that while unaccompanied working boys were being provided for in the capital, working girls were not. Gordon House was opened in 1881 in Endsleigh Gardens primarily as a home for German women, though over time it attracted many other nationalities. It was financially supported by the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen who had a wider philanthropic interests in improving the lives of servants. Eventually, over ten HWGL homes were established across London of which Gordon House was the third. None of the others catered specifically for foreign women and hardly any domestic servants were housed outside Gordon House. The Home would stay in operation for over 30 years until the outbreak of World War I reduced the need to house what would become 'enemy' aliens.

*LCM: Ayahs' and Amahs' Home*

There was a boarding house dedicated to travelling ayahs since at least the 1870s in London to meet the need of accommodating the regular stream of ayahs who had served as shipboard nannies or ladies' maids to British families travelling to and from India. On arrival in London, many of the ayahs would stay at the Home until such time as their employers were ready to depart, or a new family could be found to engage them for the return journey. The Home moved from the City of

[46] Bieri and Gerodetti, "'Falling women"–"Saving Angels"', p. 230.
[47] See fn.35.

London out to Hackney by the start of the twentieth century, where in 1900 the London City Mission (hereafter LCM) took over its management.

*JAPGAW: Sara Pyke House*

The Jewish community also catered specifically for unaccompanied single women arriving in London. While men were housed at the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter, unaccompanied women were taken to Sara Pyke House (SPH) in Tenter Street (in the East End) which operated as a boarding house. In its annual report of 1898, its stated objectives were as follows:

A. To protect girls and women
B. To provide them with temporary and permanent lodging and work
C. To visit the girls and befriend them in their situations
D. To train them for domestic service
E. To reserve them from vice
F. To reform and help them to lead respectable lives
G. To co-operate with societies and institutions having similar objects.[48]

*Other hostels*

The Swiss Benevolent Society established a Home for Governesses in 1884, located on Mecklenburgh Square. A home named 'Swiss Home' housing no more than ten women at a time also existed at 6 Park Row, Westminster, from at least 1861 until 1901,[49] and the Society's own Home for Governesses opened in former hotel premises in at 34-35 Fitzroy Square. According to the 1911 census schedule, it was catering for 31 mostly nursery governesses and upper servants from Switzerland, Austria, Germany and France, housed in 25 rooms.[50] Some boarding houses operated as de facto homes for foreign servants, though not designed or named as such. A handwritten note to the enumerator at the foot of the 1911 census return for the Gloucester Road Convent described the boarders as 'Roman Catholic girls and women working or seeking work in London and not having a home here'.[51]

Although these hostels formed part of the spaces inhabited by foreign servants in London, they were careful to downplay any active role in encouraging migration. In 1887 Gordon House reassured its membership that 'on no account do we advertise Gordon House in any of the German newspapers as a home for German women to come to. The Home was not opened with

[48] Southampton, Hartley Library (HL), MS173/2/1/3 Minute Books of the General Committee, 4 Jan 1899.
[49] Ancestry.com, 1861 Census, RG 9/54 p. 24.
[50] Ancestry.com, 1911 Census, RG 14/689 p. 589.
[51] Ancestry.com, 1911 Census, RG 14/670 p. 769.

the intention of attracting foreign girls to London'.[52] Instead, they relied on their presence being made known to potential boarders by any number of official personnel they may have come into contact with on arrival in London. By 1898, 'the more reliable porters and interpreters who are now to be found at our ports and stations' pointed newly-arrived European girls to Gordon House.[53] As such, they took over the responsibility, *in loco parentis*, of lone travelling women from the NVA, TAS and other organisations, who had themselves assumed parental responsibility for them while en route. In this way, these organisations formed a seamless highway for young women to use when migrating alone abroad; a highway, nonetheless, that could have both advantages and disadvantages for foreign servants, as the thesis discovers.

The regulations enacted by the British government after World War I ended free movement for foreign servants into Britain, with the 1920 Aliens Order representing the birth of state-sanctioned gendered immigration conditions. Indeed, tying women to service in private homes was explicitly built into government legislation. In so doing, the post-war government effectively embedded medieval notions of masterless women into immigration policy, and reinforced the fears raised by sectors of society over the vulnerability of unprotected women away from home. Although the DSPs offered a privileged route into Britain not enjoyed in other occupations, or indeed men, this rendered them more visible to the state, generating and justifying the surveillance of female foreign workers which was to have a profound effect on their experience of work in interwar Britain. Gripped with the perception that simply being away from home made young, lone women easy prey for pimps and sex traffickers, charities and nationality-specific residential hostels worked to 'unite existing, and created new, like-minded groups, forming a global network to rival those established by the trafficker.'[54] This global network would work both as a restrictive mechanism and a safety net for the intrepid travelling woman, and reveals the ambiguity they would experience in leaving home to move abroad; that their foreignness could be both opportunity and hindrance.

[52] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1887*, p. 84.
[53] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 86.
[54] Attwood, 'Stopping the Traffic', p. 345.

## Departures

Exploring the regulatory and social infrastructure that permitted their access to Britain has shown that just as foreign women faced increasingly stringent state legislation, so did mobile women experience a level of familial and social surveillance that had its origins in earlier centuries. The rest of the chapter now examines how the servants navigated this control, by tracing their journeys from departure to arrival in London. Approaching this from the perspective of the servant herself offers a much richer understanding of the structures she was engaging with and challenges the dichotomy of migration theories that posit structural victim and individual agent as polar opposites. What characterises their experience of movement, why do they leave and how were they either making use of or being constrained by the official mechanisms they encountered?

### *Motivations*

Neo-classical migration approaches posit that individuals migrate based on a cost-benefit decision-making process, informed by perceived improved economic conditions at the destination. Structural-historical approaches reject this highly individualistic explanation and instead understand migration as a response to global inequities and economic imbalances. Both, however, see (non-forced) movement to be motivated by economics. Lucassen found in the Netherlands that, as in Britain, young women were increasingly drawn to factory and shop work, creating a dearth of servants in a society whose economy had not been ravaged by World War I and who now sought domestic workers from further afield. He understood that those who arrived to take their place (especially from neighbouring Germany, devastated by post-war inflation and unemployment), did so for economic reasons alone.[55] Yet though finance played a significant part in the story of foreign servants in London, it was not the only factor involved in their decision to move there. Indeed, to reduce motivations to economics alone is to reduce the servant as an individual to a simple occupational entity, in which we risk overlooking the whole person in the process of migration.

A number of historians have attempted to focus on the individual strategies of women and girls migrating for service work. In her analysis of rural-urban service migration in the Netherlands

[55] L. Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control: The Aliens Police and Foreign Female Servants in the Netherlands, 1918-40', *Social History*, 27/3 (2002), pp. 330-1.

during the century up to 1950, Hilde Bras found that while family strategies of survival and upward mobility account for some of the reasons for leaving the family, a 'desire for higher wages, emancipation from the parental home, and participation in more exciting city life' drove many women to seek work as domestics in Dutch cities.[56] In her research on the League for Families with Numerous Children (*Bond voor Kroostrijke Gezinnen*) bilateral recruitment programme for Hungarian maids in Belgium, Hajtó found that different Hungarian women were drawn to the scheme for different reasons, based on their socioeconomic backgrounds. Those who saw the chance to live abroad as an adventure and a way to further educate themselves came from comfortable, educated and often urban families; those to whom financial remuneration for the support of their families was of primary importance were largely daughters of artisans or farmers.[57] And Louise Ryan's oral history interviews with emigrant Irish women seeking work in London in the 1930s reveal they did so as part of a wider family strategy.[58]

Using minimal source analysis, scholars of servants in Britain have only seen part of the picture. Aiken's thesis on tackling the servant problem in the interwar years supposes that foreign servants used the Ministry of Labour 'short-term work permits to provide a kind of working holiday experience'.[59] In explaining an increase in foreign servants in the 1930s, Lucy Delap believes that these women were motivated primarily to learn English.[60] Yet such ideas are anachronistic, and project notions of today's motivations for travel back into the past. Scholars from different disciplines urge a more nuanced understanding of independent women's motivations to migrate. In Agustín's work with contemporary sex workers, the 'women describe how they make decisions to change their lives by traveling abroad to work, weighing their options, talking with friends and family, taking advantage of opportunities offered, and continuing to exercise judgment along the way.'[61] Agustín found that migrations are never just economically motivated: 'among the many elements to take into account are human desire and personality types disposed to take risks and look for adventure, independence, and opportunities, as well as the presence of networks already in

[56] H. Bras, 'Maids to the City: Migration Patterns of Female Domestic Servants from the Province of Zeeland, the Netherlands (1850–1950)', *The History of the Family*, 8/2 (2003), p. 242.
[57] See V. Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium, 1930-1949', *Journal of Belgian History*, XXXVII/3–4 (2007).
[58] Ryan, 'Family Matters'.
[59] D. Aiken, 'The Central Committee on Women's Training & Employment: Tackling the Servant Problem, 1914-1945' (PhD, Oxford Brookes University, 2002), p. 199.
[60] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 72.
[61] Agustín, 'Migrants in the Mistress's House', p. 97.

place, as fragile as they can be'.[62] The women (both in Agustín's work and among domestic servants) were exposed to information and images about intended destinations via the media, offering would-be migrants dreams of further education as well as pleasure, and the prospect of meeting people from other countries. Crucially, of course, 'not all poor people decide to migrate; many that do are people interested in and capable of taking the risks involved in uprooting in order to 'find a place in the world".[63] Thanks to more detailed sources used in this research, the motivations and expectations of foreign domestic servants in London can be revealed to be far broader than those, economic or otherwise, found to date.

**Economic benefits and wage differentials**

It is widely accepted that migration rarely takes place in the absence of economic factors, and for the large part, this was also the case for foreign domestic servants in London. From early on in the period, Gordon House annual reports certainly refer to the economic motivations of foreign domestics: on how the girls 'profit', and that sometimes they earned more than their British counterparts *because* they were foreign. Some women were of the class that Hajtó found in Hungary: daughters of middle- and upper class families who were often placed as children's nurses or governesses and sought the money less than the adventure. But many others were not as comfortably off. The residents of Gordon House were seen to be 'of a thoroughly respectable class — though many of them are poor,'[64] but able to 'command yearly wages ranging from twelve to thirty-five pounds' in 1890.[65] Booth's salary indicators, featured in Chapter 2, suggest a general servant in London at the turn of the century was expecting to make just under £16 in annual wages.[66] This might be compared to German '*bonnes a tout faire*' (general maids) in Paris, who could expect to earn between 360 and 480 francs a year (approximately £14 to £19), though wages in Berlin could be half this.[67] At the turn of the century, a kitchen maid in a provincial Dutch town could earn 50-100 guilders (or around £4 2s 6d to £9) but the same role in one of the largest cities

[62] Agustín, 'Migrants in the Mistress's House', p. 100.
[63] Agustín, 'Challenging Place', p. 112.
[64] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1911*, p. 100
[65] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1890*, p. 189.
[66] See Figure 13
[67] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 98. Historic currency conversions were calculated using 'Historical Currency Converter' https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html (7 Jul 2019).

of The Hague, Rotterdam or Amsterdam could command 130-175 guilders (or £10 14s 6d to £14 8s 9d).[68]

The motivation to earn money certainly seems to have been the case for the ayahs, though many showed deep loyalty to their child charges too. Nevertheless, London also represented a commercial opportunity for them to purchase goods and trade these on return to India. An article describing life at the Ayahs' Home in 1922 hints at this:

> It is a custom with some of them to purchase muslins and similar soft goods to take back to the sunshine – perhaps to dispose of at a profit, as a reward for enterprise and an opportunity not lost.[69]

Financial remuneration data suggests that, despite the intensity of day- and night-long working hours on board ship, they could expect to earn three-quarters of the annual salary of a British-based nurserymaid in just one four to six week voyage.[70] Such overseas work, and its potential for further commercial profit, was thus highly lucrative for a woman, potentially supporting her own family. It seems likely, then, that the wages in London for all servants were a little higher than those elsewhere, at least for certain sectors of the service hierarchy.

Yet it would be overly reductive to assess servants' migration decisions on wage comparisons alone. The 'deterministic "push-pull" models' of migration are criticised by de Haas, on the basis they 'erroneously assume that migration is linearly dependent on factors such as poverty, income differentials and population growth.'[71] In Miss Collett's helpful and valuable review of wages and conditions in the domestic service sector during the 1890s, she informs us that the wages are of lesser importance to servants seeking better positions than economic theory might have us believe. 'The quality of the food and lodging provided, the amount of work to be done, the household organisation, and the efficiency and personal characteristics of both mistress and servant are the important factors in determining the advantages or disadvantages of a situation.'[72] For the foreign

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[68] Bras, 'Maids to the City', p. 228. Historic currency conversions were calculated using 'Historical Currency Converter' https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html (7 Jul 2019).
[69] A. C. Marshall, 'Human Birds of Passage', *London City Mission Magazine (LCM)*, 1922, p. 106.
[70] O. Robinson, 'Travelling Ayahs of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Global Networks and Mobilization of Agency', *History Workshop Journal*, 86/1 (2018), p. 56.
[71] H. De Haas, 'Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective', *Working Paper Oxford University Internationl Migration Institute*, (2008), p. 43.
[72] *Parl. Pap.* (1899) Cm 9346, Report by Miss Collett on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants.

servants too, a much broader range of reasons prompted them to seek work beyond their own country borders.

**Language skills and career development**

In line with middle-class educational values, learning a language was considered an appropriate and noble aspiration for a young lady. Hajtó's Hungarian maids were attracted to the chance to learn French, as well as practising their German skills, when signing up for the Belgian recruitment scheme.[73] König's work on German migrant domestics in Paris shows a similar motivation in learning French.[74] The sources suggest that exposure to the English language was an important incentive for women arriving to work in Britain too. By the mid-1890s, Gordon House residents were arriving in London 'either to better themselves in life or to learn our language,'[75] and in 1911, '[t]o learn the English language was their sole object in crossing the Channel; at least, most of them say so'.[76] Working for a British family was critical for their chance to improve, however. This is evident in examples of employers whose first language was not English, and struggled to retain staff as a result. Such was the case with French-born Mrs Legge. She informed the Ministry of Labour (hereafter MoL) that she had lost three servants in the space of a month as 'they wished to come to this country to learn English' and her poor English accent meant 'she could not help them sufficiently'.[77] This might suggest that non-English-speaking employers were at a disadvantage in attracting foreign servants, and either had to resort to other means of keeping staff or hired women who had fewer choices themselves.

The provision of English lessons also seems to have been a benefit in kind, by way of topping up low wages. On 27 October 1931, Dacny Brandsrud and Irene Tonning, two Norwegians from Oslo, arrived to take places as cook and maid in the household of a Holland Park art dealer. They were both paid £30 a year plus English lessons. Just over three months later, Irene gave notice to work at the Norwegian Consul 'where they are fewer in family and she will receive higher wages',

[73] Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium', p. 373.
[74] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 99.
[75] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, p. 77.
[76] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1911*, p. 99
[77] 'Employment and Training; Aliens Restriction Department: Correspondence concerning Blacklisted Aliens' (hereafter Blacklisted Aliens), 1934, TNA, LAB 2/2085/AR434/2/1934

(though no English lessons).[78] Dacny then threatened to do the same. It seems the English lessons were not enough to justify the lower wages for them. Mrs Padgett, who until recently had not had to work for her living, applied for a permit for a Danish maid, Hilda Iakobsen. In offering wages of just £20 a year, she claimed she would raise this as soon as Hilda's English improved, and that Mrs Padgett had 'set off against the failure to pay the wages promised "the lessons in English" that she had given'.[79] The permit had been recommended for rejection on the basis of what they termed 'sweating', until the employer agreed to raise Hilda's wages to £35.

English-language skills could also be of use in the context of career change; for Marie Rasmine Pedersen, that meant religious work. Marie arrived in London from Denmark in 1923, taking a position with two elderly French sisters as 'household help' on wages of £30 per annum. After almost three years' service, Mary wrote to the MoL asking if she might be permitted to find employment with an English family or in a hospital, 'as it is very important for me to learn the English language completely before I go out as missionary'.[80] Her intention was to serve in India where she would be required to speak the language of its colonial rulers. Marie Rasmine's friend Martha Yensen was also preparing herself for missionary service, destined for China. She had taken a position as house parlourmaid for the same French sisters for six months until Mary Rasmine took over her job. It is not clear whether Martha did indeed go to China, or whether she stayed on the UK, but both women were in contact with the Danish YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) who may well have been supporting their preparation for new lives in heathen lands.

Some London servants actively sought educational opportunities and ways to improve their skills for future career development. Louise Schneeberger took a place as a domestic 'with the object of attending school and eventually acting as a Governess'.[81] Hildegarde Clemen from Berlin arrived at her new position as companion-help in 1933. A letter to the authorities from her mistress, Mrs Evans, explained how Hildegarde proposed to teach back in Germany and planned to attend evening English classes at the Polytechnic, starting in the term after her arrival.[82] Ruth Spiegel

[78] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/10490/1931.
[79] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/10490/1931.
[80] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1926, TNA, LAB 2/2082/ETAR/1004/1926.
[81] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/5101/1927.
[82] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/10061/1933.

entered the UK on the basis of her desire to study Philology, and her aim was to move to France next in order to learn the language.[83] For women who did not have the means to travel to London as students, domestic work provided the vehicle for their travel. How many actually managed to dedicate sufficient time to their studies alongside their domestic duties is unclear, but their motivations for self-improvement seem more pronounced that the need to earn money, and thus may reflect the experiences of Hajtó's more middle-class domestics than the daughters of artisans.

Yet for some servants, claiming to wish to speak a new language or acquire a skill might well have been more favourably judged by MoL officers than had they wished to migrate for other purposes (greater freedom, or travel for its own sake, for example). Caestecker and Moore found that in Belgium during the 1930s, German women were claiming to be learning French while actually working for a pittance as domestic servants.[84] Back in London, German-born Therese Ess arrived just after Christmas in 1931 on an 'au pair' basis, intending to study English at the Polytechnic.[85] Her landing permission was granted because of her plans to study, but the MoL later found she had been working as a domestic for two separate employers during her four or five month stay in London, and had made no attempt to enrol in classes.[86] In the case of French-born Mrs Legge, it is unclear whether her staff had indeed found her accent challenging or whether they used an excuse they felt would be easily recognisable to anyone querying their reasons for leaving their positions. Declaring a desire to perfect a language to appeal to a social class impressed by learning was not, perhaps, a foolish strategy for someone wishing to secure a DSP.

**Family, freedom and independence**

As recorded throughout the period, changes in the personal and family situations of the foreign servants played a significant part in their migration. Sinke claims that 'while general economic conditions and information set the stage for migration, it was changes within the cycle of individual and family development – the arrival of a stepmother or the breakup of an engagement – that

[83] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/10057/1930.
[84] F. Caestecker and B. Moore, 'Female Domestic Servants as Desirable Refugees: Gender, Labour Needs and Immigration Policy in Belgium, The Netherlands and Great Britain.', *European History Quarterly*, 41/2 (2011), p. 217.
[85] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/1207/1932.
[86] Or, perhaps, had been prevented from doing so by her workload.

provided the final impetus for migration from the village'.[87] In her interviews with former German domestics, Wierling found that 'even when a family was reconstructed with a stepfather or stepmother […] a daughter would quite often flee into service, even before she was supposed to leave'.[88] This seems to be the case for the foreign servants in London too. During the 1880s, Gordon House estimated that '[m]ore than half of the German girls that come to this country leave home — we might almost say are turned out — in consequence of second marriages, the unkindness of the stepfather or stepmother tending to drive them out.'[89] One young German girl found her way from Germany to Gordon House. In haste she had left her home for England having 'quarrelled with her mother.'[90] In this case, her parents sent money to pay for her return, but many others resolved to stay in London (or refused to return) after family disagreements. Several of Ryan's interviewees who left Ireland for domestic work in interwar England also cited emigration as 'partly to get away from their families'.[91]

Despite recognising that most of their residents in 1911 were poor, if respectable, the Gordon House annual report attempted to explain the reasons for increasing numbers of arrivals: 'we think they like living in our land of freedom and liberty.'[92] That freedom and liberty was for many years unconstrained by state-level immigration controls. But even after these were introduced, there is evidence of women's aspirations for personal freedoms and choice while working in England, something that they felt they could not achieve while in their own countries. Ryan found that most of the Irish women and girls who emigrated to England came from 'small, rural farming communities where the opportunities available to women were quite limited and where their leisure and social life were bounded by strict conventions'.[93] In other studies, scholars have found similar narratives of freedom and liberation. Describing rural-urban migration in Preston and Paisley, Gordon suggests that 'through migration young women were often able to establish themselves as

[87] S. M. Sinke, 'Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives', p. 98.
[88] D. Wierling, 'Women Domestic Servants in Germany at the Turn of the Century', *Oral History*, 10/2 (1982), p. 52
[89] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 68.
[90] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1888*, p. 83.
[91] L. Ryan, '"I'm Going To England": Women's Narratives of Leaving Ireland', *Oral History*, 30/1 (2002), 42–53, p. 46.
[92] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1912*, p. 123.
[93] L. Ryan, 'Moving Spaces and Changing Places: Irish Women's Memories of Emigration to Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29/1 (2003), p. 72.

independent from their parents'.[94] For the German servants in Paris, '[l]iberation, to live a self determined life at least for a couple of years, excitement and adventure, and the desire to learn the language and better their chances on the marriage market' were, in Harzig's work, the primary motivators for international migration into service.[95]

Although in many cases a lot of the women arriving in London were indeed older, as established in Chapter 2, and more likely to have made a move away from home prior to arriving in London, their status in their own natal family was likely to have played a part in their motivations to leave. Wages in Ireland and the relative proximity to their families meant girls were handing over what pitiful wages they did receive for the good of the household. For some, this was enough to propel them towards long-distance migration. Fed up with working long hours and handing over her meagre wages to her family, Maggie, a daughter in a large Irish household, had seen advertisements in the newspapers for domestic work in in England and resolved to leave. 'These young women wanted something more, something better,' claims Ryan.[96] Bras found that in the Netherlands, poor families chose service jobs for their daughters nearby, so they could be brought home quickly if there was a change in family composition or wage incomes, for example. Crucially, one observer in 1908 found that the further away a Dutch maid's placement was from her family, 'the smaller the financial assistance' she sent back in remittances. It follows that those who made longer distance journeys were either less likely to be from the poorest families and/or manoeuvred a greater physical distance to engineer independence from family responsibilities, financial or otherwise.[97] If longer distance migration was a way to withdraw from family obligations, the decision by a servant to migrate abroad was inescapably an act of individual agency, challenging the idea of the servant being bound to structural forces beyond her control.

London service clearly offered opportunities for improving a servant's material and financial position, but it represented something greater than a mere extension of traditional internal domestic labour migration. Moving to London was a strategy for something further. Learning English was a

[94] W. M. Gordon, *Mill Girls and Strangers: Single Women's Independent Migration in England, Scotland and the United States, 1850-1881* (Albany (NY), 2002), p. 101.
[95] Harzig, 'Domestics of the World (Unite?), p. 55.
[96] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 73.
[97] Bras, 'Maids to the City', p. 230.

means to access new employment sectors such as missionary work or teaching; it was also the language of the New World for those who sought onward lives in North America, South Africa or Australia. Triggered by family breakups, and a desire for social and financial independence, many women ventured further than their own country's borders, and those seeking release from their own society's judgement and constraints could put distance between them in London. Indeed, working as a domestic was for many 'their only opportunity to get away from home and to leave parental supervision.'[98] The range of motivations displayed in the sources suggests that domestic service was a combination of several factors rather than one overriding objective. No mention is ever made of the women's enjoyment of service nor their desire to progress up the service hierarchy. This is not to suppose that never occurred, but that other, greater motivations drove these women to London. Of course, all these are simply intentions; a means of capturing what they hoped for, and not what actually happened to them. How they actually reached and dealt with life in London is explored throughout the thesis.

### *Preparing to depart*

For those girls who were new to migration, the initial decision to leave home for a different country could be overwhelming. On multiple occasions during the 1930s, employers were found to update the names of their desired domestics on permit applications as one candidate substituted another due to their cook-general being suddenly unavailable, or an illness of one of their parents, or in Else Nickel's case in 1933, due to homesickness.[99] Migration from a rural area to the local town was traumatic enough for the youngest servants, but to travel alone to a country full of new customs, rules and a foreign language was not for the faint-hearted. But it would be unfair to assume that those women who did risk a new life in London did so without considerable thought and preparation, notwithstanding the fact that many were already older with some experience already of service, abroad or otherwise.

The NVA was instrumental in providing a pre-departure checking service for women securing positions with families in Britain, working in partnership with a number of different agencies and international bodies. In 1934, Mr Sempkins, the organisation's secretary, received a letter from the

[98] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 99.
[99] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/2087/1933

YWCA Central Club requesting information about a potential employer, Mr A___ L___, based in Mornington Crescent. The YWCA had themselves received a request from the Deutches Ausland Institut, Stuttgart, who had been contacted by H___ F___, the young German woman engaged to work for him.[100] Mr Sempkins then deployed his network of informants who, in this case, included the milkman of the district. Despite the neighbourhood being 'not one of the best', the milkman spoke highly of the occupant's business, confirming how many other members of staff lived there, and concluded that '[f]rom a moral point of view there is no danger to the girls according to the milkman'. The lengths that the NVA went to in order to secure the safety of women was impressive and was underpinned by a moral imperative to shield them from harm. From the perspective of the women preparing to travel, this (free) service would have operated as an advance safety mechanism and shows their commitment to making considered judgements pre-migration.

Every year the NVA handled dozens of enquiries such as these, from women requiring assurance as to potential situations, with many of these coming from foreign sources. In 1901, for example, Mr Sempkins responded to over thirty requests for information relating to families or situations offered. Many concerned those based in or around London (Swiss women bound for the West End, Essex, Hertford, Highgate and Wimbledon; Germans to Croydon, Maldon and North-West London) but some related to positions that would take the women abroad, to South Africa and Egypt, for example.[101] Other enquiries came from other organisations with whom potential candidates corresponded prior to departure. Again, in 1901, the NVA received letters from the Girls Friendly Society (GFS) in Switzerland, the Swiss Legation and the German Consul requesting advice relating to classified 'situations vacant' advertisements or the respectability of neighbourhoods.[102] This mirrors the experience of German maids seeking domestic work in Paris. König found that the large number of letters written by servants to the church organisations in the French capital proved that they were 'trying to prepare for their stay in Paris and asking for information before they left home'; this, she claims, indicates 'the women were handling their

[100] 'Case Files', 1933, London, WL, 4NVA/6/2/4/01. The names of women who appear in files held in the NVA archive are, throughout the thesis, anonymised in accordance with the Women's Library conditions for use; email permission granted 5 Nov 2015.
[101] *National Vigilance Association (NVA) Annual Report 1901*, p. 14.
[102] *NVA Annual Report 1901*, p. 14.

migration responsibly and autonomously.'[103] Would-be migrants were thus using the intricate international networks connecting the London-based NVA to local societies, churches and diplomatic representations as a hub of information about London, and operating beyond their own communities. This accords with Bras who claims that in the Netherlands, 'community-wide, religious and peer networks took over some of the functions of the family',[104] in helping to smooth the women's path away from home. Women were thus exercising caution and judgement before travelling overseas, and using this process perhaps even to reassure their own families of their security in doing so.

### *Staged migration*

It would be a mistake to imagine that all foreign servants arrived in London green and unaware, with little experience of domestic work. In her study of Irish emigrants, Lambert found that although most were originally from rural areas, many had lived and worked in towns and cities before they emigrated to Britain.[105] Indeed, in German-language regions, Hoerder claims 'domestic servants often engaged in multiple moves: (1) an initial migration from countryside to a nearby town, (2) onward moves to urban centers, and (3) frequent change of position and location at urban destinations.'[106] An interview with a German maid, who migrated to the Netherlands for domestic work, offers some perspective on this. She first moved from an agricultural setting where she helped the farmer's wife, then to a domestic position in the nearby city of Oldenburg, an urban environment which to her represented 'culture' and variety, away from the 'dirty' farm work. A failed love affair and the poor economic outlook of early 1920s Germany were the impetus to move again. Having already made the move to the city, 'migration to the Netherlands did not seem such a radical step'.[107] As already established, given the raised average ages of the foreign servant cohort in London, immigrant women were more likely to have had experience of service before they arrived. Baines posits that defining the start point or initial decision to migrate is particularly

[103] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 100.
[104] Bras, 'Maids to the City', p. 243.
[105] S. Lambert, *Irish Women in Lancashire* (Lancaster, 2001), p. 28.
[106] D. Hoerder, 'Historical Perspectives on Domestic and Care-Giving Workers' Migrations: A Global Approach', in Dirk Hoerder and Amarjit Kaur (eds), *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers* (Leiden, 2015), p. 72.
[107] Henkes, 'Maids on the Move', p. 227.

difficult,[108] as there is no way to really know at what point a decision was made to go to England: at home in their village? in a provincial town after their first job? after a few years in a different city?

Since large numbers took upper servant positions, as described in Chapter 2, it is likely they already had experience of the work before being hired. Bras found that servants already living in urban areas were more likely to hear of information about new opportunities, so their propensity to migrate further and repeatedly increased with every migration decision.[109] By examining foreign servant work permits to identify where the women were living at the point they applied for work, and comparing this to their birth places, we get a sense of their mobility. Several servants were, at the point of being hired, living in a country or city other than that of their birthplace. Gisela Haschka and her friend Kathe Schmidt were born in Vienna, but prior to securing positions in Britain were both employed in Haarlem, the Netherlands.[110] Many others moved from Germany to Paris or the Swiss cities before making the move again to London. Kate Rogasch was born in Cologne, but took a position a hundred miles south in Wiesbaden before applying for a passport in 1928 to move to England.[111] Elizabeth Happ, born in Heusy, Belgium, applied in 1932 for a British domestic work permit from her employer's home in Wiesbaden.[112] Even the older travelling ayahs bore passports issued in cities hundreds of miles from their birthplaces or marital homes. Mrs Magdaline was born in Howrah, Calcutta, lived in Jullundar (in the Punjab) and had her passport issued at Lahore to accompany a family by ship to Britain in 1935.[113] In fact, ayahs found in the passport records were more likely to have been living away from the regions they were born or married in than not.

It is also erroneous to assume that transnational service migration was only a two-way process, since many did not see London as their final destination. Plenty saw Britain as a stepping stone to further opportunities, either from the outset or during their stay. 49-year-old Anna Maria Hoff took a position as cook-general with employers who treated her so badly she left of her own accord. In her explanation to the authorities she claimed that she was 'desirous of going to Canada and have

[108] See D. Baines, 'European Emigration'.
[109] Bras, 'Maids to the City', p. 232.
[110] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/2981/1932.
[111] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/9600/1929.
[112] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1935, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/6847/1935.
[113] 'Duplicate Passport: Magdoline', 1935, London, British Library (BL), IOR/L/PJ/11/4/949.

enough money to pay my fare. I have friends in Toronto who have invited me to go there.'[114] Gertrud Gohring planned to spend a year in England to save enough money to join her father in America,[115] and German-born Ruth Spiegel arrived in England via a stay first in Potsdam, Germany, and on her departure two years later travelled onwards to Sweden.

These accounts, describing periods of time spent by servants in different countries, challenge the idea that women found work before they arrived in London, stayed in post and saved money before returning home, as the literature on lifecycle domestic servants migrating in-country describe. It suggests many were highly mobile and had already moved between major cities (and sometimes continents) before arriving in London. Their onward travel intentions are at times made clear in the record, hinting at strategies for further migration by using domestic service in London as a means to achieve that (later explored in the Epilogue). Using protection mechanisms established by purity organisations to assess the circumstances of a potential new position, and using the facilities of other groups to travel safely to their destinations, only add to the argument that these women were operating transnationally as independent labour migrants.

## Arrivals

Experiences of arrival into Britain naturally depended on the political environment of the time. Rather than arriving freely at the London stations from the boat-trains as they had done before 1914, young women seeking domestic work in London in the interwar period faced extra layers of bureaucracy and inspection, combined with greater surveillance once in Britain. Yet despite these extra barriers to entry, the foreign domestic servant sector did not collapse; indeed, as the permit numbers show, it rapidly increased, in part a reflection of the accelerated flight from service of many British women after the war combined with deteriorating economic conditions in much of Europe. Hajtó's work on the Belgian domestic work sector also found that World War I had a greater impact on not only the origins of servants, but also as to how they arrived. Before the war, migrant servants in Belgian households hailed from neighbouring countries and arrived

[114] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2080/EDAR/1007/1927.
[115] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/6906/1932.

'spontaneously';[116] after the war they were recruited in their own countries, 'as members of specifically recruited worker groups'.[117] This was mirrored in the British context. Once the Aliens Order came into effect after 1920, employers of women domestics were required to have secured a work permit for a specific job before their new servant could even land in Britain, but before this many simply arrived in London without work at all. The need for servants was as great (if not greater), but the mechanisms for securing those workers became more formalised, as nation states and their borders intensified. So how did the regulatory environment affect the women's experiences of arrival throughout the period, and how were they able to make use of it for their own purposes?

## *Pre-1919*

**En route**

Often overlooked as a site of analysis, the act of travel is of significant value in understanding migrant experiences of arriving in Britain. Most arrived via the boat-train into the London stations, with many more arriving at Harwich or Hull and thence overground via train. The boats and trains were spaces of contact in themselves, with many meeting fellow travellers en route to London. In 1895, 'A French girl unable to speak any language other than her own, in reply to an advertisement left Paris for London […] [O]n her journey she entered into conversation with a German girl who had formerly lived in Gordon house and who was able to converse in French'.[118] Another French woman arrived from Paris 'without any knowledge of London beyond imagining that she could obtain a situation directly'. It was her 'travelling companion [who] gave her an address where she could stay'.[119]

Journeys could also be spaces of danger, however. In 1911, a Swiss servant had "'chummed" with some young women, fellow-travellers to London', and was robbed of all her money.[120] Plenty of others mislaid (or had misspelled) the addresses of their destinations during the journey and found themselves lost and dependent upon charity on arrival: Rifka Greenberg lost the address of her

[116] Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium', p. 367.
[117] Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium', p. 367.
[118] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1895*, p. 79.
[119] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 113.
[120] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1911*, p. 104.

contact in London and was forced to spend time at SPH while efforts were made to find her a position.[121] For the servant who alighted on the London station platforms after her long journey, she ran the gauntlet of the charming gentlemen (and indeed ladies) posing as recruiters and welcomers proposing she go with them instead. She might have recognised the familiar armband of the Travellers' Aid worker, hovering near the waiting room to divert new arrivals from the dangers of procurers, or looked anxiously about for her employer (or someone sent by them). And she may have paused in this liminal space waiting to be met, to be taken to a household she will have known little about, to start her work first thing the next morning.

**Tricked and defrauded**

Much of what is known about foreign servants travelling before the government restrictions applied comes from annual reports published by charity and purity organisations such as the HWGL and JAPGAW. Although it is not impossible to piece together their experiences by reading against the grain, the intended audiences of such sources clearly influenced the content of the reports. In the HWGL records, much is made of the dangers of foreign registry agents who would trick young women into accepting non-existent situations before relieving them of their money and luggage in order to pay inflated accommodation costs on arrival. The implication was that these women would have no choice but to become prostitutes. One widely published scam from 1882 related to advertisements placed in the German press. They offered work for:

> …pretty young girls as governesses, housekeepers, and saleswomen; salary according to a ability, and often under certain circumstances, a free passage. Applicants to send their photographs and addresses to an advertising office in Berlin. From all parts of Germany particularly from Sachsen, young women were selected from the photographs and sent on to London but many of them have found by sad experience that to have accepted the situation offered would mean to live a life of degradation.[122]

The 1885 report confirms that the Servants Registry attached to the Home dealt with four girls from France and Germany who had been enticed in such a manner. Yet the same report boasts of 376 applicants for domestic work that year; four cases does not seem therefore to suggest that most were being duped.[123]

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[121] 'Sara Pyke House: Minute Book of the House Committee. 28 Sep 1904-11 Sep 1907', HL, MS173/2/8/2.
[122] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1882*, p. 32.
[123] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1885*, p. 97.

**Alighting and disembarking**

The dangerous characters waiting to lure unsuspecting foreigners to a life of shame were considered so threatening that near-constant supervision was dedicated to boat and train arrivals by the protection agencies. Reflecting the nature of the Jewish arrivals (usually by ship from Hamburg), JAPGAW focused heavily on the ports, while the NVA and others focused their assistance efforts on railway and coaching termini in London where 'girls will receive help from one of the workers of the Association who speaks foreign languages and who meets all the trains carrying cross-Channel passengers'.[124] Though the JAPGAW agent was tasked with bringing unaccompanied vulnerable Jewish women to Sara Pyke House for their own protection, non-Jewish women were also assisted if they were in a similar plight on board the disembarking ship. In 1892, Margaret Orland, a Christian, was spotted on board the steamer "Gemma".

> She stated that she was a servant and that she thought she could find a situation with some people living at an address which however was so imperfectly described that it could not be found. Our agent knowing that a Christian family near Oxford street was in need of a servant took her there after having obtained the consent of the TAS to do so.[125]

In this case, Margaret was dealt with by JAPGAW and the TAS, but others were sent to hostels, consulates or religious leaders for further assistance. Such solutions were possible through the remarkable and dogged determination by lady volunteers and dock agents to prevent vulnerable women falling into the wrong hands. The NVA monitored unscrupulous registry offices and produced its own pamphlet of approved agencies which it distributed on inbound ships to London. JAPGAW too kept what was called a Black Book of suspicious addresses known to be places of vice. Golda Milstein and Rachel Marcowitch arrived together in October 1900 bearing a 'suspected' destination address (33 Bedford Street) given to them by a young man in Hamburg. The dock agent alerted them to this and after agreeing to go instead to Sara Pyke House, they both took domestic situations instead.[126]

Informal assistance was given by those working at the stations or ports. One evening in 1908, 'close on midnight the stationmaster at Euston terminus sent a young girl of 16 in company with one of the railway porters to Gordon House. It appeared that the girl had arrived at Euston station in the

[124] *NVA Annual Report 1912*, p. 50.
[125] 'Report of the Honorary Secretary to the Gentlemen's Committee for 1891', 1892, HL, MS173/2/2/3.
[126] 'Minute book, with Reports of the Case Committee, 2 Jul 1899-20 Jan 1901', HL, MS173/2/2/5, Oct 1900.

afternoon expecting to be met by a friend but no-one was there to meet her and she had no money.'[127] Rescue workers and interpreters from a variety of societies were alert to unaccompanied women. An NVA worker found a foreign girl (of unknown nationality) wandering around Victoria Coach station. Finding that her ticket was booked through to Fauldhouse, Scotland, she spoke with the conductor of the SMT Coach who 'promised to see that she reached her destination safely.' The following day, the rescue worker checked with the conductor who described the man who met the girl, asked his address, and the information was then sent to the NVA Scotland branch who were able to visit the foreign girl to check her welfare.[128] In 1893, Rosa Sackler, a Christian girl, arrived in London from Bremen. She had no destination so brought no address. The dock agent for JAPGAW found her at the port and took her to the office of the Traveller's Aid Society. Since they did not know what to do for her either, they suggested she was taken to Sara Pyke House who placed her in service with a Christian family in Charter House Square EC.[129] Such networks must have been invaluable for the newly-arrived, but also demonstrate the formidable reach of their activities.

The infrastructure that grew up around migrating women was impressive during the period. Organisations worked together to achieve the same goal: to prevent women falling into vice. This victim/protection narrative brought together rescue groups from all over the world and of varied backgrounds: international federations protecting the vulnerable woman, diplomatic entities, overseas branches of friendly societies, Jewish and Christian philanthropic and purity organisations, pastors, priests and vicars, residential hostels in London and overseas, stationmasters, coach drivers, railway workers and humble milkmen. The women's foreignness thus operated both as a potential weakness, being targets for procurers, and as a benefit: unable to speak the language and unaware of her surroundings, she became instantly, and visibly, more likely to be assisted by members of the general public.

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[127] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1908*. p. 107.
[128] 'Lithuania (Kaunas)', WL, 1932-3, 4IBS/6/092.
[129] 'Gentlemen's Committee: Report of the Honorary Secretary upon Work done at the Port of London during 1893', 1894, HL, MS173/2/2/4.

## *Post-1919*

**Centralising immigration**

Some of the intricate network of the NVA, JAPGAW, hostels and rescue organisations started to disintegrate during World War I. The Gordon House annual report for 1914 reported that most of their foreign residents had to leave the country, and it became a Home mostly for English girls until it closed in 1923.[130] The war stopped station and port rescue work altogether, since so few women were travelling. Even after the Armistice, changes in the way transmigrants were handled by the state through the Aliens Order meant many would bypass the welfare system established by the Jewish associations through the Poor Jews Shelter, Sara Pyke House and other support agencies. 'Our services would not be required very much', reported the minutes of JAPGAW, after a meeting with Inspector under the Aliens Act at the Home Office to discuss these changes.[131] But it was not just changes in the state apparatus that affected the support network; new transport routes also impacted the protection infrastructure. In April 1920, JAPGAW reported that ships were now almost always arriving at Tilbury, rather than the central docks, so 'it was very difficult to trace [young women] after they once left the boat as they did not all come up to London by the same train'.[132] By 1923, the Sarah Pyke House was forced to moved premises. 'The circumstances which necessitated the hostel being in the East End of London no longer exist, for transmigrant girls are now greatly reduced in number,' it claimed.[133] Overall, the number of immigrant girls 'is now almost negligible.'[134] As a result of the shifts in the arrival and welcoming mechanisms, greater onus was thus placed on individual women and girls seeking help themselves from relevant organisations and agencies, rather than having official assistance provided on arrival.

The NVA continued to try to assist new arrivals from the Continent. A decade after the end of World War I it was still cooperating with other organisations to assist friendless girls, and 'posters in three languages [were] now exhibited at the London stations and on board the Channel boats' to

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[130] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1923* (1924).
[131] 'Minute book, preceded by index, including conjoint meetings with the general purposes committee. 16 Jan 1916–25 Jan 1925', HL, MS173/2/2/6.
[132] HL, MS173/2/2/6.
[133] *Report of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGAW) for the Years 1923 and 1924* (1925), p. 56.
[134] *Report of JAPGAW for 1923 and 1924* (1925), p. 62.

alert new arrivals to the dangers of 'running the streets and picking up undesirable acquaintances'.[135] It claimed that even in 1930, it was 'commonplace at Victoria for foreign girls to arrive who know no English; who have travelled on the wrong day or have caught the wrong train.'[136] Nevertheless, the type of work involving foreign servant cases shifted from assisting them on arrival to investigating them (or their employers) once in a situation (explored in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5). The few cases recorded in the archives of the Swiss Benevolent Society (SBS) in the interwar period concentrate on work relating to Swiss women's false imprisonment, poor working conditions or destitution; by this time they rarely refer to the naivety, so prevalent in Victorian accounts, of the women arriving to find domestic work in London. Instead, the Ministry of Labour alone authorized domestic service applications, submitted by employers before their intended employee had even arrived at border control. In this way, tracking the immigration of domestic servants became much more visible (and controllable) than before. Nevertheless, the very existence of a route to the UK as a servant offered opportunities of its own, and the records are peppered with examples of women using these service permits to access life in Britain.

**Manipulating the regulations**

With the implementation of border controls after World War I, unless married or possessing sufficient funds for an extended holiday, opportunities for unaccompanied women to travel unimpeded ceased. Reports prepared by Immigration Officers held in MoL files reveal some of the ways in which women were using the permits to gain entry to Britain. The very gendered nature of being able to travel as a domestic servant was perhaps a tempting one for those seeking alternative purposes to be in Britain.

Twenty-four-year-old Swiss-born Marie Schneeberger presented herself at the port of Dover in 1924 claiming to be visiting her sick aunt. Two months before, she had been issued a DSP to work for Mr Hamilton, an architect living in Chelsea who had apparently employed her before. The immigration officer questioned Ms Schneeberger at some length, suspicious of the value of funds she had in her possession given that her father was 'only a cap maker' and that she had previously been registered as a '*demoiselle de magasin'* (shopgirl). She could not explain how she came to have so

[135] *Report of JAPGAW for 1930* (1931), p. 15.
[136] *Report of JAPGAW for 1930* (1931), p. 16.

much money, so the officer reported that 'it can only be inferred therefore that she is a prostitute, which impression is confirmed both by her speech and appearance' and refused her permission to land.[137] This case appears to be more complex than the notes indicate in the MoL file, but since Ms Schneeberger did not claim at the point of arrival that she was a servant, despite being permitted to enter the UK on the basis of an MoL permit, one can perhaps only guess that she was using (or being used for) the guise of service to move freely between London and Paris.

Other files revealed the lengths some women would go to in order to travel freely and work internationally. Frieda Hellstern, from Switzerland, was found to have committed an offence under the Aliens Order 1920: 'she tampered with her Swiss passport and removed or attempted to remove endorsements from Guernsey, Southampton and France'; the key phrase she removed was 'not to take salaried employment in France'.[138] It can perhaps be surmised that she had plans to work there. Julia Brichta used the opposite tactic. File notes made by the British Passport Control Office in Brussels reveal that Julia had a British identity book, having entered Britain 18 months before. But 'it would seem that she has registered periodically as being of no occupation in order to have no difficulty in remaining in the UK whereas she is actually a domestic servant and has been during the whole of the time she has been in or out of the UK'.[139] By registering just as a traveller, she was thus able to avoid the red tape involved in applying for a work permit before entering Britain, and could move jobs once in the country. This would have meant collusion with her employer, since they too would have hidden her status, and might also have been a way to pay her below the recommended wages set by the MoL.

Hildegard Loch (25) from Germany used the excuse of learning English as her reason to return to Britain after a visit home. Arriving at Harwich in the winter of 1932, she successfully persuaded the immigration officer to grant her permission on the basis of wishing to 'perfect her knowledge of English', though his notes suggest suspicion — 'she is already fairly proficient' — so was conditionally landed for just two months. When this expired she applied for an extension to remain, whereupon it emerged she was engaged to an English (as yet still-married) man. Details of

[137] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1924, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/4157/1924.
[138] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/10572/1931.
[139] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/9919/1932.

the divorce case suggest they had been having an affair since she first arrived in Britain in October 1930. Claiming to be learning the English language in this case seems to have been a convenient cover to enable her to stay longer for what the police deemed to be 'immoral' behaviour.[140]

On a few occasions, evidence of young women using permits to follow loved ones to England was found. Lucy Melletta and Major Craig (of the Royal Army Medical Corps) met while he was serving with the army of occupation in Wiesbaden, Germany.[141] They became engaged and Major Craig admitted 'he had sexual relations with her'. Very soon afterwards 'he discovered […] they were not suited to each other and the engagement was broken off, he making her a monetary allowance'. He subsequently returned to England where in 1932 he was a serving medical office at Woolwich. Lucy, meanwhile, had not forgotten. In 1931 she applied to be a 'mother's help' for a family in Clapton and had been granted a domestic work permit. Once in England, she wrote to Major Craig's friends asking for his address and claiming they were still engaged. By the time she finally met up with Major Craig, he had informed the authorities that she would 'make trouble' and demanded she be deported. He need not have worried; she took a boat from Dover shortly after they met, having accepted money for the fare. She stayed in her position only long enough to find him and meet him.

## Conclusion

It is impossible to understand migration in terms of purely individual decisions to move. Visible and invisible structures continually shape the way people make choices, and for foreign servants in London these included levels of gendered social control that stretched far beyond national borders. Organisations and state mechanisms also added to the barriers they faced in moving. Sinke argues that the protection mechanisms built around women's fragility in mobility 'discouraged the independent movement of women,'[142] but I argue that the very systems that mushroomed around the particular perception of vulnerable women were used actively by those they helped. The enduring view was that the rightful place of a woman was in the home, that she was particularly

[140] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/4489/1932.
[141] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5691/1932.
[142] Sinke, 'Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives', 82–103, p. 96.

susceptible to sexual dangers and that she should at all times be sheltered in a residential environment (which reflects the triple control of 'service, surveillance and settlement' outlined in Chapter 1). This paternalistic attitude ensured that young women were socially sanctioned to leave their families for work as domestics, that they could travel with some degree of safety to their destinations and that on arrival they could be sheltered in gender-segregated hostels who more than likely shared their national origins.

All the women benefited from the structural changes in regulations where they were able to secure permits, though the ayahs and amahs, travelling as British subjects and only staying temporarily in London, faced none of the immigration restrictions beyond the need to bear a passport. The restrictions of the 1905 Aliens Act, targeted directly at the Russian and Polish immigrants, did affect the numbers enumerated in the subsequent census (dropping from 809 to 564) but these rose again in 1921 and stabilized throughout the 1920s and 1930s at around 600 (see Table 3 in Chapter 2). Many of these servants arrived with some other intention in mind, other than service, though it might be inferred from their origins that the opportunity for a better life was represented in overseas migration. For the largest numbers of foreign servants, from the remaining countries of Europe, the sources are the clearest: rarely very young and having lived at multiple residential addresses, many of them worked in cities away from their home villages and towns before making the move to London. Many more either saw Britain as a stepping stone to further travel or careers, or as a place to discover in its own right. Economic reasons for choosing London are evident, especially given the number of women moving jobs for better pay once in the country. However, learning English (or pretending to), training for a new career, following or finding loved ones and escaping family obligations at home were also part of the varied mix of motivations for seeking work across the Channel, reasons found to be far broader than wage differentials predicted by migration theories.

The ways in which the state played a greater part in policing individual lives after 1905 had a direct effect on domestic servants as well as performing a crucial benefit for this study: case records were generated as a result of the new regulatory environment, which not only reveal how this structural framework sought to control foreign female servants, but offer a window into the individual lives

of those who were caught in its legislative web. The shortage of British servants after the war led to an increase in permits issued to overseas staff as employers and the government saw them as a solution to the servant shortage. The gender bias of the Aliens Order in effect fuelled the immigration of women as domestics, whose numbers expanded significantly in the interwar period, at a time when many historians have believed immigration in general to have waned.

The very idea of unaccompanied females on the move was so at odds with the social attitude towards women as defenceless and most suitably 'homed' that it spawned a network of state, semi-state, voluntary and international organisations designed to protect them from untold horrors and to maintain their virtues and moral values. The unintended consequence of these very structures, however, was to have encouraged women's mobility; indeed, all three groups of women were able to access support en route and on arrival. From the expectation of lifecycle service before marriage, to the fear of being trafficked or worse, and from close-level surveillance at key transport hubs to the provision of dedicated accommodation on arrival, these women were enabled to become mobile agents. Migrating abroad challenges the image of a young foreign servant as passive victim and allows us to understand her as a decision-maker, attracted by the possibility of a new version of herself far from her past. As a woman with few options, however, that future self could only happen through service migration. If domestic service was being used as the principal means for young, ordinary-class women to travel, greater attention needs to be paid to service not just as a sector but as a conduit to mobility. This means exploring servant lives beyond their employment to establish how they interacted with the structures, people and attitudes that surrounded them to pursue their own life goals. Migration for these women was a constantly evolving process, rarely starting at a given point at home and ending at a single destination, but consisting of a multitude of renegotiated decisions based on any number of planned or unplanned circumstances. This journey continues in the next chapter, which examines the ways these women were perceived as others, and how they sought and secured work as foreign servants.

# Chapter 4

## 'On the lookout': finding her place

The 'servant problem' was a two-pronged conundrum for a growing middle-class society that desired both clean houses and the social status that servant-hiring conferred upon them. But an increase in factory work, shop serving, waitressing, office work and live-out servants, combined with the sheer hard work and restrictive working time of service, drove many to other job sectors. Opinions on the subject were regularly proffered in the press: the shortage of English maids in London is 'due mainly to the multiplication of tea rooms and cheap restaurants, where the greater freedom and increased matrimonial facilities attract [these] girls',[1] claimed a correspondent for the *Torquay Times* at the turn of the century. As the literature and Chapter 2 findings show, the numbers of British women entering service went into decline from the late 1800s; the lack of British servants was thus a boon for foreigners in search of jobs. The subject of domestic service was often tackled in the annual reports for the HWGL, though given that its readership was the servant-hiring classes, it was careful not to get too drawn into the reasons for the problem. Nevertheless, it saw the benefits: 'Without entering into the "pros" and "cons" of the domestic question, it is certain that for some reason or other domestic servants are not so plentiful among our own countrywomen as they used to be, and thus it is that foreign girls find no very great difficulty in obtaining situations in England with good wages.'[2] In 1896, in a commentary on the decreasing numbers of young women engaged in domestic service in the England and Wales census report, the HWGL saw a direct correlation between the dearth of British servants and the increase in foreigners: 'The fact is domestic service has become somewhat unpopular with English girls and young women and this has incited the German and French lasses to come to our shores in larger numbers than formerly.'[3]

Post-war anxieties about former enemies, and with the introduction of immigration controls and Ministry of Labour permits, the presence of foreigners and foreign women workers became more visible in politics and the press. The word 'alien' in newspapers began to be used with more

[1] 'Male Domestics in London', *Torquay Times*, 25 Sep 1903, p. 3.
[2] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, p. 79.
[3] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1895*, p. 76.

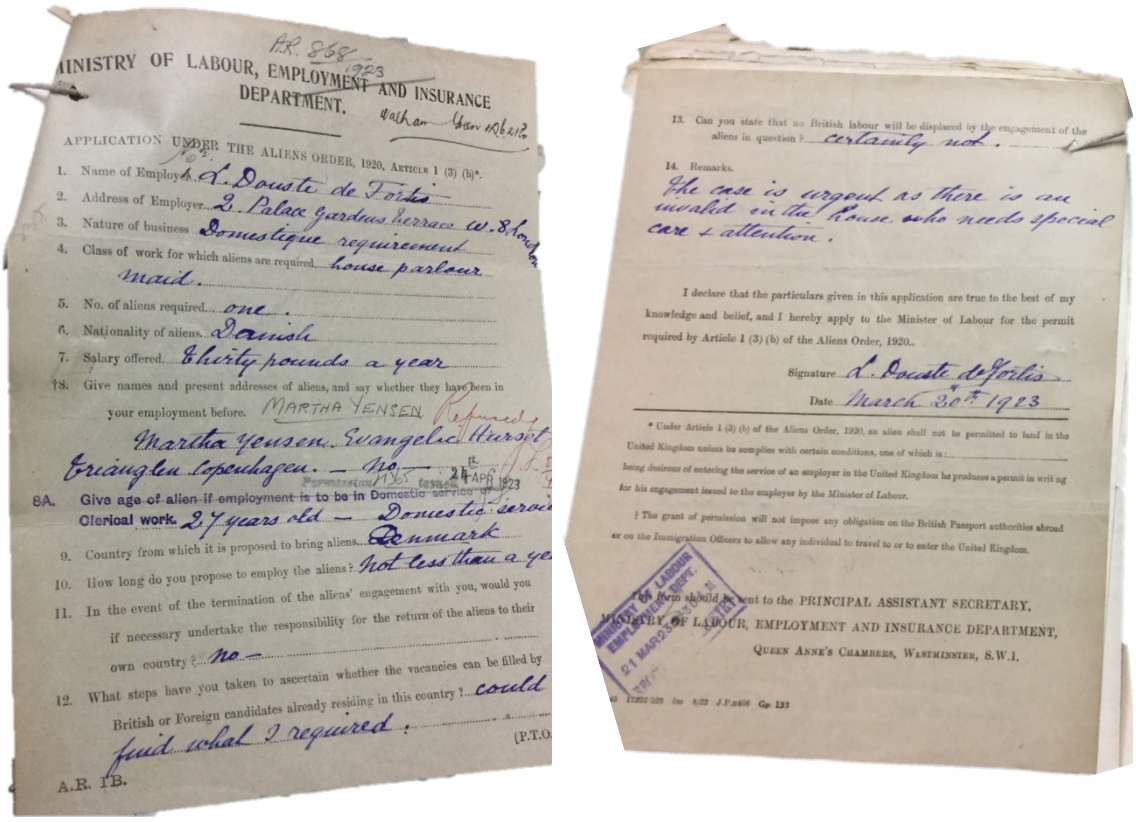
regularity after 1918, and with the onset of the post-war depression there was concern in some quarters at the folly of importing labour at a time of mass unemployment. Newspapers carried reports of MPs demanding from the Ministry of Labour numbers of permits issued to foreign staff. Under the headline 'Influx of Foreign Workers', an article in 1928 enumerated the numbers of servants, theatrical artists (almost always from America) and other smaller occupational groups to Britain,[4] and thereafter the press carried reports of MPs' requests for numbers of permits issued every quarter. In 1932, the MP for Huddersfield, Mr Mabane, urged the Minister for Labour to 'represent to employers that it is against the public interest and in the highest degree unpatriotic for employers of domestic servants to employ Germans when English girls are available.'[5] And yet mistresses continued to claim they could not find suitable help. The first part of this chapter asks, therefore, why did they seek overseas servants, and what attributes did they look for in them? Is there any evidence to support what Chapter 2 found, that foreign servants held an appeal for a wider section of society than the wealthiest homes? The second then explores the issue from the servants' perspective: how and to what extent were they able to leverage benefits from this gap in the market?

## *Domestic service permit system*

As described in Chapter 3, the domestic service work permit became key to women accessing servant jobs in Britain after 1919. Inexplicably, a number of prominent scholars have rather selectively reported the restrictions that applied in the interwar period: that restrictions to foreign servants working in Britain were only introduced in 1931 and a complicated system was established to make this difficult. Rose Holmes describes what she calls a lengthy process of application: 'Each domestic servant had first to be recruited through personal or agency connections. A lengthy permit application had to be filled out by the putative employer, and then processed by the Ministry of Labour'.[6] That 'lengthy' form (referenced AR1B) consisted simply of two sides of a pre-printed manila sheet, about the size of an A5 sheet of paper, requesting standardised information about the servant, her proposed employer and what other efforts they had made to secure British candidates.

[4] 'Influx of foreign workers', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 1 Jun 1928, p. 8
[5] 'German Domestic Servants', *The Times*, 17 Nov 1932, p. 7
[6] R. Holmes, 'Love, Labour, Loss: Women, Refugees and the Servant Crisis in Britain, 1933–1939', *Women's History Review*, 2017, p. 2.

It took about a week to process these. An example of the form used up until the end of 1931 is shown in Figure 48 and Figure 49.



MINISTRY OF LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND INSURANCE DEPARTMENT.

APPLICATION UNDER THE ALIENS ORDER, 1920, ARTICLE 1 (3) (b)*.

1. Name of Employer: L. Douste de Fortis
2. Address of Employer: 2. Palace Gardens Terrace W.8
3. Nature of business: Domestique requirement
4. Class of work for which aliens are required: house parlour maid.
5. No. of aliens required: one.
6. Nationality of aliens: Danish
7. Salary offered: thirty pounds a year
8. Give names and present addresses of aliens, and say whether they have been in your employment before: MARTHA YENSEN Refused
Martha Yensen Evangelic Hurset Friarglen Copenhagen. — no —
Permission [illegible] issued 24 APR 1923
8A. Give age of alien if employment is to be in Domestic service or Clerical work: 27 years old — Domestic service
9. Country from which it is proposed to bring aliens: Denmark
10. How long do you propose to employ the aliens? not less than a ye
11. In the event of the termination of the aliens' engagement with you, would you if necessary undertake the responsibility for the return of the aliens to their own country? no —
12. What steps have you taken to ascertain whether the vacancies can be filled by British or Foreign candidates already residing in this country? could find what I required.

(P.T.O.

A.R. 1B.

13. Can you state that no British labour will be displaced by the engagement of the aliens in question? certainly not.
14. Remarks.
The case is urgent as there is an invalid in the house who needs special care & attention.

I declare that the particulars given in this application are true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I hereby apply to the Minister of Labour for the permit required by Article 1 (3) (b) of the Aliens Order, 1920.

Signature L. Douste de Fortis
Date March 30th 1923

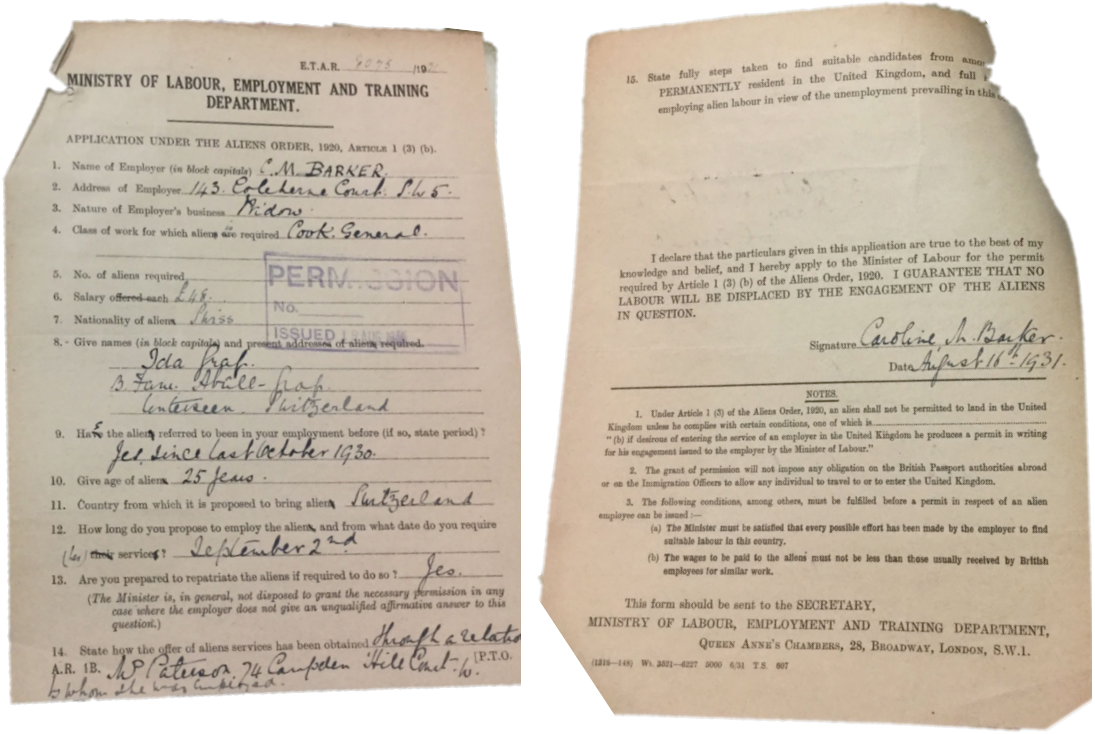
* Under Article 1 (3) (b) of the Aliens Order, 1920, an alien shall not be permitted to land in the United Kingdom unless he complies with certain conditions, one of which is: being desirous of entering the service of an employer in the United Kingdom he produces a permit in writing for his engagement issued to the employer by the Minister of Labour.

† The grant of permission will not impose any obligation on the British Passport authorities abroad or on the Immigration Officers to allow any individual to travel to or to enter the United Kingdom.

This form should be sent to the PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND INSURANCE DEPARTMENT, QUEEN ANNE'S CHAMBERS, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR EMPLOYMENT DEPT. 21 MAR 1923 REGISTRY

**Figure 48: Example of a completed domestic service permit application form (AR1B) dated 1923**



E.T.A.R. [illegible] 19[illegible]

MINISTRY OF LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING DEPARTMENT.

APPLICATION UNDER THE ALIENS ORDER, 1920, ARTICLE 1 (3) (b).

1. Name of Employer (in block capitals): C.M. BARKER
2. Address of Employer: 143. Cadogan Court S.W.3.
3. Nature of Employer's business: Widow
4. Class of work for which aliens are required: Cook General.
5. No. of aliens required:
6. Salary offered each: £48.
7. Nationality of aliens: Swiss
8. Give names (in block capitals) and present addresses of aliens required.
Ida Graf.
3 Fam. Strüle-Graf
Lenzerheide Switzerland
9. Has the alien referred to been in your employment before (if so, state period)? Yes since last October 1930.
10. Give age of alien: 25 years.
11. Country from which it is proposed to bring alien: Switzerland
12. How long do you propose to employ the alien, and from what date do you require (his/her) services? September 2nd
13. Are you prepared to repatriate the aliens if required to do so? Yes.
(The Minister is, in general, not disposed to grant the necessary permission in any case where the employer does not give an unqualified affirmative answer to this question.)
14. State how the offer of aliens services has been obtained: Through a relative
A.R. 1B. M. Paterson 74 Campden Hill Court W.
by whom the [illegible] [illegible]

PERMISSION No. ISSUED

15. State fully steps taken to find suitable candidates from among PERMANENTLY resident in the United Kingdom, and full employing alien labour in view of the unemployment prevailing in this

I declare that the particulars given in this application are true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I hereby apply to the Minister of Labour for the permit required by Article 1 (3) (b) of the Aliens Order, 1920. I GUARANTEE THAT NO LABOUR WILL BE DISPLACED BY THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE ALIENS IN QUESTION.

Signature Caroline M. Barker.
Date August 16th 1931.

NOTES.

1. Under Article 1 (3) of the Aliens Order, 1920, an alien shall not be permitted to land in the United Kingdom unless he complies with certain conditions, one of which is ..... "(b) if desirous of entering the service of an employer in the United Kingdom he produces a permit in writing for his engagement issued to the employer by the Minister of Labour."

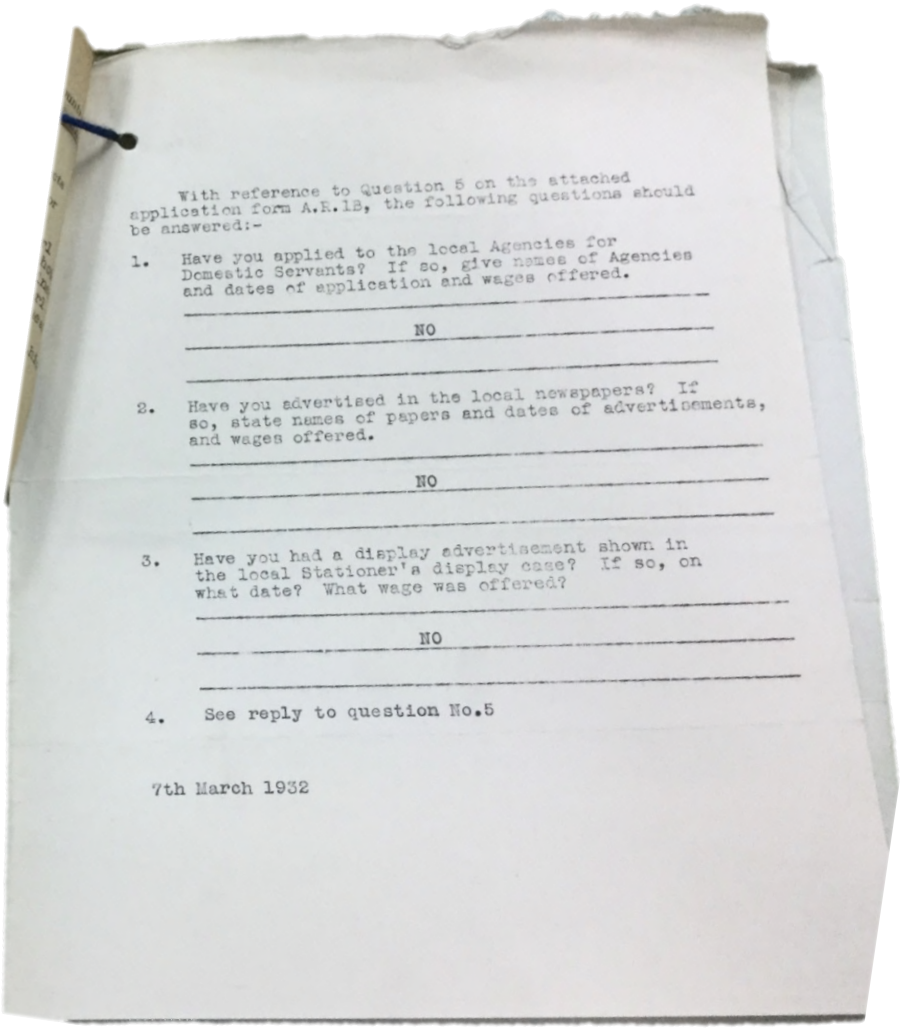
2. The grant of permission will not impose any obligation on the British Passport authorities abroad or on the Immigration Officers to allow any individual to travel to or to enter the United Kingdom.

3. The following conditions, among others, must be fulfilled before a permit in respect of an alien employee can be issued :—
(a) The Minister must be satisfied that every possible effort has been made by the employer to find suitable labour in this country.
(b) The wages to be paid to the aliens must not be less than those usually received by British employees for similar work.

This form should be sent to the SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING DEPARTMENT, QUEEN ANNE'S CHAMBERS, 28, BROADWAY, LONDON, S.W.1.

(1315—148) Wt. 3621—6227 5000 6/31 T.S. 607

**Figure 49: Example of a completed domestic service permit application form (AR1B) dated 1931**



With reference to Question 5 on the attached application form A.R.1B, the following questions should be answered:-

1. Have you applied to the local Agencies for Domestic Servants? If so, give names of Agencies and dates of application and wages offered.

NO

2. Have you advertised in the local newspapers? If so, state names of papers and dates of advertisements, and wages offered.

NO

3. Have you had a display advertisement shown in the local Stationer's display case? If so, on what date? What wage was offered?

NO

4. See reply to question No.5

7th March 1932

**Figure 50: Example of additional page added by recruitment agencies to domestic permit application forms after 1931 (dated 1932)**

Delap does not cite her source for claiming that 'controls on the numbers of foreign servants had been imposed by the Ministry of Labour in 1931,'[7] but a similar assertion is picked up by others, including Holmes and Caestecker and Moore, who accept 1931 to be the start of policy restrictions on foreign servants.[8] I cannot find reference to this in the Ministry of Labour files, but they may refer to Tony Kushner's claim that 'until 1931 there were no restrictions on the use of foreign

[7] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 90.
[8] 'The controls had only been established in 1931.' Holmes, 'Love, Labour, Loss', p. 18/fn.6 ; F. Caestecker and B. Moore, 'Female Domestic Servants as Desirable Refugees: Gender, Labour Needs and Immigration Policy in Belgium, The Netherlands and Great Britain.', *European History Quarterly*, 41/2 (2011), pp. 217-8.

domestic servants.[9] He accredits this statement to two MoL documents dated six and seven years, respectively, after the event, which were likely referring to the more *stringent* approach to authorising foreign permits. The requirement to apply for a permit prior to landing in Britain was a condition of the Aliens Order (Article 1 (3) (b)), in place over a decade before. In 1931 an amendment made it compulsory for employer applicants to prove they had attempted to find local candidates, (see Figure 50 for the extra page involved) but there is no evidence in the official files at the time that 1931 marked any other type of change in the type of servants that could be admitted. It is using information recorded on these domestic permit application forms and held in the Ministry of Labour 'blacklist' files (see section on Blacklisted Files in Chapter 1) that it has been possible to extract recruitment information relating to employers and their prospective servants, including the range of techniques used, the agencies involved and the type of work and pay for which the servants were being hired.

### *Newspaper job advertisements*

The DSPs are only available for the interwar period, however, so in order to understand the recruitment market in the period before 1914, a further source was used, which is better equipped to contextualise the findings from the I-CeM census data. In order to assess to what extent foreignness was either a desirable feature for mistresses, or a significant differentiator for servants, a survey of classified advertisements was conducted in one of the newspapers that carried the highest number of classified advertisements for domestic servants: the *Morning Post*. This follows the approach taken by Bressey in finding working people of colour in Britain.[10] Taking a newspaper every five years from 1881 to 1906 by way of a sample, all advertisements for both upper and ordinary servants were counted, selecting all those placed by servants (see Table 13 for a summary of the advertisements surveyed).[11] In this way, data was collated on the recruitment criteria: where they worked, for whom, how they described themselves, how they were described, what salaries they demanded and what characteristics marked them out (if at all) from their British counterparts.

[9] Kushner, 'An Alien Occupation', p. 557.
[10] Bressey, 'Looking for Work: The Black Presence in Britain 1860–1920'.
[11] Restricted online coverage meant newspapers printed after 1909 could not be accessed.

| **Name of newspaper** | *Morning Post* |
|---|---|
| **Dates of editions consulted** | 6 April 1881<br>9 September 1886<br>8 April 1891<br>16 September 1896<br>10 April 1901<br>6 September 1906 |
| **Total no of situations offered (Situations Vacant)** | 1,104 |
| **Total no of situations wanted (Situations Required; Want Places)** | 1,377 |
| **Total no of foreign situations offered (Situations Vacant)** | 40 |
| **Total no of foreign situations wanted (Situations Required; Want Places)** | 44 |

**Table 13: Summary of newspaper classified advertisements consulted**

Service jobs tended to appear on the penultimate pages of the *Morning Post*, and while in the 1880s the jobs were merged into one continuous listing, by the twentieth century jobs were separated into sections, an indication of the importance of hierarchy in household staffing matters: There were three main sections: **Situations Vacant** advertisements were placed by employers and ran from three lines at 3*s*. **Situations Required** also cost 3*s* but ran to four lines. These consisted of individuals looking for employment (though usually only the upper servants), mistresses wishing to recommend their staff and agencies looking to place women in positions. **Want Places** was where most servants placed their own advertisements. At 1*s* 6*d* it was a more economical way to advertise their services,[12] but in just two lines they had to carefully select descriptors that would stand out above the hundreds of others in the same section. I have also supplemented the London-based newspaper data with that of advertisements in the *Homeward Mail* placed both for and by ayahs and amahs, who operated in a slightly different market. In both cases, descriptors offer a glimpse into what were perceived to be important skills or attributes for a (foreign) servant. These descriptors and the data extracted from these servant-placed advertisements form part of the analysis in this chapter.

## "Situations vacant"

Resorting to foreign maids was not a terribly new idea, even in 1906 when the *Daily Mirror* published an article entitled 'How to solve the servant problem'. Readers were 'strongly advised to

[12] In 1881 this section cost just a shilling but had risen to 1*s* 6*d* by 1886. The price of advertisements in all three sections remained unchanged until after 1918.

try foreign domestics' in a bid to thwart the shortage of (hard-working) servants.[13] The positive othering of the continental servant has its roots further back in history. Jean Hecht's work on foreign servants in eighteenth-century Britain reveals that staff from France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy were 'thought to be docile and submissive; the habit of obedience was held to be deeply rooted in their nature. The French were credited with the most extreme servility; but the degree ascribed to other nationalities was sufficiently great to render them more attractive than English domestics.'[14] This perceived docility ensured they experienced life in service in a very different way to their British counterparts at the time. One employer felt free to kick and beat his foreign servant 'without giving reason for it', while claiming that English servants had 'their heads so full of their rights and liberties, that I'll never have any of them in my house, while I can get foreigners'.[15] Did the national memory of docile yet socially 'prestigious' foreign servants in the eighteenth century persist until at least the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? How far were they sought for specific values of being 'foreign' or were they seen rather as cheap, readily-available labour?

## *Desperately seeking (suitable) servants*

> …the maid question is hopeless they all seem to be doing men's jobs nowadays or certainly don't like the quiet of the country. A neighbour of mine had the same difficulty and was obliged to bring over Germans. (Employer justification for applying for a foreign maid on a DSP application form, 1932).[16]

**Not-British**

What many servant-keeping families appear to have felt about foreign servants is not so much what they represented, but rather what they did not. In such cases, foreign women were positively marked for being 'not British', rather than for espousing any particular values associated with foreignness. In resorting to the employment of an Austrian cook-general, Flight Lieutenant Horn felt compelled to share his experience of British servants in order to strengthen his application:

> In desperation [we] took Elsie back at the increased wage demanded by her. After three days my wife found her in bed with her airman who had climbed through the window. She was dismissed. Got a woman who could do exactly nothing. She thought amongst other things that it was quicker to boil water in a frying pan than in the kettle. The tea was undrinkable. [Subsequently placed a newspaper classified ad]. We have so far had two applications. One woman came for her interview completely drunk, the other had elephantitis of the leg and St. Victus dance. Both were quite impossible.[17]

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[13] 'How to Solve the Servant Problem', *Daily Mirror*, 10 Sep 1906, p. 11.
[14] J. Hecht, *Continental and Colonial Servants in Eighteenth Century England* (Northampton, Mass., 1954), p. 27.
[15] *London Packet*, 1774, No. 769, Sept 23-26, 1c, quoted in Hecht, *Continental and Colonial Servants in Eighteenth Century England*, p. 27.
[16] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/4409/1932.
[17] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3716/1933.

Amusing as they are, descriptions such as these were not unique in constructing the British servant as inadequate and unsuited for service. The reason mistresses strove to retain foreign staff, according to the *Daily Mirror*, was because 'English domestic servants of the present day… are unprincipled, lazy, and frightfully wasteful.'[18] Here again is the juxtaposition of foreign virtues set against the negative attributes of English-born women engaged in service. The latter, according to the *Daily Mirror*'s informant, 'have only themselves to blame'.[19] The opinions of agency managers responding to a government inquiry relating to foreign staff are perhaps closer to actual experience:

> They were all unanimous in their statements that foreigners were far more satisfactory than English girls in small households. They were adaptable, willing, clean, educated and dependable.[20]

Some twenty years later, and sections of the media sympathetic to the middle-class housewife continued to echo the virtues of the foreigner: 'her readiness for hard work, and her obvious efforts to adapt herself to new surroundings', as opposed to the British servants who are 'inefficient because they take no interest in it'.[21]

A common criticism levelled at British servants was their refusal to do work that did not formally correspond to their job title. Mr Jones could not 'find girl suitable for care of children as well as housework. Better class English girls will not do the housework,' he complained.[22] For Mr Shirley, English servants simply did not do the chores he required of them, whereas foreign women 'carr[ied] out our household duties including scrubbing which is apparently objected by servants here when doing other duties'.[23] The *Hull Daily Mail* reflected on how foreign servants were favoured over local ones in the past, on the basis of their attitude: 'In days gone by many a Scandinavian domestic girl landed at our docks to be employed either in Hull, or to be transferred to another English town. The Norwegian girl, either as children's nurse, cook, or general servant,

[18] 'How to Solve the Servant Problem', *Daily Mirror*, 10 Sep 1906, p. 11.
[19] 'How to Solve the Servant Problem', *Daily Mirror*, 10 Sep 1906, p. 11.
[20] 'Information Obtained from Private Registry Offices in Connection with Domestics and the Administration of the Aliens Order', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/972/ET6654/1931, p. 1369.
[21] 'Ban on Foreign Maids Protest', *The Daily Mirror*, 19 Oct 1927, p. 4.
[22] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/4190/1931.
[23] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2080/EDAR/919/1929.

usually makes a good domestic. Some mistresses find her more ameniable [sic], or as it was phrased to me not so "hoity-toity" as the usual English girl'.[24]

The pitting of British women against their overseas counterparts was an important part of the successful acquisition of a domestic service work permit during the interwar years. In 1933, a couple from Sussex pleaded their case to bring two Germans to Britain as 'we have tried every possible means to obtain English help. Recently we have tried girls from the north, Newcastle, but they are so rough and noisy, totally unfit for service in the south'.[25] They went on to bemoan the character of the English: 'The independence of English women and girls is appalling! How to obtain efficient English labour?'[26] Yet in Germany at the turn of the century, the complaints against servants were hardly any different: the servant-hiring classes produced 'pamphlets and articles portraying servants as more and more immodest, dishonest, stubborn, obsessed with clothes, and demanding more and more wages for less and less work'.[27]

Juxtaposing the diligent foreign servant with the freedom-loving local women was a similar theme in other European cities: '"German cooks and domestics are loved in Paris. They work more and more assiduously, are more solid, quiet, honest, reliable and simple, and are easier to gratify than the French demoiselles, who cannot easily be bound through service, and who love freedom more than it is good".'[28] And in the Netherlands, migrant German maids were promoted in the press as 'disciplined young working daughters' as opposed to the 'strong sense of freedom expressed by our Dutch girls'.[29] Concerns around the growing independence of working-class young women at the turn of the century were, according to Sally Ledger, connected to their participation in trade unionism; in the period after 1918, their 'restless desire for independence [was ascribed to] a legacy of the war'.[30] The negative rhetoric around their independence aligns them with earlier attitudes connecting service, surveillance and settlement, and suggests these notions died hard in British society. As explored in more detail in Chapter 6, however, it was not just the British servants who

[24] 'Foreign Domestics', *Hull Daily Mail*, 24 Mar 1932, p. 7.
[25] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5010/1933.
[26] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5010/1933.
[27] Wierling, 'Women Domestic Servants in Germany at the Turn of the Century', p. 55.
[28] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 96.
[29] Henkes, 'Maids on the Move', p. 230.
[30] S. Ledger, *Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester, 1997) and Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 195.

flaunted their freedom. The foreigner as ideal servant for a household was apparently more to do with perceived difference than fact.

Higgs posits a useful theory in explaining the appeal of the non-urban servant, that rural girls were generally regarded as the best, though not necessarily the cheapest, and as being 'more willing to accept their position of social subordination because of their lack of access to the urban labour market.'[31] Hegstrom concurs. In an interview with a former interwar servant agency worker, she found that city girls were seen as 'uppity', and that mistresses 'felt that if they had a girl like that [country girl], the girl was more likely to stay'.[32] The sourcing of staff from beyond a pool of London-savvy urbanites made some sense for households wishing to train and retain staff to their own specific requirements. The virtues ascribed to the foreign servant thus included specific values relating to their nationality, but mostly related to the juxtaposition between the hard-working, tractable foreigner and the independent, lazy, urban Briton. But these distinctions paled into insignificance for those struggling to find domestic staff at all, tractable or not.

**Suburban blues**

Applications for foreign domestic work permits reveal the tension and frustration felt by the servant-hiring classes seeking to hire *any* domestic labour, and this was particularly stark for those living outside central London. In an era of suburbanisation, it seems the servant shortage was particularly acute in areas at some distance from urban centres. Mrs Matthews had advertised in London, suburban and Kentish newspapers for a general domestic, and was on the books of five separate registry offices at the time she applied for a Danish servant from the Danish YWCA. '[I] would prefer an English girl but find it impossible to obtain a maid to sleep in. Mill Hill [NW7] seems to be unpopular with maids who as everyone knows are very independent.'[33] This unwillingness to be far from urban life was reflected in the comments made by would-be-foreign-servant employers such as Mrs Maclaren in 1932: 'I have tried many registry offices but they tell me girls will not look for small country situations'.[34] The survey of private registry offices carried out in 1931 by the Ministry of Labour corroborated this view. It found that work permits were granted

[31] Higgs, 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', p. 208.
[32] J. L. Hegstrom, 'Reminiscences of Below Stairs: English Female Domestic Servants Between the Two World Wars', *Women's Studies*, 36/1 (2007), p. 22.
[33] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/5596/1931.
[34] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/4409/1932.

'more freely' to applicants residing in the country than in London or major towns 'since such British domestic servants as are available are more willing to seek employment in the latter than in the former centres'.[35] Additionally, it was found that employers sought young servants who were the most reluctant to go into the country. The older the servant, the less choosy she could be, which accords with what Horn has written on the confidence of older servants being a drawback for them (see Chapter 2).[36] The versatility and willingness (or naivety) of foreign women to work in small more remote households made them an appealing alternative when British labour could not be easily secured. There was thus a spatial element to the market which connected service to age and proximity to urban (and by extension social) centres.

The resident nature of domestic service was particularly unpopular with British staff, which led many to apply for foreigners to fill the gap. In Hampstead, Alice Burton, wife of a dentist, could only manage to find 'dailies' to help in her household and proposed to supplement this with a 'mother's help from Denmark to sleep in'.[37] Mrs Leatham secured a Swiss cook through the YWCA's International Section and justified importing a cook by claiming that 'English servants will not come to our house in Virginia Water as it is so lonely in the woods and nowhere to go when they go out'.[38] When her German cook was arrested for stealing in 1932, and she applied for another foreign labour permit, she was pragmatic about her staffing options: '[It's] not possible to get English girls to come [here]. Roads very lonely and not lighted in woods.'[39] A lack of transport connections was similarly restrictive. Lady O'Brien noted, in 1928, 'the disinclination of maids to accept permanent service in this village which is not on the Railway line'.[40] These drawbacks are suggestive of a geographic dispersal of newly-arrived foreign women, perhaps ignorant of the isolation of their new posts. As shown in Chapter 5, many of the women, given the opportunity, left positions that were too remote, but were replaced by more foreign women fresh off the boat-train.

[35] TNA, LAB 2/972/ET6654/1931, p. 1382.
[36] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 36.
[37] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/1357/2/1931.
[38] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5105/1931.
[39] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5105/1931.
[40] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1928, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/1387/1928.

## *Positively seeking foreigners*

Not all applications for foreign women were made on the basis of them being simply compared to their British counterparts. Many were positively sought for specific characteristics relating to their attitude, work ethic and skill set. Specifically, there was a perception that other European states had a more rigorous attitude to the formal domestic training of girls and women. Reporting in 1937 on the numbers of foreign women being granted domestic permits, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* claimed that while some foreigners had in the past been inexperienced and seeking their first places, the majority were well trained. It cited special facilities in Switzerland and Scandinavian countries that prepared women and girls in 'housecraft', and developed apprenticeship schemes and examinations.[41] Prospective employer, Miss Barwell, certainly felt there were benefits in this:

> When English girls are taught their work like the foreign maids and do not talk of leaving before they unpack their things we shall be only too pleased to have them instead of foreigners.[42]

**Advertising**

The *Morning Post* back pages were filled with advertisements for a whole range of staff during the period. However, what is particularly striking is the low number of Situations Vacant entries specifically requiring foreign servants. Of the 1,104 advertisements in the sample offering work, just 34 (3%) specified a foreign national and almost always an upper servant. There are on occasion employers who wished to find a French maid or a German children's maid, but these do not dominate the listings in the way the data in Chapter 2 suggests they might, and suggests that foreignness was rarely a sought-after feature, even within the more prestigious upper servant roles.

Of all the job advertisements desiring foreign servants, upper servant roles dominated. Only in 1906 did one advert ask for a foreign ordinary housemaid: 'German or English or Danish.'[43] Holton explains that 'general' maids tended to be recruited from the neighbourhood, rather than via 'the wider networks by which more specialised servants, such as a lady's maid or cook, might be sought'.[44] But the ratio split between upper and ordinary roles across all advertisements was 44:56,

[41] 'Imported Domestic Servants', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 1 Apr 1937, p. 2.
[42] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/2087/1933.
[43] 'Situations Vacant', *Morning Post*, 6 Sep 1906 p. 9.
[44] S. S. Holton, 'Friendship and Domestic Service: The Letters of Eliza Oldham, General Maid (1820–1892)', *Women's History Review*, 24/3 (2015), p. 442.

showing that ordinary roles were being advertised in significant numbers, just not specifying foreigners. Being of a different nationality to English does seem to have been a way to stand out in the advertisements for certain roles. In the case of ayahs, their ethnicity was tightly bound up in their occupation, such that no European was ever called 'ayah' or 'amah', but rather children's nurse, nurse or maid. The use of *certain* nationalities, then, appears to have been a positive marker for employment prospects, but it may be enough to surmise that foreign women were free to answer advertisements whether or not they were aimed at them, and as such operated in the London recruitment market much as their British counterparts did. A fuller analysis comparing the advertisements placed by both mistress and maid appears later in the chapter under 'Situations Wanted'.

**Affordable alternatives**

There were of course financial reasons to consider when hiring foreign women rather than British workers. Those who struggled to afford British domestics were among those seeking overseas staff, as well as those who could not afford to fully staff their homes. Mr Lazarus of Golders Green was not able to secure a British maid because she would expect, he claimed, for a household of his size, a second maid to assist her.[45] Foreigners, seemingly, would be oblivious to this expectation and, according to him, would presumably work as hard as two British women. As indicated above in the case of Mr Shirley, foreigners were felt to be more flexible, and thus take on work that was not strictly in their remit. This hints too at a new type of employer; one who, through social mobility, was determined to differentiate themselves from the class beneath them, and hiring 'staff' (on the lowest possible wages) was a visible way to achieve this.[46] This perhaps explains the finding from Chapter 2 which posited that, since foreign servants were found in increasingly diverse households, they held a specific appeal for a wider section of London society.

The lower cost of hiring a foreign maid compared to one from Britain did appear to be a factor in their appeal, however. After the Aliens' Order, employers were required to indicate on their application forms the pay they were offering their proposed foreign servants. The notes on the AR1B permit application form (see Figure 48 and Figure 49) advised that 'wages to be paid to the

[45] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/2793/1930.
[46] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 193.

aliens must not be less than those usually received by British employees for similar work' and that '[t]he Minister must be satisfied that every possible effort has been made by the employer to find suitable labour in this country'. Anything under £26 during the early 1920s was considered to undercut British labour. The Ministry of Labour increased this to a floor level of £36 by the end of the decade, and the consistency with which that *precise* figure was stated on applications suggests employers were keen to pay (or advised to state) the absolute minimum in order to secure a permit.

In the early days of this system, before mistresses and agents advising them grew wise to the minimum requirements set by the Ministry of Labour, stated salaries fell well below this. In 1929, Frieda Kraneck's employer applied for a permit stating her wages were to be £32. After the permit was rejected, the proposed salary was simply raised to £36 on reapplication and a permit was duly issued.[47] In 1927, Danish-born Hilda Iakobsen had asked for lower wages than her prospective employer, Mrs Padgett, had intended to pay her. Seeing an easy way to pay less for a maid, Mrs Padgett informed the Ministry that she would give Hilda '£20 to begin with, and will raise it as soon as she knows a little English'. The Ministry refused her application on the grounds of 'sweating', so she agreed to raise it to £30. Suspicious that Mrs Padgett would not keep her word, however, the office requested the local police investigate. They in turn refused to ask the servant to confirm how much she was actually being paid, since the employers would not 'take kindly to such procedure'.[48] Others hid their frugality less successfully. In 1933, Mrs Chandler of Finchley applied for a permit for a Swiss general domestic servant, Marie Kessler.[49] In justifying her need for hiring her, she revealed that she had enquired at an agency supplying women and girls from the impoverished coal mining districts in co. Durham; they had quoted her wage costs of 17/6 per week. Why would she hire one, she wrote rhetorically, when she could secure a Swiss maid for wages of just 15/-?

The perception of foreign women undercutting local labour stretched back into the Victorian era. In the Gordon House annual reports, perhaps keen to ensure they were not accused of encouraging cheap labour to Britain, certain foreign servants were said to be earning wages above that of their British counterparts. In 1886, they 'demand[ed] wages equal to, and in many cases in excess of,

[47] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2080/EDAR/919/1929.
[48] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2080/EDAR/1674/1927.
[49] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/6087/1933.

those paid to our countrywomen'.[50] Conversely, mistresses 'who apply for servants seem to expect that they will secure their services for a nominal salary, because of their desire to learn English. This is quite a mistake.'[51] Yet by 1904, a letter written to the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* in 1904 by a local maid, claims foreign servants were undercutting local workers. 'The fault lies a great deal with the employers… they are engaging foreign servants in place of us because they get them a few pounds cheaper.'[52] Unfortunately it is not clear what nationalities this might have applied to, nor whether the national anti-alienism of the period prejudiced the correspondent's observation.[53] But the perception that a certain section of the overseas servant population was being paid less than British girls was evident throughout the period. The system, therefore, was open to considerable abuse. Maids were prepared to accept lower wages than the policy-set minimum, mistresses were able to misrepresent the wages they actually paid and the Ministry was not able to penetrate the domestic domain of the mistress/maid to enforce the pay regulations it had specifically set to protect British workers in the domestic sector.

After the introduction of the Aliens Order, the MoL faced a slew of frustrated householders unable to hire British staff yet blocked from importing foreign women instead. In a 1922 report prepared by civil servants, a number of reasons for British mistresses desiring foreign servants was listed, offering a useful survey of the motivation of employers for seeking workers from abroad.[54] It is clear that in some cases, employers located outside urban areas (or at the top of a hill, in Mrs Brauen's case) struggled to fill their staffing needs, but it seems many looked to foreign staff to fulfil roles that a British servant would either not consider (a specialist cook who would also clean the hall and dining room) nor accept such low pay for (Mrs Hine of Sydenham 'could not pay the wage to obtain a suitable English girl'). The evidence from the early 1920s shows that a strong motivation for hiring foreigners was the ability to acquire cheap hard-working labour.

[50] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 67.
[51] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1889*, p. 154.
[52] 'Foreigners as Domestic Servants', *Hastings and St Leonards Observer,* 3 Dec 1904, p. 7
[53] For a detailed discussion of the relative strength of anti-alienism during this period, see Cesarani, 'An Alien Concept?.
[54] TNA, LAB 2/1187/EDAR2718/1922 (amended).

In late 1931, as part of a review of the DSP system, the MoL attempted to ascertain levels of supply into the domestic workforce by conducting a review of several private registry offices, including those who handled foreign staff.[55] They concluded that supply of the most experienced upper servants far exceeded demand, likely an economic consequence of larger households cutting back on their staffing needs. Such applicants were difficult to place: 'they were frequently unsuited, even if they were willing, to take posts as house-parlourmaids or single-handed cooks, and that even at reduced wages it was impossible to find them situations'. In contrast, the demand for the ordinary 'general worker' was increasing. Since the findings from Chapter 2 show a large proportion of foreign upper servants, it might be surmised that many of these were forced to downgrade their expectations after World War I, and indeed may explain increases in foreign 'generals' who were prepared to tackle more diverse chores than their British counterparts. The report was used to add the extra conditions on hiring foreign servants from 1931. In contrast to Kushner, Delap and Holmes' assumptions, however, the Ministry continued to apply leniency in issuing foreign permits to households in country and suburban districts who struggled to fill their staffing needs.

The perception of foreign servants as extensions of the ideal 'country maid' persisted during this period. That they were more tractable, and likely to work harder and more efficiently than British girls for less pay, led inevitably to cases of exploitation (of which more in Chapter 5). But the lack not only of servants in Britain, but the common belief held by both employers and Ministry officials at the dearth of *efficient* and *reliable* British servants, created a favourable economic environment for non-British women seeking domestic work.

**Otherness as a premium**

Employers also sought out servants perceived to be different to them, evidenced in the way servants were actively 'othered' in the recruitment process. The discussion below (see Non-commercial registries) explores how nationality was used by agencies to differentiate themselves from ordinary registries, though language was an important aspect of this. There were several cases in the Ministry of Labour files where the language spoken by the servant was the central feature of their appeal. The Legges of St John's Wood had to 'employ French speaking maids if possible' as

[55] TNA, LAB 2/972/ET6654/1931.

Mrs Legge was from France (though she regularly hired both Germans and French women). Mr Bentinck Budd insisted on having a Dutch maid since his wife was Dutch, though they hired German girls too.[56] Others justified their choice of foreign maid on the basis she would be a mother's help and professionally tutoring the household's children in a foreign language. Major Coode wished for Marcelle Chatelain 'to teach the children to speak French. Impossible to employ an English girl for that purpose.'[57] Mrs Sterchi, a widowed hostel-keeper, appears to have tried to secure foreign domestic help by claiming she needed Charlotte Bühler 'to speak Swiss German and French to my boy that he may be able to speak to his grandparents when he goes to Switzerland in summer.'[58] On hiring Rose Zybach in 1924, Mr Grenside claims he is 'anxious that my daughter should pick up a knowledge of French at an early age' and Rose is thus 'more useful to us than an Englishwoman would be'.[59] In most of these cases, it is possible to trace the birth nationality of the mistress or master of the household which tends to confirm a foreign connection, but it is of course also possible that the chances of securing a work permit for a foreign-born servant would be improved if it could be shown she had specific and unique skills not held by a local woman.

The very notion of the servant as being markedly different to her employer was, according to Taylor, embedded in the very system: 'Rules about rising, working, time off, uniform, modes of address, eating, all served to define the servant as different.'[60] Otherness was therefore a key component to service, seen especially in how a different race and/or ethnicity was perceived in relation to staff by employers. Anderson and her co-authors, too, found that 'perceived difference in 'race' may equally well be a reason *for* hiring someone'.[61] One of their respondents claimed that 'when it's somebody from a different country, you don't have all that baggage. […] There's none of that middle-class, working-class, upper-class thing […] it's just a different race'.[62] The ayahs and amahs are a clear example of this in that their race gave them access to specific work as household and shipboard nannies. Caucasians, by contrast, were actively excluded from these types of roles;

[56] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/474/1930.
[57] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/7333/1929.
[58] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/10580/1931.
[59] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1925, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/3245/1925.
[60] P. Taylor, 'Women Domestic Servants, 1919-1939', *University of Birmingham, Stencilled Occasional Papers 40*, (1976), p. 13.
[61] Anderson, 'A Very Private Business', p. 251.
[62] Anderson, 'A Very Private Business', p. 251.

one lady seeking an ayah to travel with her to Bombay in 1886 warned that 'no Europeans need apply'.[63] Many 'European' women seeking this type of work as a children's nurse or maid (though never using the nomenclature 'ayah') offered their services in return for a free passage rather than wages, something few Asian ayahs would have been tempted by, and suggesting an inverse hierarchy in accessing this market. Instead, in advertisements placed by employers in the *Homeward Mail* ranging from the 1880s up to World War I, applicants for shipboard nannies were mostly required to be racially different to their white employers: 'AYAH WANTED, as maid, […] Tamil or Malayalum woman preferred.'[64]

In part this was economic. As I've written elsewhere, ayahs and amahs were accommodated on ship in their own segregated quarters whereas (white) nurses and children's nannies would be housed at least in second class cabins, if not in first class with the family itself, both costing far more than a deck ticket.[65] Earlier ships expected ayahs to sleep among native passengers, crew and staff, but from the late 1920s they were allocated bunks and rooms to themselves, albeit on a separate deck, which were cheaper than the cabins. The cost in 1886 of a first class Star Line ship's ticket from London to Bombay was £50, £30 for a European Servant and £17 for a Native Servant.[66] The Eurasian Nurse for India being promoted by a former mistress in the *Homeward Mail* in 1880, offered to 'go out in accommodation usually allotted to ayahs, if necessary'; perhaps in order to reduce any economic concerns held by would-be employers. For the most part, though, there was a perception fundamental to the recruitment of non-European white women as nannies that 'native' staff were innately suited to their work looking after children. This was in part due to their age, with many of them mothers (or grandmothers) themselves and, more reliant on wage labour than their married counterparts in Europe, were thus highly experienced both as parents and as staff. But their suitability was also due to the amount of experience they had in making the journey, overcoming seasickness, negotiating with luggage handlers, porters and ship staff and generally understanding their role as round-the-clock surrogate mother for their young charges.

[63] 'Situations Vacant', *Morning Post*, 9 Sep 1886.
[64] *Homeward Mail*, 17 Aug 1888, p. 30.
[65] Robinson, 'Travelling Ayahs', p. 47.
[66] H. King, *Henry King Handbook for Homeward-Bound Travellers* (London, 1886), p. 75.

Horn believes those who recruited from abroad were 'adventurous souls prepared to consider the employment of foreigners to ease their domestic problems'.[67] Adventurous they may have been, but it was households at the margins of society which struggled most to recruit servants from the internal market, and it was these families who were over-represented in the applications for foreign staff: those living far from social centres and those struggling to afford aspirational staffing levels. For certain job types, 'otherness' was a positive marker and was a key function in selecting domestic staff, by being identified as different from British girls, similar to their employers' nationalities (but different to others') or different from their employers' race. Nevertheless, in newspapers in the earlier period, foreign women were significantly under-represented in the situations vacant columns, which suggests that foreign servants were not proactively sought as the findings in Chapter 2 implied.

## "Situations wanted"

Horn has usefully summarised the various strategies British servants used in finding work. In the nineteenth century, it was most likely they relied on opportunities passed on by family or friends already in service, followed by contacts with local clergy or gentry in the countryside or tradespeople in towns. When personal contacts failed, they resorted to newspaper advertisements, and only after these options had been exhausted did servants turn to registry offices, many of which had 'earned a doubtful reputation as the resort of prostitutes or the lowest grade of servant only'.[68] By the interwar period, the first three options had changed little, with many finding their first place through word of mouth, but by the 1920s the use of registry offices had become increasingly common. Here I focus on the way in which recruitment and job-seeking offers a window into understanding life as an independent migrant, with no family to rely on for accommodation or financial support in between jobs. Did their experiences of seeking work differ significantly from those of their British counterparts? And how were they able to leverage any advantages as foreigners?

Many servants were thought to find domestic work through people they already knew. Chapter 2 identified possible former links in the census data through national origins shared by master and

[67] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 34.
[68] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 49

servant. As discussed there, Sian Pooley offers contrasting evidence to the assumption that rural servants and urban employers were socially poles apart,[69] and Higgs argues for a more nuanced understanding of servants working for kin rather than employers with whom they had no prior contact.[70] Horn too chronicles multiple instances of servants finding work through other servants in the early twentieth century. One formed a good relationship with a head housemaid and got a better job through her friend. 'We were all great letter writers to keep in touch in service', she wrote, and were able to let each other know when positions became available.[71] Yet as the century wore on, and the sheer volume of servants and servant positions increased, the market began to respond through recruitment agencies. This section offers an overview of the various means with which servants availed themselves of work. It describes four distinct methods of job-placement: using agencies/registries, newspaper advertising, personal networks and charity organisations.

## *Agencies*

**Commercial registries**

According to almost 200 separate incidents of recruitment identified in my research database, it is clear that by the interwar period, by far the most common way for foreign servants to have found work was through a third-party agent. Several catered for particular nationalities, though foreign women also found work through ordinary agencies catering for local women too. The agency trade in foreign women was spread across several countries. There were London agencies who catered purely for foreign servants; London agents with offices abroad; London offices with links abroad; and foreign agencies who recruited directly into British homes. Some women registered at, or responded to work from, suburban or provincial agencies open to all. In 1933 Trude S. was placed with Mrs Aldwinckle in 1933 through Goodall's Servants Agency in Eltham, for example. Many agencies either specifically recruited foreign women, or had a reputation for having foreign women on their books. Miss Hanbury-Hopkins opened an office in Victoria for the Au Pair Association, reflecting the interest in the continental 'au pair' system from the 1930s onwards, and Table 14 shows a selection of other registries that appeared in the above records.

[69] Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers'.
[70] E. Higgs and A. Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited', *History Workshop Journal*, 81/1 (2016), p. 22.
[71] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 47

| Name | Location | Manager/owner | Specialisation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Anglo-French Agency** | 308 Regents Street | Madame Vivienne | |
| **Anglo-German Agency** | 39 Grosvenor Place, Belgravia | Mr L.R. Thompson | German servants |
| **Danish YWCA** | 65 Fellows Road, Primrose Hill | | |
| **Federation des Unions Nationales des Amies de la Jeune Fille** | Neuchatel, Switzerland | | |
| **Humanitas Agency Vienna** | Vienna, Austria | | |
| **International Young Womens Christian Association** | 24 Upper Bedford Place | | |
| **Kloter's and Kloter Watson Basle** | 11a Duke Street (operating from to 118a Golders Green Road in 1931) and Basel, Switzerland | | Placed 'an average of 20 girls a week in situations from Switzerland Germany and Austria and a very few from France.'[72] |
| **Mrs Gilchrist's Servants Agency** | High Street North, East Ham | | |
| **Pierre Melter's English Swiss Agency** | Carmenstrasse, 21, Basel, Switzerland | | |
| **The Anglo-Swiss Bureau** | 37 Gower Street | | |
| **The Women's Exchange** | 27 Lower Belgrave Street off Eaton Square, Belgravia | Miss Verner | |
| **Union Helvetia** | Lausanne, Switzerland | | |

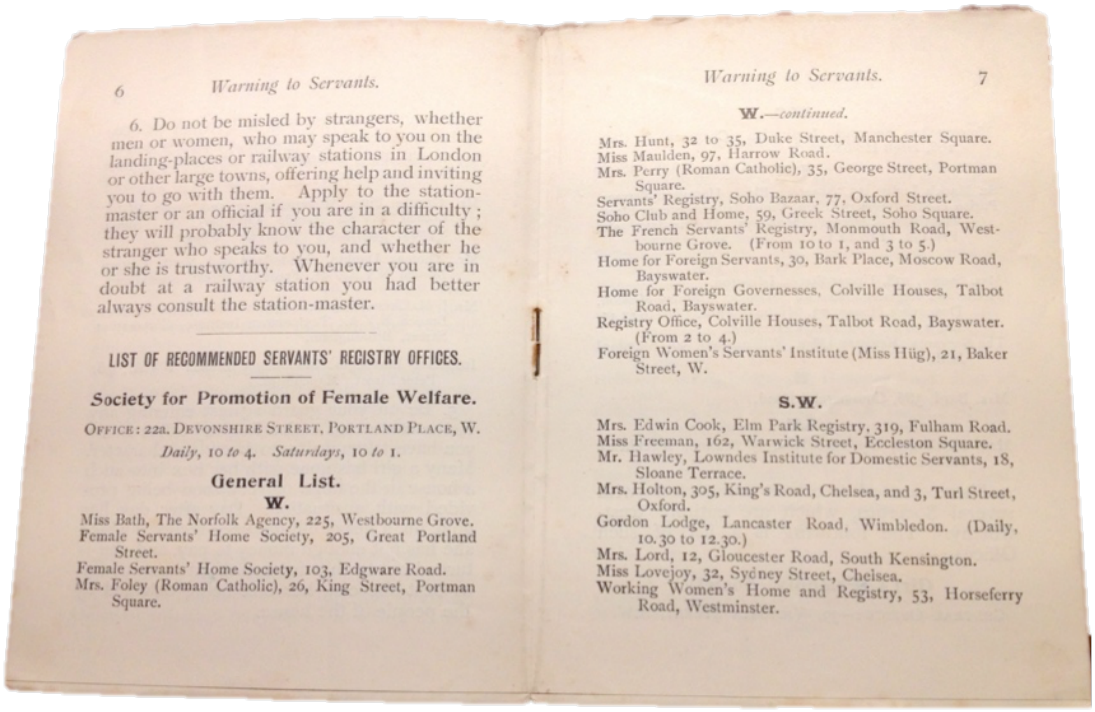
**Table 14: Selection of servant recruitment agencies operating in the 1930s**

Most agencies established during the last quarter of the nineteenth century maintained very poor reputations among both mistresses and servants and, from its very early days in the 1880s, the NVA had the measure of many of these operations. In a bid to deter the newly arrived from reaching the badly run agencies, the NVA's own 'Warning to Servants' pamphlet, printed in English, German and French, was widely distributed and listed respectable agents for foreign servants to feel safe in approaching. This was updated periodically and featured the names and addresses of those agencies the NVA had vetted.[73] Of the fourteen approved establishments in West London in 1911, for example, four specifically catered for foreign women, located in the more affluent areas of the city:

> The French Servants' Registry, Monmouth Road, Westbourne Grove (From 10 to 1, and 3 to 5).
> Home for Foreign Servants, 30, Bark Place, Moscow Road, Bayswater

[72] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/5521/1931.
[73] 'National Vigilance Association, Warning to Servants', 1901, Oxford, Bodleian.

Home for Foreign Governesses, Colville Houses, Talbot Road, Bayswater
Foreign Women's Servants' Institute (Miss Hug), 21, Baker Street, W.
YWCA Continental Department, 316, Regent Street.



6 *Warning to Servants.*

6. Do not be misled by strangers, whether men or women, who may speak to you on the landing-places or railway stations in London or other large towns, offering help and inviting you to go with them. Apply to the station-master or an official if you are in a difficulty; they will probably know the character of the stranger who speaks to you, and whether he or she is trustworthy. Whenever you are in doubt at a railway station you had better always consult the station-master.

LIST OF RECOMMENDED SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES.

**Society for Promotion of Female Welfare.**

OFFICE: 22a. DEVONSHIRE STREET, PORTLAND PLACE, W.

*Daily*, 10 *to* 4. *Saturdays*, 10 *to* 1.

**General List.**

**W.**

Miss Bath, The Norfolk Agency, 225, Westbourne Grove.
Female Servants' Home Society, 205, Great Portland Street.
Female Servants' Home Society, 103, Edgware Road.
Mrs. Foley (Roman Catholic), 26, King Street, Portman Square.

*Warning to Servants.* 7

**W.**—*continued.*

Mrs. Hunt, 32 to 35, Duke Street, Manchester Square.
Miss Maulden, 97, Harrow Road.
Mrs. Perry (Roman Catholic), 35, George Street, Portman Square.
Servants' Registry, Soho Bazaar, 77, Oxford Street.
Soho Club and Home, 59, Greek Street, Soho Square.
The French Servants' Registry, Monmouth Road, Westbourne Grove. (From 10 to 1, and 3 to 5.)
Home for Foreign Servants, 30, Bark Place, Moscow Road, Bayswater.
Home for Foreign Governesses, Colville Houses, Talbot Road, Bayswater.
Registry Office, Colville Houses, Talbot Road, Bayswater. (From 2 to 4.)
Foreign Women's Servants' Institute (Miss Hüg), 21, Baker Street, W.

**S.W.**

Mrs. Edwin Cook, Elm Park Registry, 319, Fulham Road.
Miss Freeman, 162, Warwick Street, Eccleston Square.
Mr. Hawley, Lowndes Institute for Domestic Servants, 18, Sloane Terrace.
Mrs. Holton, 305, King's Road, Chelsea, and 3, Turl Street, Oxford.
Gordon Lodge, Lancaster Road, Wimbledon. (Daily, 10.30 to 12.30.)
Mrs. Lord, 12, Gloucester Road, South Kensington.
Miss Lovejoy, 32, Sydney Street, Chelsea.
Working Women's Home and Registry, 53, Horseferry Road, Westminster.

**Figure 51: 'Warning to Servants' pamphlet 1901 (Oxford Bodleian Library)**

Before the Aliens Order came into effect, women arrived with no secured place, so accessing information such as this on arrival will have been enormously useful for women arriving without situations.

In 1907, London County Council began regulating agencies by issuing annual, revocable licences, and with the rise of twentieth-century suburban living and a much more urbanised workforce, clergy- and gentry-derived job opportunities gave way to more impersonal means of securing work. Certainly by the 1920s, claims Horn, registries had become 'one of the commonest ways of matching employers and servants'.[74] Some agencies operated on high moral or religious standards. The Fairburn Agency in Edgware Road, for example, was run by two sisters and specialised in placing Scottish servants. One ran the office in London and the other the recruiting office in

[74] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 49.

Edinburgh. They were said to take 'no stockingless or made-up girls'.[75] But while agencies could be selective about who they accepted onto their books, so servants became choosy about which agencies they used. When A____ H____ came to London aged 16, she was recruited by the Anglo-German Bureau but when switching roles later she was hired through the Women's Exchange.[76] Many other cases show that women used a range of different agencies (and indeed recruitment methods) to secure work.

**Non-commercial registries**

As a result of the perceived immorality and low standards in the commercially-run agencies, a few organisations during the late nineteenth century decided to set up their own matching services for foreign women and mistresses in search of maids. The organisations who started these services were mostly hostels that catered for foreign women in-between jobs, for whom it made sense to find work via the same home. These non-commercial agents operated by charging fees and matching employer with employee, just as their commercial rivals did, but they prided themselves on taking a moral, Christian approach, as well as trading specifically on the foreign ticket. Of those performing placement activities, the International Young Women's Christian Association (IYWCA) in Upper Bedford Place also provided hostel accommodation for their overseas charges. The Danish arm of the YWCA ran a placement service in Primrose Hill (see Table 14).

In response to the number of women arriving in London at their hostel accommodation with no confirmed employment, Gordon House established its own Servants' Registry (or Institute) in November 1883 in Bloomsbury, with the express aim to find employment for 'the foreign young women who come in England in search of situations in domestic service'.[77] The Ayahs' and Amahs' Home, operating as an informal employment registry for mistresses and native Indian or East Asian nannies, began advertising its matching services in the *Homeward Mail* newspaper from 1882. And even Sara Pyke House had to establish set opening hours, since 'great inconvenience has been caused by people calling at all hours for servants'.[78] These homes became de facto places of

[75] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 49.
[76] 'Case Files', 1935, WL, 4NVA/6/2/8/06.
[77] From beginnings in Hart Street, Bloomsbury, the Institute moved in 1895 to premises in Baker Street.
[78] HL, MS173/2/8/2, Dec 1904.

recruitment for employers eager to find domestic servants of a certain nationality or background. Over time, many of them operated as commercially as the agencies they sought to compete with.

From the early 1880s, therefore, organisations recognised the demand for specialist foreign placement agencies, and this hints at the recognition that foreign women were sought after by a particular section of the servant-hiring society, and seen as a distinctive niche in the market. Further, in line with findings from Chapter 2 relating to the shared national origins between some employers and staff, the specialisation of some of the registries, commercial or not, attracted employers of the same national origins. Gordon House, for example, noted that 'the wealthy Germans residing in this country […] make use of this house for their convenience when seeking for domestic servants'.[79] Non-commercial agencies were not restricted to foreign women, though, and Horn claims that 'various short-lived domestic workers' trade unions as well as charitable organisations like the GFS also set up their own registries all over the country.[80] Motivated by the protection of female virtue and morality, these registries nonetheless operated commercially as agencies. In the capital, twenty-two GFS registrars handled applications from mistresses and servants (of any nationality), and reported in 1885 that they had received '1,889 applications from mistresses and 408 from servants ... and had found places for 683 girls.'[81] By way of comparison, the Gordon House Institute in the same year received 599 applications for servants by ladies, 376 applications for situations by servants and had placed 185 in service.

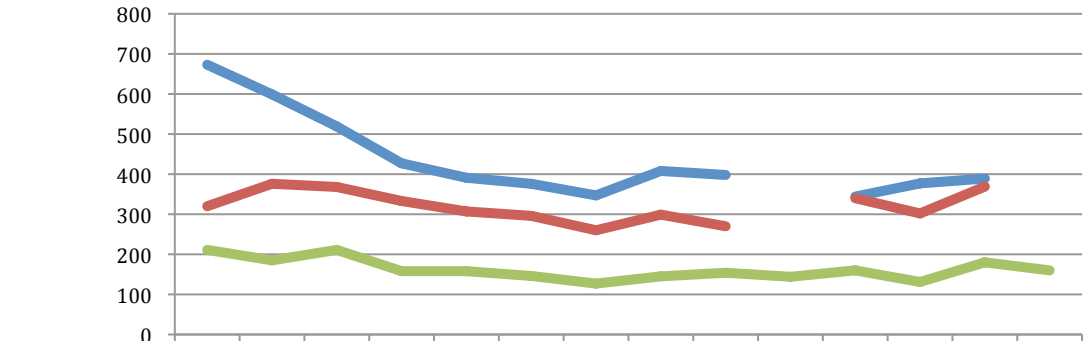
The cost of registering either as a servant or an employer stayed relatively stable throughout the period, with the Gordon House Servants' Institute demanding a fee of 1*s* from ladies seeking servants, with an additional 2*s* 6*d* per successful engagement. By way of comparison, the commercial outfit of Mrs Massey's Agency, of 100 Baker Street, was charging mistresses five guineas for a permanent servant at the start of the century, almost six times as much.[82] Servants at the Gordon House Institute paid 6*d* to have their names entered onto the books (though girls

[79] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1883*, p. 36.
[80] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 49. For more on the national coverage of GFS registries, see B. Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920', *Past and Present*, 61/1 (1973), p. 125.
[81] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 49
[82] 'Servants' Book prepared and issued by Mrs Massey's Agency for Servants, Derby and London', 1907, Personal Collection.

resident at Gordon House, had this registration fee waived) and all servants paid a 1*s* fee once they were hired. To register, girls were to present themselves in person and registration was subject to 'satisfactory replies from the applicants' referees'.[83] Perhaps to the surprise of the registrar, Miss Hüg, who expected to place Germans, these were not all German women. Over the years, Swiss, French Swedish and Italians all made use of the Institute to find work, followed by Dutch, Belgians, Danish, Norwegians, Austrians, Egyptians, Russians and those from Africa, along with some English girls too, perhaps making use of the reasonable agency rates.[84]

Four years after it opened, the registry altered its fee structure, doubling the fee to 5/- for mistresses upon each successful engagement. A year later, servants were to pay 3*d* in the £ on their annual salary. For the placement of a parlourmaid at £20, for instance, the servant would be required to pay 5/-. Was this perhaps to drive servants towards staying in one place for longer than a few months? In any case, it could be that both mistress and maid were attracted by a larger pool of prospects in the bigger establishments, than in the niche placement arms of charitable organisations. Notwithstanding the drop in interest, the numbers were not inconsiderable: even at its lowest level in 1890, Miss Hüg managed to place a girl in service every three days. The annual report boasts of the superiority of the type of situations found for these women, 'not what we in this country would term general servants, but a better class of parlourmaid cooks ladies' maids, nursery governesses, lady helps and governesses'.[85] In newspaper advertisements found in the *Morning Post* placed by the Servants' Institute, however, the lower echelons of servant roles were just as evident.[86] Using figures collated from the Institute annual reports (where given) from 1884 to 1897, Figure 52 shows a largely downward trend in both servants and mistresses using its services, despite its initial popularity.[87] Receipts in the reported accounts peaked at £126 4*s* 6*d* in 1901, but the Institute ceased to operate shortly after this.

[83] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1883*, p. 61.
[84] *HWGL. The Work of the Year volumes 1881-1923.*
[85] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1896*, p. 158.
[86] In 1891, the Servants' Institute (calling itself the German YWCA) advertised the services of a 23-year-old German kitchen maid who could not speak English ('Situations Required', *Morning Post*, 8 Apr 1891, p. 11).
[87] No statistics were reported for 1898, and the Institute disappears from the HWGL annual report from 1900.




| | 1884 | 1885 | 1886 | 1887 | 1888 | 1889 | 1890 | 1891 | 1892 | 1893 | 1894 | 1895 | 1896 | 1897 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employers | 673 | 599 | 519 | 427 | 391 | 376 | 347 | 408 | 398 | | 344 | 377 | 389 | |
| Servants | 320 | 376 | 368 | 333 | 307 | 296 | 260 | 299 | 270 | | 340 | 302 | 369 | |
| Placed | 211 | 185 | 211 | 158 | 158 | 146 | 127 | 145 | 154 | 144 | 160 | 131 | 180 | 160 |

**Figure 52: HWGL Servants' Institute employer/servant applicants and servants placed 1884-1897 (as per annual reports)**

## *Advertising*

### Promoting otherness

Horn found that as the nineteenth century wore on, classified advertisements were an increasingly likely way to recruit and be recruited into service, a method recognised by Mrs Beeton as 'one of the commonest modes of procuring servants'.[88] Among the sparsely-worded notices of the *Morning Post* can be found a wealth of information on the women who sought work, and focusing especially on those containing specific references to foreignness. A typical advertisement would run thus:

> As UPPER HOUSEMAID or Single-handed; German; speaks English; good personal character; age 38; wages £18-20; town preferred. R.S., 38 New-street, St John's-wood, N.W.

The type of job required was usually printed in capital letters towards the start of the listing, and the address was given at the end. In all instances but one in the sample, the nationality of the women seeking jobs was given either in the title or directly after the title (as above).[89] This suggests that the servant felt her foreign nationality was not insignificant and may well have been an important way to distinguish herself in the hundreds of other listings appearing daily in the papers.

Census data analysed in Chapter 2 revealed that foreign domestic servants represented somewhere between 2.32 and 3 per cent of all domestic staff in London in both 1901 and 1911. Yet among the

[88] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, pp. 45-7
[89] In the sole case that did not follow this pattern, a Belgian nurse stated her age first followed by her nationality.

313 advertisements by foreign servants or their mistresses/agents in the *Morning Post* sample for 1901 and 1906, this figure was much higher, at 6.4%. Of all the 1,377 advertisements by servants looking for a post (1886–1906), 64 identified themselves as foreign nationals (five per cent of the total). Both these percentages represent a higher proportion of the London servant market than statistically expected from the census return data. A number of possibilities might account for this. It may appear at first glance that the positions sought by the foreign advertisers were better paid and therefore justified the investment in the listing. Perhaps servants saw that identifying as foreign might boost their chances of being hired into a particular role: the French maid or lady's maid were by far the most commonly advertised positions and commanded decent wages (Cesira Orioli was being paid 25s a week – or £65pa – as a lady's maid in 1930, for example).[90] Another possibility for the raised visibility of foreigners in the advertisements was their lack of personal contacts, and this may explain why a higher than expected number of foreign servants can be found in the pages of the *Morning Post* job section.

Yet another likelihood is related to the older age of upper servants, a feature of the foreign servant population revealed in Chapter 2. Some of the Situations Vacant advertisements specified the age range of their ideal candidates, and these are revealing. Although not directed exclusively at foreign women, they suggest that the ideal age of a children's maid was in her early 20s; for a lady's maid it was about 28. The foreign women advertising in the newspapers seem to be older than this, with most lady's maids aged 30 and over. Clues to the implications of being over 30 are found in the annual reports of the HWGL during the Victorian years, in which the author laments the number of women over 30 who found it difficult to secure a place. As early as 1885 the report raises the issue that 'very few mistresses will engage servants who are over 30 years of age' and urges would-be employers to take pity on this 'class of experienced servant - domestic nurse, lady's maid etc.'[91] Their unpopularity was believed to stem from 'the fact of their being hardly as tractable', and that after a disagreement with the mistress after many years of service, she is discharged, 'to make way for a younger and cheaper helper'.[92] Older domestic servants are 'plentiful', and the report

[90] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/9011/1930.
[91] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1885*, p. 97.
[92] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1885*, p. 97.

conjectures as to how householders can complain of a servant scarcity.[93] British servants felt this too. A British maid who wrote to the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* in 1904 was particularly adamant that 'middle-aged women servants should have every respect and consideration shown to them by their employers'.[94] As discussed earlier in the chapter, employers sought young servants as the older ones were felt to be more difficult to manage.

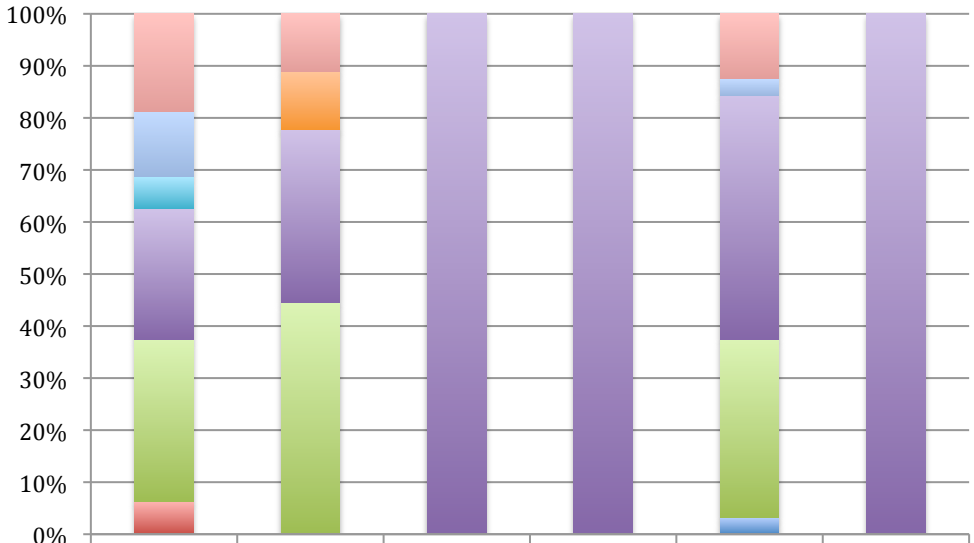
What is noteworthy is the low number of cooks in the foreign classifieds. These were the most popular foreign employee according to data in Chapter 2 and represent almost a third of all (general) Situations Vacant positions in the newspapers; yet only 16 per cent of foreign servant advertisements were placed by cooks. Is this because, hidden in basement kitchens, their ages were of less importance than the more visible children's and lady's maids, and thus their employability did not wane with age? Was being over 30 a negative only in certain (visible) instances? In which case, it is little to do with perceived attributes relating to foreignness, nor the seniority of the maids and being able to afford to place paid advertisements, but with the age of those foreign women seeking positions. If so, it would suggest that older foreign women did indeed have to resort (as Horn suggests) to advertisements to secure work where other forms of recruitment had failed. And that far from being a sign of wealth that these women could spend 1*s* 6*d* on a newspaper listing, it was actually a sign of their desperation in having to invest in the expense of advertising in order to secure work as they aged, particularly in a climate of increased economy among the wealthiest households who would formerly have retained much larger retinues of staff. Curiously, though, one would expect a career servant to have established productive social and employment networks, but it is perhaps their unwillingness to accept lower grade jobs that made them advertise. As foreign women were on average older than British servants and may have had fewer local connections to avail themselves of word-of-mouth opportunities, this may explain in part why they are overrepresented in the newspaper advertisements. The connection made between age, experience, (in)tractability and unemployment is of exceptional interest in challenging the notion of skilled experience bringing financial reward.

[93] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 124.
[94] 'Foreigners as Domestic Servants', *Hastings and St Leonards Observer,* 3 Dec 1904, p. 7.

What is just as possible was that advertisements were simply more convenient for a woman who relied on domestic service for her bed and board. Horn references the time investment that agency work took, where a servant had to register in person at the agency's offices then wait for an appointment with a potential employer. If this did not happen on the same day, 'then return calls must be made for as long as was necessary'.[95] One servant in the early twentieth century 'remembered the sheer monotony of the whole business: "We had to […] stay there all day […]. It was weary and tiring spending days there"'.[96] The foreign servant, greatly reliant on the residency aspect of her work, and who had few nearby fall-back positions should she find herself between jobs, had considerable pressure to find a new position with the minimum of delay. Placing or responding to an advertisement would ensure an interview could be arranged while still employed, and thus she was able to move from one residence to another without finding herself temporarily homeless. Since destitution was a deportable offence after 1920, it was even more critical that foreign servants moved places as seamlessly as possible.

Although the sample of advertisements is low (see Table 13), the pattern of who was advertising is clear and, indeed, unsurprising. It was usually advertisements for the most senior roles that were placed in the newspaper classifieds by foreign women. Between 77 and 100 per cent of all foreigner advertisements across the six years were for upper servant positions compared to those placed by British servants (or those who did not identify themselves as foreign), which ranged from 40 to 68 per cent. Those placed by ordinary servants of any nationality accounted for between 30 and 48 per cent of all adverts across the period, while those seeking ordinary servant positions never constituted more than a quarter of all foreigners. Figure 53 shows that certain nationalities and certain roles dominated the upper servant advertisements, with the German and French women appearing most often in the listings, and children's maids, lady's maids and cooks the most often-sought-after positions. Lady's maid advertisements were most often placed by German and French servants (in line with findings in Chapter 2) but children's maids were more evenly distributed across several nationalities: French, German, Swiss and Belgian.

[95] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 50.
[96] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 50.




| | Children's maid | Cook | Housemaid | Kitchen maid | Lady's Maid | Parlourmaid |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Swiss-French | 3 | 1 | | | 4 | |
| Swiss | 2 | | | | 1 | |
| Swedish | | 1 | | | | |
| German-Swiss | 1 | | | | | |
| German | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 15 | 2 |
| French | 5 | 4 | | | 11 | |
| Belgian | 1 | | | | | |
| Austrian | | | | | 1 | |

**Figure 53: Nationalities of servants placing advertisements for different roles in the *Morning Post* (1886-1906)**

In terms of what words were used both to describe roles suited for foreign women and the words they themselves used to describe their skills, the sample is quite small and so caution is advised in drawing firm conclusions. Unsurprisingly, these were dependent upon the type of job the servant was looking for. For lady's maids, the most prevalent skills featured were dressmaking and needlework (featured in 24) and hairdressing (13) and used to or being willing to travel (11), with one claiming to be a 'good sailer (sic)'.[97] Many lady's maids also advertised their ability to pack (8). For children's nurses, the most advertised skills were of needlework (7) and a command of languages (4). Cooks promoted their experience (2) and good characters (5), with one recommended on the basis of being 'strictly sober, clean, early riser'.[98] And of the ordinary servants advertised (6), very few attributes were stated apart from three claiming that they could speak English. Both upper and ordinary servants claimed possession of good or excellent characters. The

[97] 'Want Places', *Morning Post*, 8 Apr 1891, p. 11.
[98] 'Situations Required', *Morning Post*, 10 Apr 1901, p. 9.

skills changed little over time although dressmaking and needlework were skills that featured consistently throughout the period.

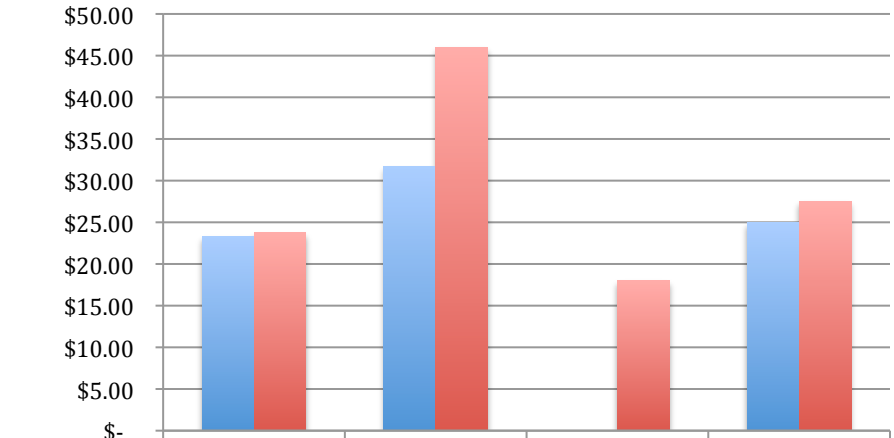
It was inevitable that most French and Swiss applicants would have been raised in the Roman Catholic faith, but some women recognised that this might not have been an ideal feature to promote. There were a number of adverts containing the phrase 'North German' or 'Hanoverian', a subtle code likely distinguishing themselves as non-Catholic Germans. Others asserted their Protestantism, a term that appeared in 17 per cent of advertisements for or by foreigners. The term featured in 30 per cent of the listings for children's maids, only 19 per cent of ladies' maids and not at all for other job types, suggesting a much greater importance was attached to the exposure of British children to Protestant staff.[99] In 1901, a mistress sought an 'experienced German NURSE (not R.C.) for two children',[100] but no other religions were mentioned in connection with foreign staff in the *Morning Post*. Religion was not mentioned in the *Homeward Mail* classified advertisements for ayahs but, according to their passports, the ayahs had diverse religions backgrounds: Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Roman Catholics. Although their religions were not as important as their being non-white, Sen has shown how in India itself, there were debates in advice manuals as to which religion or caste the most sought-after ayahs belonged to.[101]

**Job type and wages**

The three most popular types of servants required in the *Morning Post* were the lady's maid (or maid), children's maid (or nurse) and cook, all possessing good personal characters or references, along with stating their ages and wage expectations. The advertisements placed by mistresses for foreign staff numbered just 21 from the six newspapers, associating mostly the French and Germans with children's maids, cooks and lady's maids. Their requirements, beyond being of a stated nationality, were articulated in the context of the role they were being hired for. Advertisers stated the wages offered, whether they were in town or country with most demanding experienced candidates. Some wanted applications by post, others in person stating the hours of visiting; some

[99] See B. Walter, 'Strangers on the Inside: Irish Women Servants in England, 1881', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 27/2–3 (2009) for a discussion of Irish servants as 'racial others' and their proximity to raising middle-class British children.
[100] 'Situations Vacant', *Morning Post*, 17 Apr 1901, p. 10.
[101] I. Sen, 'Colonial Domesticities, Contentious Interactions: Ayahs, Wet-Nurses and Memsahibs in Colonial India', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 16/3 (2009).

insisted on photos of candidates, others not. Many expected personal characters or recommendations from previous employers. Some specified ages, with the better wages going to the older women, but many were simply focused on candidates' ability to sew, mend and pack well. With such a small sample (n=24) it is difficult to extrapolate any useful wage data, but Figure 54 shows the difference between wages offered and wages demanded among the foreign adverts.




| | Children's maid | Cook | Housemaid | Lady's Maid |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Available jobs | $23.33 | $31.67 | | $25.00 |
| Seeking jobs | $23.75 | $46.00 | $18.00 | $27.50 |

**Figure 54: Wage comparison between a sample of situations vacant and situations wanted advertisements 1881-1906**

**Geography**

What is especially interesting about classified advertisements is the correspondence address listed by the servants which gives some indication of the position of the women at the time they were job-hunting. This is of particular value when examining the lives of women whose workplace was also their (temporary) home, and more so for foreign women whose natal homes were out of reach. For households where other staff or family members were wont to pry, it might have been prudent to have post sent to a third-party address. Horn describes how a 'possibility for those seeking employment was to secure the help and advice of local gentry or clergy in the rural areas, and of tradespeople in the towns.'[102] She claims this latter was increasingly important, such that girls found out about local places at the greengrocers or butchers. It seems from the advertisement addresses, though, that these tradespeople functioned as more than passing contacts. A French cook used her

[102] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 44.

local cheesemonger as her poste restante and several others used nearby stationers and libraries as their stated addresses when placing an advertisement.[103]

A number of the women were out of work at the time of advertising, and one of the roles of the foreign servant hostels becomes apparent (of which more in Chapter 6). The Gordon House address features many times over in the addresses of women seeking work and is suggestive of its use as a space of unemployment and (re-)recruitment. Other residential servants' homes featured in the advertisements too. A young Swiss-French under-nurse, who could not speak English, gave her address as the 'Servants' Home at Warwick Street, Pimlico,' an address which is later listed in the *Post Office London Directory* as the 'Pimlico Girls' Friendly Society's Lodge'.[104] It was not just dedicated foreign servants homes that girls were using as their correspondence addresses, then, although charitably-run organisations such as these may have lent extra credibility to any job application since most home matrons expected good characters to admit residents.

Overall, advertising in the newspapers was, in the case of foreign women, overwhelmingly the preserve of the upper servants. While some ordinary servants did appear, they were anomalies, and it was more likely that they found work through word of mouth or answering advertisements, than promoting themselves. Of those who did advertise their services, most were older and, after stating their nationalities, promoted attributes suitable for the roles they sought. Religion and age were important differentiators particularly in relation to children's maids, and the propensity for older servants to advertise is tentatively assumed to be driven by a lack of options.

### *Networks*

While many maids continued to rely on agencies to find new situations even after having been in the UK for some time, they would also find out about work elsewhere by word of mouth. Since domestic work tied servants to the home for most of their week, it might be reasonably assumed that their chances of socialising or networking were consequently curtailed. Even within the home, though, servants were able to find other work via their mistresses, their friends, or through other servants or even family.

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[103] 'Want Places', *Morning Post*, 8 Apr 1891, p. 11.
[104] 'Want Places', *Morning Post*, 9 Apr 1886, p. 8; *Post Office London Directory, 1895*, (London, 1895), p. 1314

**Family**

A number of sisters and even mothers and daughters were in service in Britain at the same time, one often arriving first followed by the next. M___ H___, a Swiss maid, found a place in Potters Bar before her sister S___ also made the journey to England, finding work through an agency as a maid in Llanstephan, Wales. After a few weeks' employment, alarmed at her mistress' unpleasant nature, she fled in the night to join her sister in Potters Bar. Three weeks later she was found a new place by her sister's employer who lived nearby. Her former Welsh employer was unsympathetic: 'she ought to have thought well before accepting a situation so far from her sister', she scoffed.[105] Whether S___ missed her sister, the company of other Swiss people or she had little interest in remaining in the remote Welsh countryside is unclear, but mistresses of sisters appeared several times in the record as routes out of poor employment conditions (or choices).

The D____ sisters from Italy not only used each other's contacts, but found support from other Italians.[106] A___ arrived in London in 1927 and had been employed as a maid in Hampstead for eighteen months when her elder sister, B___, joined her in Britain. A___ may have mentioned this to her mistress Mrs Copley, because B___ was found a place with Mrs Copley's friend in Ruislip on her arrival in the summer of 1928. She was clearly unhappy in her new place, though, and left after a few weeks having found a new position working for an Italian immigrant family, much to the indignation of both Mrs Copley and Mrs Copley's friend. Somehow the behaviour of A___ was suddenly found wanting and she was dismissed just before Christmas; she too made her way to the Italian family for temporary shelter. The family ran two Italian restaurants and employed a maid and B___ as a children's nurse while they were at work. But their house in Camden was fully fifteen miles east of Mrs Copley's friend and an hour's walk east of Mrs Copley's own house in Hampstead. It is highly likely, therefore, that B___ found her new employer through an Italian connection: perhaps church or community, rather than a neighbourhood contact.

**Servants**

This type of interaction with a settled diaspora community was not the norm, however. Most of the contact observed was between foreign maids themselves, like Anna Deufal in 1932 who was

[105] 'Case Files', 1928, WL, 4NVA/6/1/037.
[106] 'Case Files', 1928, WL, 4NVA/6/1/098.

desperate for a position as her permit was running out, she had just 10 shillings left to her name and only one change of clothes.[107] At Mrs Thompson's Registry Office in Earl's Court, she had a chance meeting with a governess who had just left a place with the Waller family in Knightsbridge. She sent Anna to Mrs Waller who passed her to her sister-in-law Mrs Cissie Arnold in Finchley where she worked until she left England on the expiration of her permit.

Some maids were instrumental in placing their own friends in places nearby, which would have had the added bonus of creating a geographically proximate social network. Twenty-one-year-old Helie Garber was hired by Mrs Evans in 1930 via a local friend of hers whose own German maid put them in contact.[108] Although Helie returned to Switzerland shortly afterwards, Mrs Evans found another maid to replace her (this time Danish), once again using her friend's German maid as a go-between. Others tried to keep a job among friends. In April 1923, when Camilla Stockhardt left her place working for Mrs Douste de Fortis, she recommended her Danish friend Martha Yensen to replace her.[109] Six months later, when Martha returned to Denmark, her own friend Marie Rasmine Pedersen took her place (who featured in Chapter 3). The friendships seem to have been forged in Denmark, not London, demonstrating how transnational recruitment worked not only from the top down but also through friendship networks in the home country.

**Employers**

It was not just employment agencies who recruited candidates in their home countries. Mistresses too advertised in European newspapers or would ask personal friends abroad to help find them suitable servants from their own countries. As she could not afford more than one servant, Mrs Shirley asked a friend of hers in Switzerland to find her a maid. The result was nineteen-year-old Frieda Kraneck who arrived during the spring of 1929.[110] Some of the mistresses, as shown in Chapter 2, were themselves born overseas and sought to recruit servants of the same nationality. They were well placed to find and send for women from their home countries when in need of servants. Several were hired in this way from the Netherlands to work for Dutch-born Mrs

[107] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/2702/1932.
[108] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/5805/1930.
[109] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1923, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/868/1923.
[110] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2080/EDAR/919/1929.

Bentinck Budd.[111] She used relatives in the Netherlands to find suitable staff, and on occasion travelled there herself in order to interview candidates before bringing them over to England. She even paid them in guilders rather than pounds, which suggests the money may have been paid to the servant's family rather than to the servant herself. These findings are in line with Pooley's which, though focused on a provincial English town and its rural hinterland rather than foreign servants, challenge our understanding of 'live-in domestic servants as 'outsiders' in insular employers' homes'.[112]

## *Charity*

Finally, a section of the foreign domestic workforce found themselves with fewer options than those who made the conscious choice to find domestic work in Britain. They did not choose a route into service but found themselves placed there for the want of any other support. Orphaned, abandoned or apprenticed girls in Britain had long been placed out into service if no-one else was prepared to accept the expenses of their upkeep. Under the nineteenth-century poor laws, girls taken into parish workhouses could be sent out into service rather than remain a burden on the ratepayers by receiving in-relief.[113] For foreign women in London, with no recourse to public assistance as aliens, it was the network of protection organisations that provided for them. Even those organisations which did not specifically cater for foreign servants would be called upon to assist in cases involving fellow nationals. In line with the masterless women concept discussed in Chapter 1, as females they were invariably placed into service, often with a member of the rescue organisation itself or a family from the same national or religious background.

### Co-nationals

National or denominational churches played their part in the diffusion of the newly arrived into domestic work among fellow nationals. I___ M___ arrived in 1927 from Lithuania hoping to join her uncle and his family in Glasgow. On further enquiry, it appeared that the uncle's family of nine was living on a pitiful income of just 24 shillings a week and could therefore not support I___ too. Through the Lithuanian legation, the National Vigilance Society made contact with the Lithuanian

[111] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1928, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/5524/1928.
[112] Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers', p. 406.
[113] P. Dale, 'Training for Work: Domestic Service as a Route out of Long-Stay Institutions before 1959', *Women's History Review*, 13/3 (2004).

Roman Catholic priest Rev. C. Matulaitis, who placed I___ at once in service with one of his Lithuanian parishioners in Hoxton.[114] These co-nationality placements often seem to happen when rescue agencies are involved, usually at a point in the girl's situation at which she could no longer exercise her own choice or judgement.

**Subsistence**

Being placed in service was a particularly common strategy for placing young women from Russia and Poland up until World War I, who arrived unaccompanied in London off the ships from Bremen. The girls and young women who found themselves housed at Sara Pyke House arrived in England with very different goals to those of the Western European or Asian servants seeking work. Fleeing persecution or economic hardship, many were en route to America or South Africa to join family or intended to settle in London and marry. However, keen to prevent pejorative attitudes towards both the settled and immigrant Jewish community fomenting in British society, a politically and socially sensitive issue at the time, the Jewish Board of Guardians sought to handle immigration 'internally' without outward reliance on the British state. As such, JAPGAW's activities were motivated by preventing girls falling into prostitution and to ensure they were able to earn a living until such time as they left London or married. Service, in these cases of unsupervised lone females, was the ideal (though hardly novel) solution. The committee minutes for 1893 illustrate the bias in favour of residential service as subsistence. Of the 144 girls received into SPH during the year, the largest number (53) were sent to service. Of the others, 42 went to relatives in London after they had been traced, 19 went abroad, 18 were sent to relatives in the provinces, five were at SPH at the close of year, four were sent to work (which is tellingly a separate category to service) and three were sent to other Homes.[115]

The minutes of the 1890s and early 1900s are peppered with details about individuals in the care of SPH who were placed in service having expected, or were awaiting, entirely different outcomes to their journeys. On 22 August 1893, the "SS Reiher" from Bremen brought Rifka Goldberg to London to join her fiancé. Upon being accompanied by the Home's inspector to the address she had for him in Booth Street, he could not be found. As she 'had no friends here', the Matron

[114] 'Case Files', 1927, WL, 4NVA/6/1/010.
[115] *Report of JAPGAW for the Years 1923 and 1924* (1925), p. 65.

placed her in a situation in Scarborough Street.[116] On 23 May 1893, Leah Bartzoff arrived midstream upon the "SS Adler" from Bremen. She was accompanied by the JAPGAW dock agent to some friends in Hanbury Street but they refused to receive her. She then decided to try to find her brother, so while JAPGAW attempted to trace him, the SPH matron put her in service with a family living in the Mile End Road. Her brother, whom she eventually joined, was found to be living in Manchester.[117] Nega Zolkova arrived on 8 June 1893 on the "SS Amstelstroom" from Amsterdam in order to join her sister in London. The address, however, was illegible, nor was the sister found. After staying four days at the Home, the Matron found a situation for her at Bow Street, Charing Cross.[118] Annie Rosnitsky (alias Glata Krammer) had a lucky escape. She had been given an address before she left that appeared in SPH's Black Book (see Chapter 3) by a young man, 'a friend of her friends in Russia'. Sent into service by SPH instead, she eventually went to her brother in America.[119]

The placement of young Jewish women shows how service was a convenient stop-gap not just for the girls, but for the families who took them as servants, most likely at reduced wages given the less affluent districts in which they were located. The Polish housemaid employed at the SPH, who was, incidentally, Christian, was only paid 6/- weekly (or the equivalent to £15 12*s* pa), compared to a German girl staying at Gordon House in 1906 who found work as a general domestic at the weekly wage of 9*s* 3*d* (£24 pa). Locating a few of the employers' addresses listed in the minutes suggests that a few girls were at times placed with the middle-class members of the Committee, or their friends. Addresses such as those above in Mile End Road or Bow Street were more likely to be more ordinary homes, however. Carefully piecing together a criminal case from the JAPGAW minutes, Central Criminal Court calendars, census returns and Proceedings of the Old Bailey, it has been possible to trace one girl's placement as servant in 1906 to the Soskin family in Great Alie Street, Whitechapel. In the closest census of 1901, the family consisted of a tobacconist, his wife and their five children. From their ages and birthplaces, it suggests the family immigrated to London in around 1886, so were not new settlers but were clearly not part of the wealthy

[116] *Report of JAPGAW for the Year 1894*, (ref. 22 Aug 1893).
[117] *Report of JAPGAW for the Year 1894*, (ref. 23 May 1893).
[118] *Report of JAPGAW for the Year 1894*, (ref. 8 Jun 1893).
[119] HL, MS173/2/2/5, 4 Oct 1900.

Committee members' social set.[120] The JAPGAW minutes confirm Mrs Soskin had had girls working for her from SPH before, so was a regular 'receiver' of Jewish maids in this way. Located in the densely populated immigrant area around Leman Street, the types of families into which newly arrived, usually young, immigrant women were being placed were hardly the most prestigious households, and may account for the high number of young, foreign servants residing in poorer boroughs revealed in Chapter 2. Service for this group, working in ordinary boroughs and identified as younger and less experienced, was thus a gendered welfare function of immigration.

**Short-term solutions**

As short-term solutions, girls would often be hired to help around the Home. Russian Jew Minnie Katzman found work like this while she was waiting to travel to South Africa to join her father, and was paid 2/- a week (raised to 3/-) plus bed and board to earn her keep, until such time as her father sent money for her onward ticket.[121] A significant number of Jewish young women had either failed to secure onward travel to America, returned from America's immigration centre at Ellis Island or had been rejected at Liverpool on account of trachoma, a common eye infection.[122] Many others in the care of the SPH had to be medically treated before they could successfully pass through the Liverpool screening centre as well as the Ellis Island one, but others were fit to work and were only temporarily to stay in London. Fifteen-year-old Gruene Sharshefski was one of these. Sent back with her father from Ellis Island, she turned to Sara Pyke House to find a situation until she and her father worked out their next emigration options.[123] In February 1907, Rose Polelinsky was left at SPH by her brother, who went to America promising to send her a ship's ticket. In the meantime she was placed in service, and left that July to join him, service representing, for them, a cost-neutral interim measure in the process of transmigration.[124]

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[120] See R. Attwood, 'Looking Beyond "White Slavery": Trafficking, the Jewish Association, and the Dangerous Politics of Migration Control in England, 1890-1910', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 18/7 (2016), who charts the history of the JAPGAW starting with its foundation in 1885 by Lady Constance Battersea, the daughter of Sir Anthony de Rothschild, a banker and landowner at the apogee of the Anglo-Jewish elite.
[121] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 13 Jun 1906.
[122] For more on the impact of trachoma on trans- and return migrants, see K. Maglen, 'Importing Trachoma The Introduction into Britain of American Ideas of an Immigrant Disease 1892-1906', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 23/1 (2005).
[123] HL, MS173/2/8/2 28, 14 Dec 1904.
[124] HL, MS173/2/8/2 28, 12 Feb and 24 Jul 1907.

## Conclusion

By examining the detail of hundreds of cases of foreign servants from the 1880s to the 1930s and analysing data derived from hundreds of newspaper classified advertisements, this chapter has added to our understanding of how otherness played a role in securing work in the domestic service sector. Not only has it confirmed what is already known about the declining appeal of service among British women, but it has revealed the opportunities this trend presented to the foreigner in search of domestic employment. It has revealed hitherto unmapped national connections between employers and their servants which complicates our understanding of servant-hiring families – that they were not always British and certainly not always wealthy – reinforcing the census findings from Chapter 2. Equally, it revealed that difference, through both foreignness and race, was coveted as a means to make a clear distinction between maid and mistress. Those employers who sought foreign labour tended to be those at the edges of society, and indeed cities, failing to offer the wages or surroundings of a standard to attract British women. In contrast, foreigners were perceived to possess training, experience, tractability, obedience and perhaps useful ignorance as to how far from social centres their suburban homes really were.

The chapter found that many foreign servants, as migrant workers, were using job-seeking techniques very similar to those of their British counterparts, actively seeking domestic work using a mixture of methods, and there was little evidence beyond the ayahs, of any loyalty towards agencies specialising in particular nationalities. A higher proportion of foreign women were found to be advertising their services as compared to their distribution in the census data, which might be explained by their being slightly older than British women, or indeed by being more likely skilled upper servants. Though it would be inaccurate to describe these women and girls as passive receivers of charitable assistance, it is important to note that those relying on co-nationals or co-religionists usually had the least agency over their work choices: those who were homeless or impoverished relied largely on community charity, support or infrastructure to find work and sustain themselves until such time as they could be more permanently settled or onwardly migrated. This resonates with both the experiences of workhouse girls being made to enter service as a means of subsistence and the older compulsion to anchor the masterless woman, preferably in a residential

setting. The vast majority, however, used the London press, registries (both those aimed at foreign and British women) and personal contacts made through work and their social lives to find and move jobs which, as explored in Chapter 5, they did often.

Just as with their migration to Britain, the infrastructure that grew up around women's mobility was mirrored in recruitment mechanisms. Purity organisations and hostels, established initially to provide accommodation, evolved into more elaborate recruitment service providers, attempting to outperform the dubious commercial agencies that preyed on the naïve, just as international purity organisations built parallel structures to outmanoeuvre the people traffickers (as discussed in Chapter 3). It would be unlikely that the printing of the 'Warning to Servants' pamphlet, though motivated by protection, would not have been used as a useful agency catalogue by women seeking work; why would they not avail themselves of vetted agencies in order to find a position? The thesis now turns to explore what conditions awaited them, once recruited, and how they actively navigated the restrictions and opportunities that their foreignness represented.

# Chapter 5

## 'Only the night is mine': double standards of the triple disadvantage

Countless scholars have chronicled the domestic service route as a finite period of a woman's life in which she spent as little time as possible before leaving the occupation as soon as she could, either for marriage or to another form of employment.[1] Certainly by the 'mid 1930s they were voting with their feet and leaving service — or scorning to enter it in the first place'.[2] With fewer women competing for positions, and working conditions persistently unattractive, 'the ease with which servants could move to other jobs was a feature of the inter-war servant scarcity'.[3] Nevertheless, despite servants finding it simpler to move jobs, usually to improve their employment conditions, the power employers held over their servants continued to extend well into their staff's private space and time. As this thesis has shown already, foreign domestic servants were constructed as victims, not only for being women away from supervision, but also as immigrant 'others' and engaged in hidden, though intimate, non-productive service work.[4]

In migration studies, the triple disadvantage refers to difficulties that arise from being specifically female, non-native and having a refugee background,[5] but here it has been adapted in a historical context to relate to challenges encountered by being female, foreign and in service (i.e. in manual or working class work). What effect did the extra burden of marginalisation they bore – namely foreignness – have on their working conditions? Unaccompanied by family, far from home and not necessarily familiar with the English language or work standards, were they at greater risk of precarious employment than their British counterparts? And once increased state control over domestic work permits and immigration was underway, to what extent were they able to exert any

[1] See for example Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', D. Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London; New York, 1998) and McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*.
[2] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain'. p. 197.
[3] Horn, *Life below Stairs*. p. 147.
[4] Marginalised by Adam Smith, Marx and E. P. Thompson, according to Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 189.
[5] T. Liebig and K. R. Tronstad, 'Triple Disadvantage?: A First Overview of the Integration of Refugee Women', *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 216*, (Paris, 2018).

agency over resisting or improving their positions, and what were the consequences of their actions?

## In place

### *Conditions*

> This can't be my life – to live with strangers, work for them from morning until night, have two half days a week and be called by my Christian name, like a 16 year-old girl. Soon I will forget that I got a surname.[6]

An understanding of what was expected of the servant, both in work and off duty, will offer context for how closely the experiences of foreign servants mirrored those of the British. Todd and Delap, among others, have argued that domestic service, as a significant occupational category for women, persisted well into the twentieth century. Despite labour-saving devices, smaller households and a perceived shift in favour of the private 'servant-less home', the rough work, at a minimum, of scrubbing, sweeping, mopping and cooking, for many households during the interwar years, was expected to be carried out by a live-in maid. But little had changed from the Victorian context in terms of workload, hours, pay and free time. In 1935, when *Good Housekeeping* magazine presented 'the ideal "modern" conditions under which a general maid should labour', her working day was still eleven hours, stretched over thirteen.[7] Not only did servants face interminable working hours filled with lists of chores, but their general behaviour both on and off duty came under constant scrutiny: there was an assumption on the part of employers that their servants would simply 'use their free time badly'.[8]

A government committee report in late 1918 into the domestic service problem attempted to account for girls' 'reluctance to take up what should be recognised as an honourable profession'.[9] It identified the resentment servants felt about wearing their 'distinctive dress', being called by their Christian or surname only, and being ridiculed in wider cultural life. Critically, it found that the long

[6] F. Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine' (Private Collection, unpublished short story, London, c.1939), p. 77.
[7] L. Delap, 'Housework, Housewives, and Domestic Workers: Twentieth-Century Dilemmas of Domesticity', *Home Cultures*, 8/2 (2011). p. 199.
[8] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 24.
[9] *Parl. Pap.* (1919) Cm 67, Ministry of Reconstruction, Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem, 1919, p. 35.

hours on duty 'compare unfavourably to those of any other occupation'.[10] As other trades and occupations gained independent rights and recognitions by the close of the Victorian era, domestic service remained stubbornly mired in traditional notions of filial dependence. Domestic servants earned very few employment rights and their work fell outside the scope of many of the hard-won labour laws of the nineteenth century that applied to factory work and later shop work.[11] Hidden in private homes up and down the country, their working hours were 'completely unregulated',[12] and conditions relied on individual negotiation (if any) between maid and mistress.

The long hours and exhausting workloads applied to all in the sector, including the foreign servants. Exhaustion from relentless work with so little time off was a constant theme of Frieda Ehrenstein's stories (see Chapter 1, Sources). Her working days, no matter which job she took, meant a 6:30am start until at least 9pm. On days or evenings when her employers went out, she rejoiced at being finished by 7 but her time away from the home was also limited. With often only two half-days (i.e. afternoons) to herself per week, she lamented how it was 'such a long time to be shut in a house from Sunday until Thursday'.[13] Her regular changes of jobs corroborates what others have said about the occupation in general, both about exhausting working conditions and moving on when a situation was not suitable. With too few women entering service, those in the sector could afford to change employers often, and this applied to foreigners too.

Naturally, a major complaint by mistresses of their staff was how quickly they changed positions, a phenomenon experienced across Britain and Europe too. In 1890s Berlin, for example, 61,063 servants registered 82,948 job changes in a single year.'[14] Pamela Horn reports that in a survey of 468 London households at the start of the 1930s, over a third of the servants employed had been in

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[10] *Parl. Pap.* (1919) Cm 67, p. 22.
[11] According to J. Macdonell and E. A. M. Innes, *The Law of Master and Servant: Being a Treatise on the Law Relating to Contracts of Service, Apprenticeship, and Employment. Part I. Common Law.* (London, 1908), pp. 481-7, the Factory and Workshop Act (1878) restricted female factory workers to 60 hours, with set times for lunch and a day off a week; regulations of shop opening hours provided for a limited working week for shop staff, set time off and regular breaks.
[12] P. Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers? Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service between the Wars', in C. Clarke, J. Johnson and R. Critcher (eds), *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (Birmingham, 1979), p. 129.
[13] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 17.
[14] Hoerder, 'Historical Perspectives on Domestic and Care-Giving Workers' Migrations: A Global Approach', p. 72.

post for under a year while more than two thirds had been in place for less than four years.[15] Letters exalting the loyalty of long-serving servants were featured in the *London Evening Standard* in the late 1930s, perhaps marking the last of the old-fashioned, lifelong servants, as opposed to the 'flighty' modern young ones who rarely stayed long in post.[16] But an emphasis on longevity of service was happening at least half a century before too. From the early nineteenth century, in attempts to entice women to stay in post and minimise disruption to middle- and upper-class family households, several organisations offered rewards for long-serving servants to encourage 'faithful service' to their employer.[17] In 1888, Mr Shrimpton, Secretary of the HWGL, in a bid to encourage girls to remain in one situation for at least a year 'and not to keep changing them as so many domestic servants often do, instituted a scheme of granting rewards of an English Bible on certain conditions and have a proportionate value according to length of service.'[18]

JAPGAW also encouraged girls to stay in post for at least a year by providing prizes, 'such as excursions to Epping'.[19] In 1897, for example, they decided to offer Eva Goldberg 'a present on her marriage'; having placed her in service, they deemed her 'an exceptionally good girl [since she had] kept her place for two years.'[20] Of the 527 servants placed in jobs by the Gordon House Institute in the three years to 1888, only two of Mr Shrimpton's three-year-loyalty awards were awarded, nine for those having served over two years and 16 to those who had been in place for at least a year; clearly hundreds more had moved before reaching twelve months. Rewarding servants for long service rather suggests a propensity for the majority to move places more often than their employers would have liked, in itself representing an act of agency and purpose. The independent mobility of these women challenged two key notions: loyalty to their betters (who acted *in loco parentis*, as explored in Chapter 3) and being in service, supervised and settled, in line with the masterless women theme found throughout this research.

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[15] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, pp. 36-7.
[16] Horn, *Life below Stairs*. p. 148.
[17] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 136.
[18] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1888*, pp. 149-150.
[19] S. L. Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (London, 2014), p. 154.
[20] HL, MS173/2/1/3, 12 Feb 1897.

Frieda Ehrenstein's writing reveals the level of emotional performance that was required of her, and her experiences of how she was expected to be dressed and behave give us an insight into employer expectations. On a day she was due to be interviewed for a job, she was tired, and 'the thought that in a day or two I have to enter a new job – new people, new place, I feel like a good cry. But I must not cry – I must look cheerful'.[21] Indeed, cheerfulness was expected at all times: 'One lady told me once "Tony, you must learn to smile". I will smile on the day when all servants will be free in the evening like any other person and have their Sunday to themselves', she commented afterwards.[22] Yet another mistress, Mrs Bradford, had scolded her for not smiling when she had guests for Sunday lunch. : 'A lady wants the servant to look happy when people are invited', she claimed.[23] 'I wear a smile like I wear a cap'.[24]

A lack of independence afforded them in general as servants was one of the main objections to the occupation.[25] True to the perception that a life in service was a life restricted, the movements and actions of a live-in servant did not escape the notice of her employers. Between a quarter and a third of the foreign staff from Chapter 2 were employed in single-servant households, and since they would have been working in much closer proximity to the family, the chances of them escaping notice were slim. Delap notes that less spatially segregated and smaller homes increased friction between employer and servant after World War I, and for all the talk of modernity and a focus on privacy, maid and mistress found themselves in much closer quarters than had their parents' generation,[26] bringing personal differences into sharp relief.

Some employers still clung to the need for separation. Frieda noted at times that the requirement for her to blend into the background was paramount, even when being employed in small apartments or houses. One of her mistresses complained at having been woken up by Frieda's heavy shoes, implying clumsiness and a general inability to be invisible. Indeed, Frieda once mused

[21] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 10.
[22] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 42.
[23] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 81.
[24] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 61.
[25] Lilian Harris, one of the signatories to the Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem insisted that the disadvantages to domestic service are 'mainly due to the lack of freedom arising from living in the employer's house.' *Parl. Pap.* (1919) Cm 67, p. 5.
[26] Delap, 'Housework, Housewives, and Domestic Workers', p. 195.

that she should 'wear a uniform that has the same pattern as the wall paper to match the house'.[27] In other households, her mistresses would require her to be an emotional support, and would make claims on her time (and sometimes her private space) to offload their woes and problems: 'I grew very tired of her stories about her private life. […] When I retired […] to have a bath she would come in and start again'.[28] The intensity of working so close to an employer was thus far greater than was experienced in other occupations, though there is no evidence that this was any different for the British servant population.

Denying staff a private life was not restricted to foreign servants, of course, and the moment that a servant stepped outside the family (both metaphorically and physically) was cause for concern. In the Victorian period, many households banned servants from entertaining their own visitors and maintained a 'no followers allowed' rule.[29] Although this did not prevent servants from spending time with members of the opposite sex away from the household (though even then this could have negative consequences as shown later in this chapter), free time within the walls of an employer's home was tightly controlled. Rose Aarons was dismissed from her post after her mistress came home to find a man in her room; as a result she was not even allowed back into Sara Pyke House, despite her protestations that he was nothing more than a friend.[30] Swiss-born sisters Clara and Frieda Schindelholz were dismissed from their places with Col. Turner since he found them 'most undesirable with no sense of honour or obedience, staying out all night when it pleased them, and [...] various other misbehaviours'.[31]

Staying out late was a common complaint levelled at staff. That it was a sign of immorality to be out of doors after dark clearly challenged the perceived character of a female servant as one to be protected by her employer (loosely deemed *in loco parentis*) rather than independent and responsible for her own actions. It is clear that employers expected their servants to accept long working hours with little free time, as well as commit to staying with them for many years. An intimate work

[27] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 78.
[28] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 13.
[29] Horn, *Life below Stairs*. p. 131.
[30] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 12 Apr 1905.
[31] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/254/1929.

environment meant their own personalities and behaviours were highly visible and liable to be regulated, one of the most detested aspects of life as a servant. However, these conditions applied across the sector, and had no respect for the age, nationality or background of the servant.

### *Responses*

Gordon House reported that 'the foreign girls […] know that if situations are found for them and they "serve" as they should, it is a real benefit to them.'[32] 'Serving as they should' implied that they knew to adhere to the standards and behavioural expectations of their employers if they knew what was best for them. But while many did avoid conflict or issues, cases across the decades suggest servants employed a number of ways to resist or improve their lot. While the power dynamic usually meant the employer had the upper hand, servants have always found ways to express their own displeasure. One avenue available to the disgruntled maid was resistance, or to cause her employer maximal disruption. Benson claims that servants at the start of the twentieth century were 'less compliant than the existing historiography allows, [and] that they had many more ways of protecting their interests than we have usually been led to believe'.[33] In the nineteenth century, Horn reports how on being reprimanded, Zilpah Tyrell, a farm servant, had the 'fit of the sulks' and stayed in bed instead of doing her work.[34]

Such resistance was not reserved for the British servants. In 1933, Maria Steiner objected to her employer withholding 5/- a week from her wages to pay her national insurance stamps, and a further 5% to pay the agency fees. By way of protest, and until such time as her money was reimbursed, she stayed out until 3am, would not work or leave her bedroom.[35] Maria Hejduk left her former employer's home in 1931. We do not have her version of events, but on the day she left, she:

> …committed a very filthy nuisance in her bedroom throwing (human filth) wrapped in paper and a bundle of dirty linen out of her window on to the roof of [her employer's] bedroom and into the garden which was found the day she left. There was no need for this dirty action considering there is an indoor lavatory as well as an outdoor one and every

[32] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 120.
[33] J. Benson, 'One Man and His Women: Domestic Service in Edwardian England', *Labour History Review*, 72/3 (2007), p. 205.
[34] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*. p. 133.
[35] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3716/1933.

> convenience in her bedroom. [Her employer] also found a quantity of sugar on the kitchen floor after she had left, evidently to keep the dogs quiet… [36]

Maria had clearly wanted to avoid being detected as she left. It is difficult to guess why she fled in this way, but it chimes with what Frieda has written of how uncomfortable she would feel in giving notice to an employer. It is perhaps no surprise that Maria chose to leave without having to face her employers' reactions, but more surprising to read of her display of defiance and protest. Todd warns against workplace relationships being overly or 'inevitably characterized by "deference" or "defiance"',[37] but the highly personal relationship and power imbalance between employer and employee in domestic service made the means to protest or bargain for improvements virtually impossible without resorting to behaviour considered by the employer to be unreasonable.

As shown in Chapter 2, small households with fewer than four servants were by far more common employers than those employing vast hierarchies of staff. With the decline in the aristocracy in the early years of the twentieth century came staff cuts in the largest households, as was seen in the way this affected skilled upper servants (see Chapter 4), such that small staffed households were a feature throughout the period for foreign servants. The size of the servants' hall or empty kitchens that Frieda used were a reminder of how many people had once worked there, yet there was no proportional reduction in the workload. Despite domestic technological improvements, conditions for interwar servants in these households were rarely more manageable than had been the case fifty years previously, and often a lot more lonely.[38]

If servants were not in a position to defy their employers or leave their positions, many simply stayed, dissatisfied, in post. Horn points out that large numbers of British servants, and particularly the youngest ones, 'were apparently either too timid or too ignorant to show their discontent by leaving a position in which they were unhappy or badly treated'.[39] Indeed, even in the most severe of cases (such as rape or assault), girls would opt out of legal proceedings for fear of the publicity

[36] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/11924/1931.
[37] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 203.
[38] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain'. p. 191.
[39] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 137.

involved, observed Gordon House.[40] Horn claims that those particularly at risk were the young women sent to service from the workhouse, 'who had no families of their own to whom they could turn'.[41] The importance of having access to family support, or one *in loco parentis* perhaps, was paramount for women to find the means to manage alone in London. Being isolated in post, and a lack of support and knowledge of their rights, was likely to have compelled thousands of foreign women to stay in wretched conditions.

For many, the easiest way to remove themselves from an exhausting or solitary situation was to give notice before finding another. Even 'before the 1920s, servants had been able to move between jobs fairly easily — they had been able to break their contract without too much difficulty since the 1875 Master and Workmen Act.'[42] Many servants did not put up with poor conditions for long. Violette Beyeler had only been in post 'about a fortnight when she informed her employer that owing to the treatment she has received she was going to leave'.[43] Gertrud Göhring informed the police officer that she had run away from her position with Mrs Poynting, 'because that lady was always grumbling at her and had assaulted her by smacking her face'.[44] During a long investigation report held in the MoL files into an employer, they were found to have had 36 servants in the previous 12-14 months. It claimed that 'many of these servants have arrived one day and fled the next, others have stayed longer but have quitted without wages in order to get away'.[45] It was even enough for some to be blacklisted by the Home Office to prevent them employing further foreign servants.

Foreign servants who did decide to leave unsatisfactory positions joined the army of British servants doing the same. Horn records that it was far more common for discontented servants to move to a 'fresh situation' than engage in resistance or insolence by way of protest. Pam Taylor's interviews with former servants confirm this, with many leaving for another job 'with the minimum

[40] *NVA Annual Report 1901*. p. 18.
[41] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 137.
[42] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain'. p. 196.
[43] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3067/2/1933.
[44] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/6906/1932.
[45] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/4409/1932.

of antagonism' rather than court trouble by making a scene.[46] Though some moved 'for purposes of promotion or a mere desire for a change of scene',[47] most were driven to change by relentless workloads and a lack of free time. Crucially, one British woman in service in the 1920s claimed that '[e]xploitation applied much more to other workers […]. There was no need for a girl to stay where conditions were poor'.[48] Nevertheless, Frieda lamented how often she felt compelled to change position: 'I will never save up a penny owing to changing my job so often. But what else can I do? Stay and be unhappy?'[49] Those servants in unsatisfactory positions were therefore usually limited to various measures reflecting the endurance of their lot or leaving for a new post. Nevertheless, some took breaches of contract incidents to the law and others appealed for assistance, actions that will be discussed later in the chapter.

It is clear that employers expected their servants, whatever their nationality, to adhere to a set of household rules and morals that applied to their time at work and beyond. Increasingly close contact in small houses with few staff exacerbated character differences and brought a level of personal contact between mistress and maid that few endured for long. To mitigate some of the worst aspects of their lives in service, servants variously chose to keep quiet, resist or defy the authority of their employer, or change positions altogether, though none was exclusively experienced by foreign staff. Rose Holmes' oral history research on refugees put to work as servants in the late 1930s found that they too were expected to endure the same challenging conditions of labour as their British counterparts, with no consideration for the context of their status.[50] Frieda Ehrenstein's own work corroborates the long hours and hard work described by British counterparts throughout the period. And the Report of the Women's Advisory Committee on the Domestic Service Problem concluded that loss of social status by entering the occupation, long hours of duty and a lack of companionship or independence had become the defining features of service as a whole.[51] With working conditions and responses to them broadly similar across the

[46] Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers?', p. 138.
[47] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*. p. 135.
[48] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 198.
[49] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 18.
[50] Holmes, 'Love, Labour, Loss', p. 13.
[51] Although others within the report claimed poor wages and conditions continued to blight the occupation as a realistic alternative to factory work. (*Parl. Pap.* (1919) Cm 67, p. 22).

sector, the consequences and implications will now be examined, of the actions and behaviours while in service of the foreign women, experienced as a direct result of their otherness.

## Consequences

> I consider this person totally unfit to enjoy the privileges of living in this country.
> (Employer of his former servant)[52]

### *Away from home*

While it seems that foreign servants' working conditions and methods of handling poor situations were broadly in line with those of the wider servant community, women faced an extra layer of disadvantage as foreigners, not only entirely reliant upon their employers for accommodation and income but, in the interwar years, on the government and its agencies for their right to remain in Britain. The key difference between local and foreign staff was their proximity to home, the support it offered and the accommodation it provided in the event of unemployment (discussed more fully in Chapter 6). The main obvious difficulty was financial, since a spell in a hostel, private lodgings or her passage home ate into a servant's savings. The financial considerations of returning home were not just reserved for those coming from overseas, of course, but the costs involved were greater. A boat-train ticket from London to southern Germany via the boat cost one servant £3 17s 9d in 1930,[53] and Maria Hoff (see Figure 55) submitted a full breakdown of costs involved in her travelling in 1927 from Wiesbaden in southern German to London via Belgium, to secure a visa: for two maids this came to 55 schillings (*c.* £1 10*s*) and 41*s* 5d, totalling £3 11*s* 5*d*. A train ticket from London to Minehead, by comparison, cost just 6*s* 6*d*.[54] But time was also a factor, and would prevent servants returning home even if their employers offered them the opportunity to do so. The sense that foreign women would stay in Britain for as long as they had work was, for the women, pervasive (though for the authorities it was less so). Any break in their working lives was an unwelcome drain on their resources.

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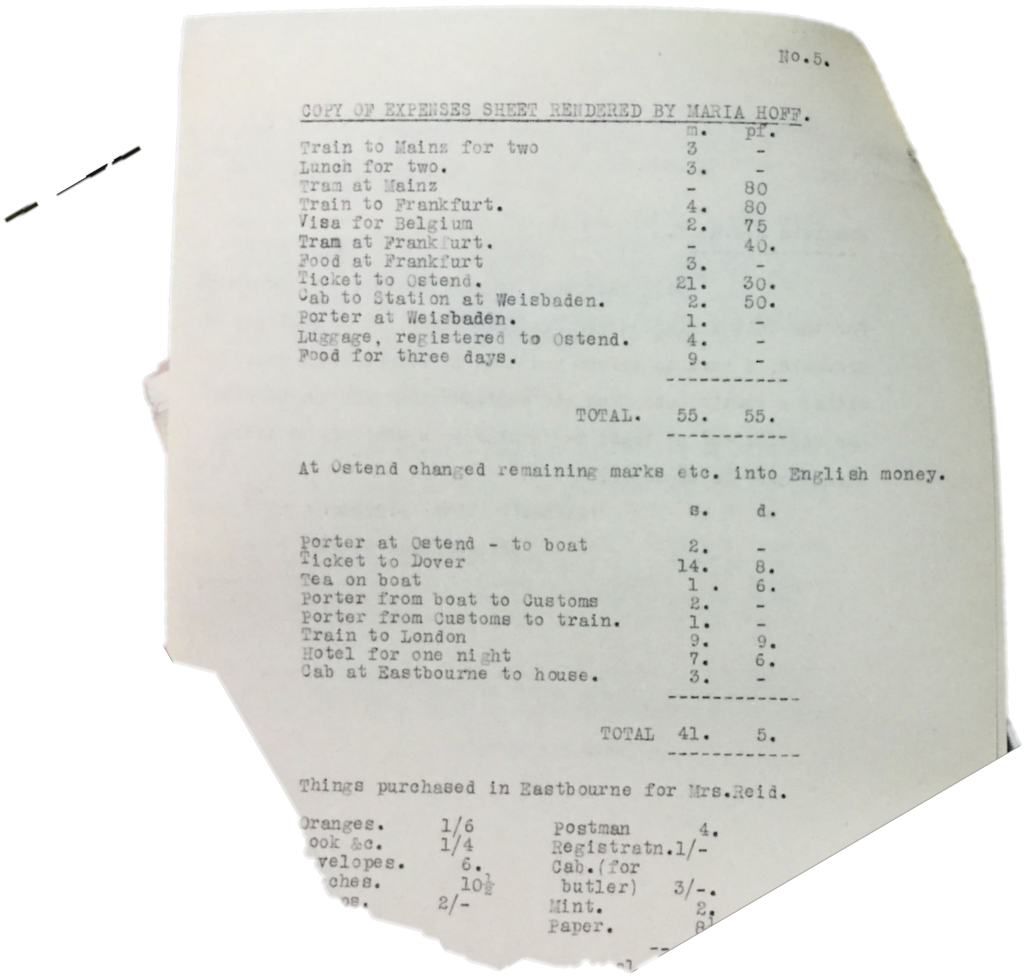
[52] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/11924/1931.
[53] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/7945/1930.
[54] R. M. A. Davies, 'Public Passenger Transport in Inter-War Britain: The Southern Railway's Response to Bus Competition, 1923-39' (PhD, University of York, 2014), p. 158.



No.5.

COPY OF EXPENSES SHEET RENDERED BY MARIA HOFF.

| | m. | pf. |
|---|---|---|
| Train to Mainz for two | 3 | - |
| Lunch for two. | 3. | - |
| Tram at Mainz | - | 80 |
| Train to Frankfurt. | 4. | 80 |
| Visa for Belgium | 2. | 75 |
| Tram at Frankfurt. | - | 40. |
| Food at Frankfurt | 3. | - |
| Ticket to Ostend. | 21. | 30. |
| Cab to Station at Weisbaden. | 2. | 50. |
| Porter at Weisbaden. | 1. | - |
| Luggage, registered to Ostend. | 4. | - |
| Food for three days. | 9. | - |
| TOTAL. | 55. | 55. |

At Ostend changed remaining marks etc. into English money.

| | s. | d. |
|---|---|---|
| Porter at Ostend - to boat | 2. | - |
| Ticket to Dover | 14. | 8. |
| Tea on boat | 1 . | 6. |
| Porter from boat to Customs | 2. | - |
| Porter from Customs to train. | 1. | - |
| Train to London | 9. | 9. |
| Hotel for one night | 7. | 6. |
| Cab at Eastbourne to house. | 3. | - |
| TOTAL | 41. | 5. |

Things purchased in Eastbourne for Mrs.Reid.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oranges. | 1/6 | Postman | 4. |
| ook &c. | 1/4 | Registratn. | 1/- |
| velopes. | 6. | Cab.(for butler) | 3/-. |
| ches. | 10½ | Mint. | 2. |
| | 2/- | Paper. | 8½ |

**Figure 55: Excerpt of the Eastbourne County Constabulary police report showing a breakdown of costs for Anna Maria Hoff to travel to England to work as a maid[55]**

For most British servants, leaving a bad position or tiding themselves over between jobs would likely mean a return to their family, albeit briefly. While it would be foolish to claim that no British-born servants experienced ill effects of job-hopping or getting the sack, oral histories, contemporary writings and modern scholarship all suggest that it was commonplace to return to the family home during periods of unemployment.[56] A young English maid in 1914, while struggling to manage her workload, longed to fall ill in order 'to go home'.[57] Another, Winifred Foley, took a place as a general domestic in the 1930s but was expected to be a housemaid all morning, a parlourmaid all afternoon and a children's maid all evening. 'I escaped to home as soon

[55] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2080/EDAR/1007/1927.
[56] See especially W. M. Gordon, ""What, I Pray You, Shall I Do with the Ballance?"".
[57] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 12.

as I reasonably could', she remembers.[58] And that safety net afforded her time and rest enough to find a new place.

## *Employer reactions*

The giving of notice by a maid, displays of 'deviant' behaviour or simply personal disagreements could trigger anything from irritation to fury in an employer, and prompt some of them to feel aggrieved enough to take things further. Withholding property was one of the easiest ways mistresses could express displeasure or disapproval at the behaviour of their staff; others alerted the authorities to some spurious misbehaviour or a character trait which quite often had no bearing on their servant's work. This section explores how the responses by employers to the agency and independence displayed by their foreign servants had a direct and often expensive or profound effect on the lives of these women living in London.

### Debt bondage

The implications of being far from home and family appeared to embolden the sense of power their employers held over their foreign servants. The economies of hiring foreign staff meant that many women became trapped in situations they could not leave before their passage over to London had been repaid (usually via their wages). In the mid-1890s, Gordon House reported on (poorly-run) registry offices 'in many cases securing an exorbitant fee from them [overseas servants] as well as obtaining the cost of the journey from the mistresses on the understanding that the amount is to be stopped from the first payment of wages.'[59] Despite claims this was taking advantage of the girls, it was a system widely understood by both mistress and maid. Claiming that servants were aware of their financial obligations if their travelling expenses were paid up front, J. Kloter, of Kloters Registry Office (see Chapter 4), insisted that deducting expenses from the maid's wages 'is the usual course and which they thoroughly understand has to be done if they do not stay a year in the situation.'[60] Paying back debts to employers for costs of their recruitment was not restricted to foreign servants. Delap found that Barnardo's girls who were sent into service would be 'liable to pay back the £3–5 spent on their uniforms if they left their employment at any time in

[58] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 54.
[59] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1896*, p. 156.
[60] 'Mrs King', 1931, WL, 4NVA/6/2/2/03.

the first nine months',[61] and many ordinary servants were expected to repay the cost of their uniforms over several weeks' wage packets.[62] But since an employer's up-front investment in a British-born servant was without cost, the freedom for her to move positions was naturally less restrictive.

**Retention of documents and wages**

Due to the highly personal (and often unwritten) nature of contractual obligations, there was little standardisation in how to handle the departure of a servant. One important regulating mechanism was the 'character', a written reference supplied by a mistress to her departing servant, or a written reply to a subsequent employer's request. For it to have been an effective system, of course, it relied on the mistress and maid parting on good terms, and as Horn notes, 'there was no *legal* requirement for an employer to give a character reference at all. Any mistress of a vindictive turn of mind could, by withholding this document, in effect deprive a servant of his or her livelihood'.[63] For British servants this was difficult enough, and kept many women in place rather than risk a poor reference by leaving a post early. Jean Rennie, a former servant interviewed in the 1970s, explained the charade of giving notice: 'you always tried to give the impression you were loath to leave […] you couldn't get another job without a good reference'.[64] Women with poor character references faced declining prosperity in subsequent jobs. One British maid believed her 'job-hopping' had harmed her career prospects and claimed that she only 'worsened' herself as she was forced into gradually less and less comfortable positions.[65]

For foreign women, the impact could be more severe. Gordon House recognised the highly personal nature of the service relationship when a mistress' mildest displeasure could warrant her withholding wages: 'very petty are the reasons why some of these young women are so often turned adrift, without their wages and sometimes without any consideration as to what is to become of them.'[66] There is evidence throughout the period of such treatment. Compelled by ill-health to

[61] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 52.
[62] In 1923, 13-year-old Minnie Cowley was expected to pay out of her wages for her two uniforms at a rate of 2s 6d a week for six weeks. Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers?', p. 131.
[63] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p. 53.
[64] Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers?', p. 138.
[65] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, p.147
[66] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1905*, p. 116.

leave her position, M___ Y___'s mistress detained her boxes claiming from her the money [the employer had] paid for her journey to England.[67] Three years later, an Italian servant had her boxes withheld by her master when she left her post after a month;[68] and in 1901, the wife of a Member of Parliament detained the boxes of her 28-year-old Norwegian maid after she gave notice.[69] A 21-year-old German in 1913 found herself in an 'undesirable situation'. Upon leaving, her mistress 'kept her recommendatory letters and declined to give them back until the girl had served a month'.[70] And fifteen years later and the same tactics were being employed: Mary, an ayah in the service of Mrs Thomas of Hastings, had not only her wages withheld but her passport and testimonials were also retained by her employers in 1928, forcing her to appeal for help in being able to leave the country.[71] In cases such as these, with the right support, servants could reclaim what was rightfully theirs, but for those without access to that advocacy (and see later in this chapter), a lack of funds or possessions would leave them stranded in London and subject to dubious options, including prostitution.[72]

**Intimidation**

For foreign servants, the most significant and feared consequence they faced was deportation. This threat loomed large, and employers knew it. As a result, many were forced to stay in posts against their will or, on leaving or giving notice to leave, would be threatened with forced repatriation. Miss G___ in 1931 was trapped in a position with very poor working conditions, and was prevented from giving her notice or leaving by her mistress who told her 'she was under contract to stay a year and if she left she would be sent back to her own country by the Home Office.'[73] M____ O____ had endured a year of overwork and a lack of food before she eventually fled her employer's household for a better job. According to her NVA report, she had only stayed because

[67] *NVA Annual Report 1894*, p. 7.
[68] *NVA Annual Report 1897*, p. 16.
[69] *NVA Annual Report 1901*, p. 12.
[70] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1913*, p. 29. Recommendatory letters in Germany were usually bound together and served as a full employment history for prospective employers to examine. See W. Howitt, *The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany* (London, 1842), p. 241.
[71] 'Enquiry into the Alleged Ill-Treatment of an Indian Ayah by her Employer in the UK; Borough of Hastings Police Report', 1928, London, British Library, IOR/L/PJ/6/1957, File 914.
[72] The link between prostitution and unemployed servants is successfully explored elsewhere; for example: Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*.
[73] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/3478/1931.

her mistress 'gave her to understand that she was obliged to by her contract'.[74] These cases of coercion came to light periodically, and often by chance, in the purity organisation files too, but many more must have gone unrecorded. It is therefore highly likely that hundreds or even thousands of foreign women were tricked into believing they had to stay in an exploitative job or risk losing their right to work in Britain.

**Threat of deportation**

The domestic permit system was used as powerful threat against servants. Instead of being in place to just grant permission for her to gain access to work in London, it became used in reverse by employers wishing to punish their former employees for misdemeanours of all kinds. That might have been because they left after a few days, or because their behaviour was unsuitable or for more serious reasons such as theft and criminal behaviour (though proceedings were usually dealt with by the police rather than employers in these cases). However it manifested itself, employers sometimes went to great lengths in writing to the Home Office to express their anger, and to recommend their former servant be ejected from the country – these claims then triggered an investigation into the servant, and often her associates. As described in Chapter 3, the law governing the deportation of foreigners from the UK was formalised under the 1920 Aliens Order, and provided for the expulsion of foreigners in the event of criminal activity or destitution. But there was one highly subjective condition upon which the fate of a foreigner rested: being considered an 'undesirable alien'. Some were done on formal grounds of deportation, but many girls and women returning to their home countries were pressured to do so by state authorities, in most cases with no legal authorisation to do so but for a) it being in their best interest, b) not eventually becoming a charge on the state or c) for reasons linked to their apparent deviant (though non-criminal) behaviour.

**Slander, spite and revenge tactics**

Withholding resources was an effective way to assert power over a servant, particularly one who was entirely reliant on these for survival: her trunk of clothes, her references or her wages. For women coming from overseas with no family to turn to locally, the consequences could be especially brutal. Without access to money, possessions or travel documents, many were suddenly faced with few choices. Once employers had little left to use by way of punishment or

[74] 'Case Files', 1928, WL, 4NVA/6/1/037.

reimbursement, spite often motivated an employer's next steps. Mistresses (and others) were known to write to their servant's parents to cause her 'upset and trouble'. In 1887, Gordon House reported the case of a girl who had taken a situation through a foreign registry office. Kept at the hostel attached to the office for a week and forced to pay for her keep with meagre funds, she left her first position as being unsuitable. Refusing to return to the registry, 'they had nothing but her reputation to influence, and wrote a libellous postcard to her parents saying she was leading a "light" life.'[75]

In the interwar period, though, this type of intimation of immorality had more severe consequences once the police or Home Office became aware of them. Helene Armbruster, a 27-year-old German from Bavaria, fell out of her employer's favour.[76] She had been in service for over a year in St John's Wood, London, before she took a position as parlourmaid for the Earl of Denbigh's household. The Earl contacted police after Helene 'flatly disobey[ed] a simple order from Lady Denbigh to keep a window shut so that the dog could not get out into the garden, […] packed her bag and walked out of the house at 8 o'clock in the morning'. The Earl wrote to the MoL insisting she be considered an undesirable alien for having left her position without giving notice. 'We had five visitors in the house at the time and she knew that she was leaving us without anyone to do the work. We therefore think that she is not a desirable alien and that she ought to be taught a lesson and would be very grateful if she was sent out of the country'. This level of interference at an official level, and 'recommending' she be taught a lesson, is typical of employers who felt slighted at having their servant 'desert' them. Despite leaving the UK on her own, Helene was eventually blacklisted by the Ministry.

**Alleging immorality**

In most cases, it was enough to have simply a *hint* of deviant or unusual behaviour to trigger either an investigation, or indeed a definitive order for cutting down conditions, deportation or being added to the blacklist. German servants in the Netherlands, according to Lucassen, faced similar consequences: 'As soon as suspicion arose that their conduct was 'immoral', or when they lost their

[75] *NVA Annual Report 1887*, p. 23.
[76] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/7038/1932.

job, they were expelled without hesitation."[77] In 1927, Rosa Furi, a Swiss general domestic 'was found to be suffering from anaemia'.[78] Eager to rid himself of a weak servant, her employer, describing her as 'peculiar and unpleasant', discharged her and bought a ticket for her to return home, but she refused to leave London. The Home Office recommended her landing condition be cut down and her whereabouts were traced by police to an address in Regents Park. After being forced to attend the police station with her passport, she was persuaded to go to the Swiss Benevolent Society who paid for a ticket back to Switzerland. 'This alien has no money and appeared of a very loose character', claimed the Bow Street police report sent to the Home Office. Her conditions were ultimately reduced to 14 days and directions were given to the police to 'have her warned to leave'. All this, as a result of her not having secured new work with a permit, having been sacked for illness.

Sexual intrigue could of course inspire highly emotive responses, and insinuating immorality was a common method to imply the undesirability of an alien. Klara Hermanns' employer triggered an investigation after alleging that she was 'fond of going out with soldiers',[79] and Rosa Zybach was reported to have been 'living with a married man whose home she broke up.'[80] As a direct result, the Home Office issued an order to the ports banning Rosa from landing again in the UK. These cases were not isolated. In 1930, Ruth Spiegel arrived to work for the Caplan family as a Companion/Help. After some months, Mrs Caplan discovered Ruth was having an 'intrigue' with Mr Caplan and that Ruth had left London for Sweden. In poorly paid employment in Stockholm, Ruth had written to Mr Caplan to help arrange for a better job for her back in England. Fearing a resumption of the affair, Mrs Caplan wrote to ask for the Home Office's help. In this case the servant fared poorly against the social standing of her former employer. On her mistress's word alone, Ruth was blacklisted and prevented from returning to England, having neither committed a crime nor become a burden on the state.[81]

[77] Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control', p. 328.
[78] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/2343/1927.
[79] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/4493/1930.
[80] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1925, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/3245/1925.
[81] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/10057/1930.

In a similar case, 29-year-old Else, an Austrian maid hired by the Upwards of Hampstead from the Anglo-German Agency in 1933, had an affair with Mr Upward. She was turned out of the house and left the UK, but stated her intention to return to take up employment. Mrs Upward reported the matter to the Home Office 'as she does not think it is desirable that the alien should be allowed to enter the UK and perhaps carry on another injury with her husband or somebody else's.' Soon enough, a prospective employer applies for a domestic service permit for Else but permission is denied. 'We can hardly agree to this', a file note states, and Else's name is added to the Ministry of Labour's blacklist.[82] Yet another young servant girl's career in London was cut short on the word of her mistress alone. Mrs Fosbrooke had found 22-year-old Anny Buss a 'good worker' for two years until Anny had gone back to Germany on a short holiday. She then discovered that her son had become 'infatuated' with Anny and begged the Home Office to cancel her work permit so as not to allow her back into the country. She felt 'her son might get entangled; […] if my son had any more to do with her it would mean the breaking up of an English family. […] This girl seems to have a strange fascination over men.'[83] Sure enough, Anny's permit was withdrawn.

Some employers went further. Alongside hinting at immorality, others alleged criminal behaviour. In 1933, Maria Friedrich, a 20-year-old housemaid for Percy Millard, left her post after 'three weeks and three days'.[84] Mr Millard and his wife were furious that she had left so quickly, and wrote to the Aliens Office claiming they were 'glad to get rid of her', that they had found 'in her possession a sexual book not fit for any girl to read' and that she had broken her 10pm curfew. He was so angry, in fact, that Mr Millard alleged she had stolen some items from the house. Such false accusations were not isolated, but ensured the police became involved in order to perhaps smear the girl's reputation. In the presence of the police, Maria opened her cases proving their contents were hers and forcing Mr Millard to withdraw the allegation. The police seemed unimpressed with Mr Millard's claims that *Maria* had wasted police time. Nevertheless, three months later, the Ministry concluded she was 'clearly an undesirable person' and placed her on the blacklist.

[82] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/6359/2/1933.
[83] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/7886/1931.
[84] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/6279/1933.

Maria Hejduk, a servant whose file is referred to earlier, was alleged to have been wealthier than she ought to have been, in her employer's eyes. '[S]he appeared to have plenty of money', he noted as she left without giving notice. Having plenty of money, clothes or possessions became a sly way of insinuating a servant was earning extra income via immoral means or indeed just by accepting gifts from men. Percy Millard (above) alleged that despite only earning 12/6 weekly, his maid Maria also had 'plenty of money and very good clothes'. Such allegations of unexplained wealth may well have been designed to have officials form a poor opinion of servants and to have them labelled undesirable. Of course, the extravagance of young working women (maids included) wearing feathered hats, crinolines or other extravagant outfits was a popular trope from the Victorian period onwards,[85] (indeed, such visible 'excesses' had currency in other periods and countries too, as Stanley notes in early-modern Japanese society).[86] But for foreign servants, the choice of clothes and any other outward displays of wealth or decadence, even when worn outside her hours of work, could be a dangerous trigger for official investigations.

The consequences of these employer actions were clear: without a reference, respectable households would not engage a servant, foreign or otherwise, such that she was left with fewer and fewer choices. British servants could often find another place via a friend, or family contact, or change occupation altogether, choosing factory, shop or café work over service, but foreign women, who were more often stymied by their lack of English, networks and a reliance on accommodation, faced an extra layer of disadvantage. Much of their treatment would now be categorised under key International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Forced Labour indicators, themselves enshrined in UN law in 1930.[87] Some of these abuses were experienced by British servants, but the regulatory environment of the interwar period rendered foreign women particularly vulnerable to precarious employment, with the constant threat of permanent removal from Britain affecting their options.

[85] M. Valverde, 'The Love Of Finery: Fashion And The Fallen Woman In Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse', *Victorian Studies*, 32/2 (1989), pp. 169-88.
[86] Stanley, 'Maidservants' Tales', p. 449.
[87] ILO Indicators of Forced Labour, 2012 https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_203832/lang--en/index.htm (3 Jun 2019).

## *Official responses*

The threat of deportation hung heavy over the servants. Despite having privileged gendered access to the domestic service labour market through (women-only) domestic service permits, the servants faced immigration sanctions for engaging in any number of actual or insinuated misdemeanours: behavioural, financial, criminal or moral. During their employment, they could be subjected to scrutiny by the Ministry of Labour or the Home Office and face deportation under the 1920 Aliens Order: criminal behaviour (e.g. prostitution or larceny), breaching permit conditions (e.g. failing to renew a permit in time or working for someone else without securing a fresh permit), being a charge on public funds (e.g. becoming destitute or admitted to an asylum) or whenever their removal from British shores would be 'conducive to the public good', in the opinion of the Home Secretary.[88]

There were several ways in which the Ministry of Labour and the Home Office ensured the girls left the UK. Firstly, if guilty of having committed a crime, the judge/magistrate would recommend a deportation order (further explored in the Epilogue). Secondly, the Ministry of Labour could recommend to 'cut her landing condition down'; in other words, reducing the amount of time she had been permitted to legally remain in the country. Thirdly, the Home Office could have the servant visited by an official or policeman who would pressure her to leave of her own accord. Other agencies were often involved in these cases, usually by helping financially in the repatriation costs. The Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress, for example, paid for Helene Trampitsch's ticket back to Germany in 1930, when she suffered mental health issues and was about to enter an asylum.[89] As co-optees in the process of repatriation, the organisations that formed the very infrastructure smoothing women's migration also, in turn, facilitated their removal. In parallels with the way in which unwanted prostitutes were treated by the British government during the same period, Laite observes the injustice of how 'alien women (both servants and prostitutes) could be deported for an offence they could not be imprisoned for.[90] Such measures, built into the Aliens

[88] D. Cesarani, 'Anti-Alienism in England After World War I', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 6/1 (1987), p. 6.
[89] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/7945/1930.
[90] Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*, p. 105.

Order, effectively legislated for the ejection of mobile, masterless women from Britain, to have them settled in their own place of birth.

Many servants had spent their own money to get to London and wished to avoid returning home with less than they had arrived with or having to justify their expulsion to their family, friends and future employers. In 1932, Frida Glatthaar appealed to the Aliens Office to remain in the UK with a fellow maid after losing their places with an abusive employer, and before they had secured new posts: 'it would not be possible to go back to our own country at present as we must make good our losses and earn money to pay for the return journey,' she explained.[91] The Superintendent Chief Constable of Bucks Constabulary saw the injustice of the policy towards the servants in the case of Maria Steiner, who had been poorly treated and dismissed from her position. She had been deliberately framed by her employer as a thief, since he was reluctant to pay for her ticket home to Austria. 'As the girl has not committed any criminal offence and has not been found wandering I do not see how I can take action. […] I am of opinion that when girls are brought from a foreign country and cannot speak English that some person should look after their interests so that the criminal law should not have to be invoked against them'.[92] In this case, the employer may well have wanted to avoid the costs of repatriation; having her convicted, he believed, would have made the state responsible for her deportation.

After the permit system was introduced, the financial responsibility for repatriating a foreign servant did indeed fall to the employer. 'If the aliens have not sufficient money to pay their own fares back to Germany you will understand that you are liable to be called on to defray the costs',[93] one employer was told. This may well have been an aspect of alleging stories of immorality or criminality; in the event the servant was found wanting, the financial responsibility was assumed by the state in having her prosecuted or deported. However, tellingly, in correspondence relating to an Austrian maid committed to an asylum, the MoL wrote to the Home Office for clarification on whether they could legally oblige her employer to pay for her repatriation. After consulting their

[91] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/8097/1932. Her letter had been translated by a Home Office official from German.
[92] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3716/1933.
[93] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5010/1933.

solicitor, the Home Office advised that 'we cannot take proceedings but there is no reason why we should not endeavour to get from the employer some payment towards the cost of the girl's return […] You will of course realise that it is pure bluff and that if the employer ignores it, or replies with a blank refusal we cannot carry the matter any further.'[94] The very system that permitted women to access domestic service jobs in Britain, then, was based on highly interpretive approaches by the officials employed to administer it, who seemed far more concerned with returning a servant to her home (in a manner of settlement) than who paid for it.

Several cases in the Ministry of Labour files suggest the authorities took unilateral decisions on the right of an individual to remain in the UK on the basis of some dubious interpretations of their status. An investigation into Austrian sisters Hildegarde and Juliana Ondracek, dated April 1931, found they had each taken three or four situations since they had arrived in Britain in November 1930.[95] On the basis that they were prone to changing positions often, the officer concluded 'it would appear that they are both unsuitable for British conditions and should be required to go'. Their passports were duly endorsed,[96] and they left the country on the 7 April 1931. In 1933, Emma Keller appealed to the Home Office for an extension of her work permit, but this triggered a request for her police file which revealed 'that the alien has had 15 situations since her arrival and five since February this year. In explanation of this she states that she is frequently ill and also that she has been unfortunate in her situations. She is very shabby in appearance and states that she is in financial difficulties. She wishes to remain in the UK indefinitely.'[97] The Home Office denied her the further permission: 'we must avoid the possibility of her becoming a public charge. […] She should therefore arrange to leave at an early date.' This case makes clear that the right to remain in Britain to work was not even necessarily predicated on having carried out a crime, being a charge on the public purse or being undesirable for any other reason but for having the *potential* for any of these to occur in future. The fact she had held so many jobs counted directly against her, despite having a reasonable justification for this. Once again, having these women removed from Britain

[94] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3716/1933.
[95] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/3879/1931
[96] This was the same procedure as having conditions 'cut down'.
[97] A police file was essentially a record of a servant's changes of addresses and occupations, which she would (in London) register at Bow Street Police Station. 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/9339/1933.

echoes the manner in which the poor law system dealt with independent women away from their home parishes.

Official investigations did not always find against a servant, and some police reports or case files at the Home Office feature sympathy for some of the women's situations. Telling comments written by internal staff members on case files offer a glimpse into unofficial attitudes towards some of the women. On occasion, the Ministry was able to spot an employer being unnecessarily unkind, abusive or spiteful, but poor working practices were rarely admonished. In an attitude amply exemplified by a comment in Betty Schnepf's case, the Home Office acknowledged the blatantly unfair working conditions she had been forced to endure, but could only conclude: 'A bad employer. HO [Home Office] however can do nothing. […] The alien has apparently got a fresh post. A bad case handled very well by the local PC'.[98] No further aliens were to be allowed to work there, but the employers faced no punishment or sanctions otherwise.

Todd maintains that employer responses to servant defiance and expressions of independence were 'actions […] borne of fury and antagonism'.[99] This follows to some extent in the sources relating to foreign women. A sense of injustice and entitlement pervade the domestic permit application case files, in which employers engaged in lengthy and time-consuming correspondence to frame their departing servant as 'undesirable' in immigration terms, should she have transgressed appropriate behavioural boundaries or deigned to assert her agency in leaving a position which did not suit her. The implications for the foreign servant, however, went beyond losing her place; for many in the interwar period, it meant losing their dream of earning money, an end to life in cosmopolitan London and leaving behind friendships. Deportation usually meant future applications to return would be denied, so their lives in England were curtailed, often just on the basis of alleged deviant behaviour or employer spite, with brutal finality.

[98] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3125/1933.
[99] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 200.

## Intermediaries

The actions of foreign servants – as is evident in the generation of government policy, official departments and police activity dedicated to this group of women – had thus become highly visible to the authorities, and as a result, as explored in the previous section, had become more vulnerable to being reported and deported. However, this visibility paradoxically made them more of a focus for advocacy groups and individuals, their foreignness insinuating vulnerability. The very infrastructure, explored so far through organisations acting *in loco parentis*, is replicated here as their positive support mechanism in the absence of nearby kin.

Scholars have explored the importance of family, both in domestic service decisions,[100] and in migration.[101] In Todd's work on British service, Mrs Sandy's mother refused to let her daughter be treated like a 'slave' and removed her from the local vicar's household, for example,[102] and Wendy Gordon describes girls being taken home by their mothers when an employment situation wasn't successful.[103] But no such maternal advocacy existed for the foreign women, disadvantaged by the distance of their families. This extra layer of perceived vulnerability was thus absorbed by responsible 'others', who took on the role of parenting these women away from home, acting (supposedly) in their best interests. This final section explores the scope of the support available, and its consequences for the servants themselves. It begins with examining to what extent the foreign women were active agents in appealing for help, or indeed rejecting it, for their own benefit.

### *Enlisting help*

#### Servants

In the event that servants found themselves experiencing poor or exploitative conditions, some turned to other servants for support and advice. In a case already encountered, of two servants employed in Wales, S____ H____ had been alarmed at the way her colleague M____ O____ had been treated by their mistress Having only just arrived, S____ had no knowledge of how to leave or

[100] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', 181–204; Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers'.
[101] Gordon, ""What, I Pray You, Shall I Do with the Ballance?""; Ryan, 'Family Matters.
[102] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 187.
[103] Gordon, ""What, I Pray You, Shall I Do with the Ballance?"", p. 54.

where to go. M____ left soon after S____ had arrived in post, having found a new place in London, and quickly wrote to S____ to say she'd secured a position for her too.[104] This means of helping one another to find work was a vital means of being able to successfully change positions without finding oneself homeless and unemployed. Other evidence suggests how it was difficult to change place without some level of peer support. Maria Hedjuk (see above) left early in the morning, and her employer felt that 'she must have had help from others to help her leave the premises, considering the amount and weight of her luggage.[105] Girls leaving places thus rarely did so alone or without some planned assistance, as May found in her work on New York servants. The act of leaving a position, she claims, 'reinforced domestics' self-identity as workers. It was an individual act of resistance, but it relied on the existence of a wider working-class network' to achieve.[106]

**Authorities**

Faced with employer threats of deportation if they gave notice, some sought help from the Ministry of Labour itself. Frida Glatthaar wrote an impassioned letter to the Secretary of State requesting advice on the situation in which she and a colleague found themselves:

> it is not our fault that we wish to leave but we feel we have been particularly unlucky in finding ourselves in such a place […] Our employers are not a penny out of pocket and now we are to be tied to a situation so bad that no English girl will stay in it. […]We are made to work like niggers so that we cannot put up with it any longer […] We have permits for one year in England and I cannot understand why these should be withdrawn because we want to accept another situation, Will you please write and explain to us what the law in England is.[107]

Others requested help from the local Women's Employment Exchange, a job centre aimed at women's work opportunities. Charlotte Schmidt and Frieda Schneiker were allegedly overworked and underpaid working respectively as a cook and a general maid. Charlotte undertook to write on their behalf to request assistance on how to get their wages paid and for their workload to be decreased:

> Sir, […] I seen [] gett not our money. Can you may be so kind and inquire at the Ministry of Labour in London to gett the information about our affair. […] We pay food from our money - there we getting sick of that food here as well not enough be given to us. We are stranger in England and for that matter I call at you - if you may be so kind and try to

[104] 'Case Files', 1928, WL, 4NVA/6/1/037.
[105] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/11924/1931.
[106] May, *Unprotected Labor*, p. 66.
[107] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/8097/1932.

> protect us. We giv the registration at S[…] and the paper are in proper condition, […] Nothing is faere here […] I don't know if my friend and I will be able to work such long time so many hours 2 girls left one nigth, the 3 girl is gone at notes - so we 2 have to do work for 5 and it seems too me we doing not enough.[108]

Betty Schnepf (referenced above) was hired by a family to give lessons to the 13-year-old daughter and assist with 'light housework'. After less than three months, Betty enlisted the help of the local police and subsequently wrote to the Aliens Branch of the Home Office to set out her grievances. Underfed, withheld wages, long working hours and physically injured as a result of her work defined her experience there. Having had positions lasting six and seven years previously, Betty considered this to be the 'unluckiest job of my life', stressing it was not her fault she had left and found new work elsewhere. She considered the doctor who treated her injuries and his wife as allies in her case, and 'all the worse impressions [of her employers] are cancelled by my great esteem for [them] and all other English people, to whom I entered into connection during the last days'.[109]

The South-Asian ayahs were not exempt from challenging poor working conditions. Mrs Choudhuri's ayah, for instance, presented herself in person to the India Office claiming her mistress was withholding her wages and requested that the India Office write to her employer. She had made her own way from Bournemouth to the Ayahs' Home in Hackney before visiting Whitehall, hoping that 'a letter from this office would frighten that lady into paying the money due'.[110] After her employer had 'turned her out of doors without notice or wages', another ayah, named Nasiban, made her way from Hackney to the police court at Bow Street to address herself in person to the magistrate. He noted afterwards that 'she speaks English with difficulty and wears her native dress', but Nasiban evidently did not see these as a barrier to engaging with institutional authority.[111]

Less direct means of challenging unfair working practices were also employed. Many simply opted for written communication with the India Office, direct or with help from others. In one letter, an

[108] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5010/1933.
[109] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3125/1933.
[110] 'Case of an ayah who left her employers service and came to the Ayahs Home', 1910, BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/1023, File 2801.
[111] 'The case of Nasiban, a female servant and native of India, destitute in England', 1899, BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/518, File 1676.

ayah asking for assistance in returning home explained at great length her mistreatment by a British employer who had kept her in England under false pretences of returning imminently to Burma: 'Mary Ayah' asked a neighbour of her employer in Hastings to take up her cause when she was not allowed to leave after her five-month contracted employment was over. Just before the outbreak of World War I, a Christian ayah from Madras staying in Hertfordshire appealed to the local Roman Catholic priest for assistance in getting her case heard when her mistress disappeared without paying out-standing wages.[112]

Appealing for help did not always produce the desired results for the servants. In 1904, Mary Magozek arrived at Sara Pyke House having left a position with a Mr Spiller in which she was allegedly underfed and over-worked as a housemaid. Hoping to escape detection she took another housemaid place through SPH but Mr Spiller wrote to the Committee explaining that he'd paid £5 to bring her over from Poland and that Mary had left after just one week. The Committee, however, 'decided she must be persuaded to go back'.[113] Within two weeks she had been returned to Mr Spiller.

**Multiple agencies**

Servants were also adept at appealing to a number of different intermediaries to achieve their own ends. After Sara Pyke House found her a position as servant, Regina Crongold refused to do the work. She wrote a 'very rude letter' to the Committee thanking the ladies 'for their kindness' but as they could not find what she wanted 'she would go to the missionaries'.[114] This action was rewarded with a ban from the Home; even support agencies had behavioural expectations of the girls they sought to help. As a Jewish girl, it is noteworthy that she used both the JAPGAW services and those of the Christian missionaries, in a bid to secure work she found satisfactory.

Another case involving multiple agencies concerned Philomene Krackhofer, a 20-year-old Austrian. Having placed an advertisement in a newspaper, Philomene had accepted a position with Mr and

[112] 'Miss S C Burby; Application for Help in her Engagement as an Ayah 14 Mar 1913', 1913, BL, IOR P&J/6/1225, file 867; BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/1957, File 914; 'The Case of Sarah Smith, an Ayah, brought to England and Left by her Mistress', BL, 1913, IOR/L/PJ/6/1260, File 2966.
[113] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 8 and 23 Nov 1904.
[114] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 10 Oct 1906.

Ms Geller of Golders Green as a cook and arrived in November 1933. Three weeks after her arrival she wrote a letter addressed to the Ministry of Labour and handed it in person to a policemen who happened to be visiting the house. In it she detailed the poor treatment she had been subjected to: her employer had taken her passport as soon as she was met at the station, and she was expected to work from 6 in the morning until 11 at night, with short breaks only for meals. She alleged the house was cold and her own room unheated, and the clothes her mistress had required her to wear were to be paid for out of her own wages. She claimed that Mrs Geller was threatening to have her sent back to Vienna after 15 days as the work was too hard for her. After finding a new position through the Anglo-German Agency, Philomene had been told by her mistress that she was not allowed to take another situation without her mistress' consent and 'whenever she likes she can have me sent back to Vienna at once'. Philomene sought comfort with a friend (a foreign nursemaid) though was compelled to return to Mrs Geller who had not allowed Philomene to leave the house.[115] In this instance, the Anglo-German Agency also wrote a letter to the Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, alerting them to the behaviour of the Gellers. As a result of both her own letter and that of the agency's, Philomene was able to change positions and have the Gellers added to the blacklist, preventing them from hiring foreign staff again. Here, Philomene was assisted by a former colleague, a policemen, her recruitment agency and the Home Office. Had she been British, she would not have found herself trapped and under threat of repatriation; but as a foreigner her experience was visible to a government ministry which would not have been the case for a native servant.

## *Advocacy and intervention*

### Eliciting sympathy

Many cases involved multiple agencies and concerned parties. In 1934, the Ministry received a letter from the Swiss Legation who had been contacted by a Justice of the Peace. Swiss-born Paula Wettenschwyler, employed in a local household and claiming to be unhappy in her post, had allegedly been poorly treated and had wages owing to her. A representative from the Swiss Benevolent Society and a Legation staff member visited Paula, arranged for her to leave and placed

[115] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/7103/1933.

pressure on the employer to repay the £10 owed to her.[116] In this case, Paula was helped by a local judge, her country's embassy staff, a benevolent society and the Ministry of Labour. A similar case involved two German women in their early twenties, engaged in situations in a suburban family. Their mistress was dissatisfied with them, withheld their trunks and sent them up to London, paying just their single fares, to find new positions. Stranded in London overnight, arriving after the German Consulate had closed, two policemen took charge of them and paid for them to eat breakfast. A coalman assisted them in sneaking back into their mistress' house to retrieve some of their clothes, before a railway guard eventually directed them to Gordon House where they were supported until their case was tried and they were reunited with their possessions. This account was taken from the annual report of the HWGL and clearly paints its own role in a positive light, but the detail as to how the girls were helped by different individuals is enlightening: policemen, Consul staff, a railway guard, a coalman and the Gordon House matron.[117] The perceived vulnerability of foreign servants on their own seemed to elicit much sympathy. Cases such as these also challenge the idea that servants were largely confined to their own households; in public, their foreignness magnified their feminine vulnerability which in turn engendered a more compassionate response from those around them.

While some servants successfully appealed to the government and other groups for assistance, many others found themselves exposed to often unwanted or uninvited scrutiny by the very same authorities. The German consulate is mentioned most often in the record as a result of the number of Germans, but was involved in anything from handling enquiries to investigating the private lives of its countrywomen. In 1932, it wrote to the Secretary of the NVA for their assistance in preventing an unsuitable marriage: 'It would not be in the interest of the girl if this marriage project would materialise since her fiancé appears to be penniless and also to be mentally deranged'.[118] The familiar tone of the letter's greeting suggests a high level of cooperation between the two offices, and in this case they were successful in preventing the wedding. But Consuls were also relied upon to provide support and assistance too. In 1890, a young Danish servant staying at Gordon House

[116] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1934, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/7638/1934.
[117] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1891*, pp. 79-80.
[118] 'Case Files', 1932, WL, 4NVA/6/2/5/04.

fell ill suddenly and died of 'a sudden paroxysm of pain'. The Danish Consul arranged the removal of her body and met all attendant expenses.[119]

**Protection organisations**

Intervention by many of the associations often led to the desired outcome for the servants involved. Reports by the NVA, Gordon House, Sara Pyke House and the Ayahs' Home all contain instances throughout the period of stepping in to cause property, wages or other possessions to be surrendered. In 1897 a German girl was dismissed from a position in Hampstead without notice or wages, and her boxes retained. Through the intervention of the NVA 'the boxes were delivered up and the wages paid'.[120] In an important court hearing in 1891, the NVA succeeded in obtaining a magistrate's order compelling a mistress (a German Countess) to return the boxes belonging to two German maids she had dismissed; the court awarded costs and damages worth 50*s*.[121]As late as 1937, a Swiss girl had a dispute with her employer for wrongful dismissal, wages and moneys lent by her for household expenses. A Swiss Benevolence Society worker had several interviews with the employers' solicitors and was able to secure the full debt for the servant of £9 15 shillings.[122]

Just as Horn found with young servants from the workhouse, the NVA was acutely aware that women who had been defrauded were 'too frightened to take proceedings, and prefer bearing their losses to public prosecutions.'[123] Sometimes court was unnecessary, and pressure from the NVA alone was sufficient to return possessions to servants: two French women who had been brought to London in 1890 under false pretences had their boxes returned to them this way.[124] 'In former years German waiters were the prey of agents in like manner but they have successfully defended themselves by societies such as the "Genfer Kellner Verein" spreading over Europe and America'.[125] This mechanism for self-supporting and protecting a working-class trade did not translate easily into domestic service. Servants were separated from others by dint of their place of work, unlike the waiters who were not only working alongside other foreign waiters but were also

[119] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1890*, p. 94.
[120] *NVA Annual Report 1897*, p. 16.
[121] *NVA Annual Report 1891*, p. 10.
[122] 'Minutes', London, Swiss Benevolent Society (SBS), 1932-45, LMA 4669/A/03/002, 9 Aug 1937.
[123] *NVA Annual Report 1887*, p. 23.
[124] *NVA Annual Report 1890*, p. 9.
[125] *NVA Annual Report 1887*, p. 21.

'customer-facing', and thus more exposed and empowered to defend their positions. That so many examples can be found of the effectiveness of the NVA's involvement in cases of illegal detention of money or possessions suggests that collective and authoritative bodies could make a great deal of difference in the treatment of 'vulnerable' young women in London.

Agencies would also be called upon (or opt in) to intervene in a foreigner's legal trial. It was rarely in the interest of local prisons to hold convicted foreigners, so many magistrates would recommend an order for deportation (explored further in the Epilogue). A case that reached court caught the attention of the Swiss Benevolent Society's caseworker. In 1938, a Swiss girl ("R. L.") found herself in court on allegations of theft. The caseworker's report stated that:

> her master, who was of the Hebrew faith, used to speak [to her] in a very coarse and insulting way, [so she] got frightened and ran away without saying anything. To revenge himself the master complained to the Home Office […]. He then summoned her for having stolen a dress, coat and hat belonging to his wife. In court he had a solicitor while the girl had no legal advisor. She was therefore remanded for a week and the court appointed a poor man's lawyer for her. The latter asked me if I would attend and act as interpreter as on the previous occasion translations had been made in an indifferent way. At the court at Hendon the police interpreter was discharged and I was sworn in. […] The Bench dismissed the case.[126]

In this case the caseworker was instrumental in preventing the conviction of a young maid, by acting in place of the official translator assigned to her, a service a British servant girl would not have access to.

Organisations such as these were funded and supported by the servant-keeping classes, but seemed nonetheless to operate at the border between servant and employer, offering assistance that would ensure girls were not disadvantaged by the unfairness of their employers. Miss Hüg, long time registrar at the Servants' Institute, and Miss Seebo, superintendent of Gordon House, often acted as social workers. One servant who had stayed the home before returning a few weeks later from yet another place, was found to have stolen from both mistresses. 'Through the Super's efforts she was not arrested,' claimed the Annual Report. Another servant was struggling to find a situation: 'Although she had good certificates as to her qualifications she had no references as to her character', so when she found an ideal place as nursery nurse to a little boy, the other girls in the

[126] SBS, 1938, 4669/A/03/002, Secretary's Report of 22 Feb 1938.

home 'begged the superintendent to write to the lady' by way of character reference. Miss Seebo agreed. These small acts of assistance thus reveal the multi-faceted role of the home's management, and how they played an unofficial social-work role in the lives of their charges. Since these organisations were primarily aimed at the foreign servants, it was a support structure not available in the same way to British women. As such, the advocacy they had access to was a positive feature of their otherness.

**Individual support**

Being foreign meant being marked in some way, even if it was only a perception. The poor behaviour of a fellow countrywoman could reflect badly on the whole diaspora, and there were many instances of women who sought to protect or control the behaviour of other women to prevent British disapproval. One very sensitive case, handled by the NVA, involved a young Austrian woman who had brought attention to herself while working as a servant in a small town outside London by fabricating tales of wild nights out in the capital. A local German woman who had initially befriended the servant as a fellow German-speaker had become concerned at the impact it would have on her: 'She herself was afraid that the villagers, not being able to distinguish between Austrian and German, or between one type of foreign girl and another, would place her in the same category as A___'.[127] The sensitivity around perceptions of what foreignness meant thus extended into private homes and individual lives.

However, there were other more positive experiences of finding a fellow countrywoman as an ally. In the late 1920s, Swiss-born Mrs Averard was walking in Hyde Park when she overheard two girls speaking her language. She gave them her card and for them to contact her should they need anything while in London. A few weeks later they did, asking to be helped since they were being overworked and underfed. Mrs Averard was instrumental in organising for one to be taken immediately to the Italian Hospital and to assist the other in leaving her position.[128]

[127] 'Case Files', 1935, WL, 4NVA/6/2/8/06.
[128] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/4546/1929.

For those trapped in service seven days a week and knowing no-one in the area, assistance might come from neighbours or visiting tradespeople. Philomene Krackhofer was able to get a letter to the outside world through a visiting policeman, for example, as shown above. In 1894, a German 17-year-old maid was forced to leave her situation as she had injured her hands. 'Her mistress demanded a month's wages in lieu of notice and deducted it from the nine weeks' money due',[129] but the girl had been able to befriend the family living next door who 'kindly sheltered her for a night and advised her to apply for admission to Gordon House'. She subsequently found work through their own recruitment agency after surgery and recuperation. In 1898, a young German servant was 'deceived' by a German woman and found herself trapped in an 'unsuitable' post. After five months, she was able to explain the situation to a local Master Baker who told her of Gordon House. The Matron was then able to plead her case to the German Consul who authorised her passage back home to Germany.[130] And in a letter addressed to the India Office, a neighbour of Mary Ayah's employer took up her cause when she was not allowed to leave after her five-month contracted employment was over. He wrote: 'Indian ayah, Mary by name, employed by people living near here, has appealed to me to help her to return to her own country'.[131] In a counter to discrimination, then, the 'visibility' of foreignness, in accent, race or nationality, could thus incite compassion and sympathy. Their 'otherness', in these situations, may well have made them more likely to have been helped than a local girl; it certainly suggests a level of contact with members of the public, religious bodies or shopkeepers not always recognised in domestic service scholarship.

## Conclusion

Many of the cases referred to in this chapter had consequences, which is why they appear in the historical record and are thus able to be scrutinised in the twenty-first century by historians. There may have been thousands more incidents of immoral behaviour or a fondness for job-hopping with either no consequence at all or none as severe as has been described from the records that have been consulted here. Nevertheless, the benefit of a collection of source materials that cover six decades from multiple charity and purity organisations, government and police files and personal

[129] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, pp. 81-2.
[130] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 89.
[131] BL, 1928, IOR/L/PJ/6/1957, file 914.

testimonies means at least some generalisation might be permitted. Remembering that women's experiences are themselves marginalised in accounts of independent migration, work and even service, any access to information relating to these is of value and revealing.

This chapter has attempted to understand whether being foreign placed women in greater or less precarious situations when it came to experiencing employment as servants within the home. How did foreignness affect their ability to resist poor working conditions or improve their prospects? And how did it manifest itself as different in the way employers and the state treated them? The evidence suggests that, as women away from their own homes, they faced extra pressure to conform to an unwritten code of behaviour; one that was written into the very fabric of the law, and permitted the removal of many women from Britain – not on the basis of breaches of work contracts or criminal convictions, but on the basis of being 'undesirable'. Operating within a narrow scope of behavioural acceptability, the consequences of falling foul of this morality were for many of them deportation or forcible repatriation, sanctions applied by the authorities to protect Britain from those not conducive to the public good, their removal and resettlement elsewhere reminiscent of how masterless women continued to be treated by the state and society. Subjective, gender- and class-based assumptions about the appropriateness of their behaviour overrode these women's own aspirations in the process, and hundreds of servants had their work lives in London curtailed as a result – many against their will.

Both before and after the domestic service permit system was introduced, foreign servants were more exposed to the possibility of precarious employment. Faced with threats of repatriation, loss of earnings (or of reputation) and with no nearby family to intervene on their behalf, widespread exploitation is not difficult to imagine. However, emboldened by the shortage of servants in the interwar period, the job-hopping activities of foreign servants offered them opportunities to escape poor situations (though such job mobility seldom resulted in a move up the servant hierarchy), but also triggered the anger of their employers, leading to serious investigations and scrutiny of their private lives. In line with much of the literature on immigration, if women had a local network or organisations they could turn to, they were able to weather much of the precarity. Many, including

the ayahs, successfully used multiple agencies to assist them and benefitted from their 'vulnerability' as foreign, lone women to achieve positive outcomes, actively co-opting the assistance of a virtual urban family support mechanism. Those who were younger, newly-arrived or did not (or could not) seek support invariably endured long periods of poor working conditions or had their stay in Britain terminated. Although the women from Eastern Europe were seen to be at a disadvantage, in Chapter 4, their access to the organisational support provided by the Jewish community was an important factor in navigating life in London. It was the women who were not able to draw on neighbours, foreign servants hostels, or protection agencies, or those who were not 'visible' as vulnerable (perhaps due to their isolation), who fared the worst in managing poor work conditions.

Enforced periods of repaying their passage, threats of repatriation and withheld documents and wages tied many to situations that could be classed (even then) as forced labour. Evidence of each of the full list of forced labour indicators feature in this chapter alone: intimidation and threats (threatening to return a servant to their home country), retention of identity documents or wages (withholding passports and pay), debt bondage (making them work for a minimum period of time or to repay the cost of their passage), and excessive overtime (working long hours with few breaks). The compassion and support that they engendered in others gave them access to both financial and advocacy services from protection, religious and charity organisations, from which British servants, by contrast, did not directly benefit. The aspect of being foreign in the 'triple disadvantage' thus meant the experiences of foreign servants in work might be categorised as both precarious and privileged.

# Chapter 6

## 'Out of place': finding pleasure at the margins

Much emphasis is placed on the servant as a domestic creature, attached to her mistress's household and defined by her relationship to her employers. Yet the experiences of servant lives beyond their employers' households, either in their free time or in periods of unemployment, are rarely captured. Yet a failure to understand their lives beyond their cap and apron risks erasing their very personhood from scholarship. 'To pay attention only to the jobs migrants do', according to Agustín, 'is to essentialize them as workers and deny the diversity of their hopes and experiences'.[1] Expected by their employers to blend into the background, this chapter instead places personal lives of servants firmly in the foreground.

In her article based on oral histories of eleven former migrant Irish women, some of whom went into service in London, Ryan attempts to explore how they 'experienced, confronted and negotiated public and private spaces within British society'.[2] She had the relative luxury of asking of her subjects questions pertinent to her research, something written historical sources are not capable of yielding, but the themes she identifies are evident in the intricate details of the cases and sources used here for foreign domestic servants: space, place and mobility. She challenges the notion that women are 'rooted in place', tied to nostalgia and immobility, in line with argues advanced by Doreen Massey and other geographers writing on gendered spaces. Although it is not possible to interrogate individuals themselves, as Ryan did, reading against the grain to find where the servants spent their days off, evenings out or periods between jobs, offers a new perspective on how foreign women navigated a vast and at times threatening metropolis, and how servants more generally spent any spare time they had carving out spaces of privacy and individuality, normally so categorically denied them within the homes in which they were employed.

[1] L. Agustín, 'A Migrant World of Services', *Social Politics*, 10/3 (2003), p. 391.
[2] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 69.

Social geographers such as Doreen Massey and Linda McDowell have articulated that 'space' is never neutral but highly gendered. Massey in particular criticises the perceived relationship between 'local' and 'feminine', in which the view that 'women lead more local lives than do men' is linked inextricably to notions of the public–private dichotomy and further associations between women and both home and nostalgia.[3] And yet with foreign servants, who are both mobile migrants and indoor home-workers, the dichotomy is blurred. The domestic space, when shared with an employer, was a stifling one, as explored in Chapter 5. For servants working in city townhouses, suburban terraces and even flats, what time and space did they have away from their mistress, their work or their colleagues? And how did that shape their private lives and the development of their own identities?

## Beyond work

### *Working hours*

> I do not long for being rich, only time - time to myself I would like so much. A little more time - the night is mine, this is all what I got.[4]

Despite a general recognition that domestic work entailed long hours, loneliness and scarcely any independence, little changed over the study period of the thesis and conditions appear to have been similar whichever nationality was hired, as I explored at the start of Chapter 5. Long days of endless chores with only a half day a week away from the house was most servants' experience throughout the period. It is of relevance here to recount the duties of a nursemaid's daily duties, as shared by a young woman staying at Gordon House in 1906:

[3] D. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 9.
[4] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 49.

**Nurse's list for two children**

One evening a week (Thursday) if convenient

Bottles 6, 9, 12 AM, 3, 6 PM. Dressed both by 7:15 and beds stripped. Bird 7:30. Food made by 7:45. Breakfast 7:45. Start bedrooms 8:15. Bathed baby 8:30 to be finished by 9. Baby settled in pram., 9:30. Bottles finished et cetera 9:50. Room finished by 10:10. Dressed and out by 10:30. Come in at 12:45. Dinner at 1. Out again at 2:30. Come in at 3:45. Tea at 4:15 finished by 4:45. Make food at 5:10; then take Marjorie's lessons. Start Basil at 5:30; finished and put to bed at 6:15. Marjorie finished and put to bed by 7. All cleared up, shoes cleaned, and bottles finished by 7:30. Needlework at 7:45. Supper at 8:30 until 9. Come up at 10 sharp.

Monday— Washing 10:30 sharp. Ironing at 1:30.

Saturdays — turn out night nursery 10:30 sharp.

**Figure 56: Nursemaid's duties (1906)**[5]

In the entire day, the nursemaid was entitled to one hour between 9pm and 10pm for herself, and would have been working fifteen hours from 6am: that one hour before bed would have been precious.

Frieda Ehrenstein's writing offers a glimpse into the porous nature of work in someone else's household and she particularly resented having to spend time with her employers during her spare time: 'To sit with [her mistress] in the evening and listen to all the nonsense she woulkd (sic) talk - how tiring.'[6] In the evening, when all the work was done, she had to bring some mending into the sitting room and sit with her employer, Mrs H. She 'did not like this idea at all'. She would have 'much preferred to put on the radio and read a book'.[7] She, and no doubt many other servants, keenly felt the injustice of being on call for any minor task at any time they were in the house; they could only be free of this when they left the building. If it was not her mistress calling her, it was often the sheer hard work that ate into Frieda's free time: 'I was dog-tired when I entered my room at nine o'clock that evening. I was even too tired to read. The whole day I had been looking forward to the evening, and to reading a good book'.[8] Non-work time, then, never simply began when work finished.

As shown in Chapter 2, foreign servants were working all across London, and while a few were employed by those of the same nationality, many lived far from communities of their own co-

[5] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 69.
[6] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 5.
[7] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 4.
[8] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 126.

nationals. Ryan's interviewees were able to begin to negotiate the city using Irish networks,[9] chiefly possible because of the size of the Irish population: 'Well, we had our own friends, all Irish needless to say, we used to go visiting each other, playing cards, dances, all that sort of thing, so we had our own social life.'[10] But a combination of geographical disparity and work-time restrictions prevented the foreign servants from engaging on a regular basis with members of their own (national) community. Even for the Irish women, contact with friends was challenging for those in service: 'It was difficult to meet friends because they were unlikely to share the same half-day'.[11] This meant many servants would spend any free time alone, adding to their sense of isolation. Indeed, Davidoff argues that unlike servants in continental Europe, the social geography of English towns and cities meant that those in England were unusually segregated: 'The intense privacy of the English middle-class household in individual dwellings often surrounded by gardens in isolated settings or suburbs separated from working-class districts, made English domestic service exceptionally confining'.[12] Since many of the newly-arrived women were entering work in remoter or outer boroughs of the city (as explored in Chapters 2 and 4), this isolation would have been further intensified.

The length of the working day and the constant nature of being on call, even when technically being at rest, was a key factor in the unpopularity of the occupation. With so little time fully to themselves, the scope of their lives beyond work was, as a consequence, limited and often solitary. Frieda, for example, was only able to plan outings further afield when she was out of work or between jobs: 'What am I going to do tomorrow? I know, I'll go for the whole day to Kew Gardens. When I am employed I have never time for things like that.'[13] With only a half a day to leave the house, reach a destination then travel back before a 10pm curfew, time off was restricted to the local area and thus helps to explain the unpopularity of households located further from the city.

[9] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 78.
[10] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 79.
[11] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 77.
[12] Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life', p. 408.
[13] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 19.

## *Work space*

Residential domestic service was intrinsically bound up in notions of household membership. Often given their own bedroom, servants were nevertheless strangers in the home of their employers; their rooms were owned by someone else and the relationship between employer and maid operated at an intimate level. The blurred boundary of private space while living in another's household is articulated often in Frieda's writing. 'Sometimes in the afternoon I withdrew to my room just to mend a pair of stockings or perhaps to have a rest. No peace. She [her mistress] would come in to start [talking] again.'[14] Another servant, an Englishwoman in the guesthouse where she briefly worked, recalled: 'I can remember on my half days, when I came in at night I wished I had a ladder to get into my room without being seen. One gets so sick of one's employers if one has to see them all day long and also when one comes in at night.'[15] Frieda herself often stayed out late on her half days off to avoid encountering her employers: 'I opened the door very quietly. I was lucky. I got into my room without meeting her.'[16] Coming home later than the bedtime of the rest of the household implies a strategy of maximizing a sense of freedom, through private time and space, entailed by being outside the home. In a sense, servants were protecting every last drop of their free time before being confined once again to the indoor space of their employer. Nevertheless, returning home late held its own dangers, as shown in Chapter 5: women could lose their jobs if found breaking the house rules.

Carving out a fragile privacy behind her bedroom door was a servant's fundamental response to the interminable workload. Both Gardner and Chamberlain have argued that immigrant women found particular ways of negotiating their new surroundings 'by making a 'homeplace' within the foreign space',[17] though since the space allocated to the maid was owned by her employer, this too was eroded. Frieda talks of closing her bedroom door against the incessant workload, emotional burden of family labour and a chance to focus on her own sense of self for a short while: 'These few minutes before I go to sleep oh I do like so much. I think only at that time at night I am my real self. I thank God that I have not to see my employer also at night, that I can shut my door and be

[14] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 67.
[15] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 14.
[16] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 55.
[17] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 71 and p. 80.

alone.'[18] She gives the impression of acting a role while she is at work, faking smiles and obeying commands unchallenged, holding herself tense and unnaturally. That persona is discarded when her working day is over: 'When the evening comes, one counts the minutes to be free, to close the door of one's own bedroom and breathe.'[19] Her sense of individuality and playfulness emerges when she knows she is alone and will be undisturbed: [When Mrs G. went out for the evening] I cleaned silver, singing to myself: "She is not coming to supper." The whole evening to myself and only seven o'clock'.[20] The absence of her mistress in these instances represented a freedom from supervision, despite still being in the home and at work.

Horn agrees that an employer's supervision of a servant's activities did not stop with the mere performance of daily duties, but rather extended well into her private space and time.[21] As the one physical space in the household where a servant could retreat to, bedrooms became sites of fiercely defended privacy. Maria Steiner, in protest at her wages being docked (see Chapter 5) 'refused to leave her room all day […] and placed her bed against the door to prevent entry'.[22] Similarly, in protest at getting the sack, J____ E____ retreated to her room for over an hour, 'which she had carefully locked during the process of packing', before being escorted off the premises by her mistress and an NVA worker.[23] These simple acts entitled the women to a small degree of control in unequal power dynamics: colonising a part of someone else's home. But privacy and private space could be invested in more than a room. Personal possessions, few as they often were, represented what was private and individual to the servant. Just as Todd reveals how Mrs Halliday's employer felt entitled to read letters addressed to Mrs Halliday,[24] so did many mistresses feel justified in taking more than a professional interest in their servants' private lives. In the foreign servant sources, Eda Lipman's affair with a ship's cook was discovered 'owing to a letter having been opened by mistake',[25] according to minutes of activities at the Sara Pyke House. In a letter begging for assistance from the Ministry of Labour, Frieda Schneiker and Charlotte Melly wrote

[18] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 86.
[19] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 14.
[20] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 124.
[21] Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*. p. 130.
[22] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/3716/1933.
[23] 'Case Files', 1932, WL, 4/NVA/6/2/3/01.
[24] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain, p. 200.
[25] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 12 Oct 1904.

that their employer searched their rooms without their permission.[26] And according to an attending policeman, Irma Gros's employer told him 'that she had missed a silk jumper value 49/6 and indirectly accuse[d] Gros of having taken it.'[27] On searching Irma's box (trunk) they could not find the jumper, but the indignity of having her personal effects turned out to prove her innocence was too much for Irma, who resigned on the spot.

Achieving privacy was thus challenging for servants when whatever they considered their own space or possessions within another's household was rarely treated as such by their employers. Not only did many servants find no privacy at all inside these households, but some experienced a complete lack of safety at the hands of their employers. The sources reveal some very distressing cases of foreign servants exposed to having more than the privacy of their rooms invaded. Bluette Serex wrote to her father, a Swiss pastor, feeling herself in 'moral danger'. She had already worked for a year in the Netherlands, so was not new to service nor to life in a foreign country. But in London she found herself employed by a family consisting of a mother, daughter and son, where the son 'evidently entered the girls [sic] bedroom […] The girl has still a look of horror on her face because of what she ha[d] gone through and it will take some time for the Swiss lady to get her story,' claimed notes recorded by the Swiss Benevolent Society.[28] Mirel Grievel was raped by her employer's son while in service (see Chapter 4 for details of her employers, the Soskins). Despite a doctor confirming the truth of her claim, Mirel's assailant was eventually acquitted, and the effect of the ordeal was enough to drive Mirel to leave London and the UK altogether, taking a ship to America shortly after the court case.[29] There was a real tension, therefore, between what was seen by middle-class ladies and gentlemen as the safe, appropriate and natural place for a woman being that of the private home, and what for servants was at best a boundary-less work day and at worst a space fraught with danger.

[26] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5010/1933.
[27] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/2457/1932.
[28] 'Case Files', 1932, WL, 4NVA/6/2/5/06.
[29] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 25 Apr 1906.

## Beyond the household

### *Public spaces*

Given the invasion of their privacy, both in terms of time and space, servants had little choice but to 'retreat' outside, beyond the walls of their employer's homes. Parsons argues that 'city streets held the possibility for women to escape the scrutiny of the domestic sphere;'[30] the very spaces the servants made use of during their free time were consequentially *public*, something that in itself challenges the concept of a female servant's natural place being in the *private* domestic sphere. The primary consequence for servants on a low income and with restricted time off was their cityscape not only shrank but was largely confined to (free) public spaces. For some newly-arrived girls from rural areas, the very streets and thoroughfares of London could be intimidating. One spent her half-days '"wandering around the streets" of Golders Green because she was too scared to venture into the West End'; another described 'her fear and unease as she wandered the streets of Kensington on her half-day off.'[31] Nevertheless, stepping outside of the home, moving to another city or country and actively exploring the public spaces beyond the workplace was for many of the women the main attraction in migrating. A___ H___ complained in 1934 of the 'quietness of Goring said she would like to be back in London',[32] and, as explored in Chapter 3 in the motivations for migration, many moved for reasons other than employment or to be confined to their workplace all week.

The nineteenth-century urban development of the city, prioritising open spaces for public enjoyment, permitted many servants to enjoy a number of outdoor excursions without venturing far or spending much. For those working in West London, Hyde Park was a favourite. Working in Kensington were Hedwig Roth and Klara Johanna Schmidt, employed in the same household as general domestic servants. The sources tell us that on one spring afternoon in 1929, they were walking together in the park not far from Lancaster Gate.[33] The address at which the girls were

[30] D. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis, Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford, 2003), p. 43 in Ryan, 'Moving Spaces and Changing Places: Irish Women's Memories of Emigration to Britain in the 1930s', p. 68.
[31] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 77.
[32] 'Case Files', 1935, WL, 4NVA/6/2/8/06.
[33] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/4546/1929.

registered was situated several blocks south, at 4 Manson Place, Kensington, a handsome five-storey townhouse. It would not have taken them longer than fifteen minutes to reach the park entrance and another quarter of an hour to reach Lancaster Gate. Their proximity to a green space meant they were thus able to enjoy a walk in under an hour.

Chapter 3 explored how many servants arrived independently at ports and train stations, and the way these spaces were conceived of by purity organisations as dangerous and threatening for unaccompanied women. But public transport in the form of buses and, later, the underground, represented both a space outside the home and also a chance to move beyond their identities as (subservient) maids. Frieda described her joy at the simple act of being invited to board a bus by a complete stranger. 'When the bus came I let him [an officer] go first, being so used from the hotel and from other work, as I am just a maid. But he waited until I stepped into the bus. It is nothing and [yet] I felt happy the whole day long'.[34] The experience of *not* being seen as a servant, therefore, offered Frieda a sense of freedom. The anonymity of being in a public space, and unidentifiable as a servant, paradoxically imbued in her a greater sense of herself.

### *Spaces of consumption*

Frieda described the mundane chore of shopping for groceries in excited terms. On a day her mistress was ill, Frieda was asked to go instead: 'To go out on a day which is not my half day, to see the shops and people – what a treat!'.[35] On her return, she met a neighbour with whom she relished having a chat. Social contact beyond the confines of the household was a rare privilege and in itself reinforced a sense of individualism. English servants too found such contact rewarding. Winifred Foley describes chance meetings outside her workplace: 'Sometimes a lady in one of the gardens would bid me a pleasant "Good afternoon". Of course, they didn't know I was a mere "skivvy". It was nice to be spoken to as an ordinary human being.'[36] For women as consumers, the West End shops had become spaces open to them to enjoy as individuals, rather than running to the local shops on errands for their mistresses (if indeed they were even allocated such 'outdoor' tasks). Parsons describes the female shopper as one of the new 'types of female presence' permitted in the

[34] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 33.
[35] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 74.
[36] Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, BBC Publications, quoted in Taylor, *Women Domestic Servants*, p. 12.

modern city, and a legitimate participant in city life.[37] In a retail space they could be anyone: a milliner, a wife, a seamstress or a civil servant. Here they were valued for the money they would spend, not treated as an inferior and deferent creature in relation to their occupational status.

But ever-sophisticated retail marketing could also prove a temptation. Many of the foreign servants' experiences of shops appear in the sources in the context of shoplifting, and while this does not mean all servants stole from stores, it does offer a glimpse into what items they desired and how far they travelled from their own households to the places where these crimes were committed. One Wednesday, a week before Christmas of 1931, Danish housemaids Edith Skov (19) and Vera Arndal (20) were caught shoplifting from Marks & Spencer in Oxford Street.[38] Working in Mill Hill and Hendon respectively, M&S's flagship store was on Oxford Street (in 1931 it was located at number 460), so their journey there would have almost certainly involved taking a tube or bus, and even then would have taken at least an hour. Marie Adelbert (24) from Germany was working for Mr Budd in Brondesbury Park, when she too was tempted by M&S wares. At about 4pm on Thursday 25 August 1932,[39] she was alleged to have taken 'a box of six table knives and a travelling clock (value together 10/-) from the counter and to leave the store without making payment.'[40]

Like the Danish friends above, Swiss-born Gertrud Schmidt and her stepsister Frieda Botschi also worked together to steal. In 1933 they were domestics for Mrs Mott, living in Peaslake (Guildford), and must have travelled to London one Friday by train to carry out a fairly extensive raid on London's West End shops. 145 items consisting of hats, gloves, stockings and vests valued at over £40 were recovered from their leather bags after being stopped in Selfridges, along with a handbag, scarf and two dressing gowns they had taken from Barkers, earlier, worth a further pound.[41] Such criminal acts of course do not characterise all (foreign) servants, but offer a window into their world beyond work; a world which drew them well beyond their own immediate locality to find valuable items as personal treats, gifts or for resale. This they did almost certainly by public

[37] Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, p. 43.
[38] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/10993/1931 and 'Servants go shoplifting', *Hendon & Finchley Times*, 25 Dec 1931, p. 11.
[39] Possibly her half day holiday.
[40] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/7598/1932.
[41] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/1894/1933.

transport, which in itself reveals how comfortable some became at navigating London on their own, or indeed in pairs.

Cafes were other important sites of servant spaces outside work, with Lyons' Tea Houses being particular favourites. Maureen, one of Ryan's Irish interviewees, described her leisure time in service during the 1930s: 'My friend had the same half day and we would go into the city, they used to call it 'going into town', London. We always had tea in Lyons, the tea shop'.[42] Frieda too enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of Lyons as a space where she could sit down away from work: 'I had a cup of tea at Lyons, two rolls and butter. How much I did enjoy - I can't tell. To sit down to a meal, without a bell ringing for me to get up.'[43] The aim of Lyons' branches was to provide luxury for the masses at affordable prices, and their widespread presence across London made them attractive and affordable indoor spaces for servants (of any nationality) to use.[44] British maids in Taylor's research also recalled their days off at Lyon's tea rooms before going to the cinema.[45] Their long opening times also appealed to those with irregular working hours. A little before midnight one day in 1932, Arline Hedge (a beauty parlour owner) called the police to report her German maid Irma missing, after she failed to return home at her allotted time. It transpired that Irma had been sent out to walk Arline's dog, and since her mistress had allegedly not given her access to enough food, 'she went to Lyons restaurant to get something to eat.'[46] Lyons' featured in the sources quite a number of times, and was a particular favourite of Frieda's, not least perhaps because of the luxury of not having to make the food herself: 'I walked down the Strand and went into Lyon's Corner House. I ordered some tea and pastry. How nice to sit down for once, and the food is brought, I had not to fetch it.'[47]

In the period after World War I, the cinema was another indoor space that appealed to servants, offering them several main attractions: it was socially acceptable to go alone and unchaperoned; it was affordable; it offered an escape from a life of drudgery; but perhaps most of all, it was a place

[42] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 78.
[43] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 18.
[44] Correspondence with Leila Kassir, research student into J. Lyons & Co. in novels & archives.
[45] Taylor, 'Daughters and Mothers?', p. 133.
[46] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/2457/1932.
[47] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 59.

to sit down and rest, undisturbed. 'Darkness will surround me and I will sit for a few hours and rest my feet,'[48] wrote Frieda, claiming 'I go to the Pictures to see something different from my own life.'[49] Similarly, the Goring-bound German-born maid, A___, much disillusioned with her quiet life, had travelled to Reading for an evening at the 'Pictures' (causing much consternation having gone alone and returned late).[50] Such instances are only mentioned incidentally in foreign servant case notes, so it is difficult to ascertain the popularity of films for young women of the time, but Ryan's Irish interviewees mention how they would go to London to look around the shops, go dancing 'and we used to go to the pictures',[51] suggesting they were yet another popular 'neutral' space, like Lyons' or the departments stores, that represented a socially acceptable environment for unaccompanied servant women. The anonymity and release from the stigma of being a servant is reflected across the public spaces experienced by the foreign servants: parks, buses, trains, shops, cafes and cinemas all provided them with opportunities for sociability, amusement, a sense of identity and, not least, rest.

## *Spaces of shared interest*

### Clubs

Non-commercial spaces, unlike cafes, shops and cinemas, represented a further form of leisure and (important for the isolated maid) socialising open to foreign servants. In Belgium, migrant Hungarian domestic servants had access to Hungarian 'homes' set up in several provincial towns: 'On average, 30-50 girls visited these Homes on their free Sunday afternoons'.[52] In the US, the Finnish Woman's Cooperative Home, opened in 1910, gave domestics a 'place to relax and entertain male callers and other guests,' as well as offering an 'employment society' and offering mutual support.[53] Several clubs for foreign women in London appear in the sources, either as places of temporary accommodation (of which more below) or venues for meetings and social engagements. The YWCA ran both a recruitment service as well as a social club, and had branches all over the UK (and indeed abroad). Miss Sheard, the superintendent of the Harrow YWCA,

[48] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 37.
[49] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 46.
[50] 'Case Files', 1935, WL, 4NVA/6/2/8/06.
[51] Ryan, 'Moving Spaces', p. 78.
[52] Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium', p. 376.
[53] May, *Unprotected Labor*, p. 57.

appeared in the case files attesting to the good character of one of their club members, German-born Rosa Hartmann. 'I have known Rosa since about 20 of September 1931 as a Club girl coming in about twice a week,'[54] she confirmed. This suggests that foreignness was not a barrier to membership of the YWCA, and indicates a level of intra-nationality mixing among the club members.

The Foyer Suisse ran modest hostel accommodation which was open to all but mostly housed Swiss clerks and young women.[55] It also ran a number of regular social meetings for Swiss people in London. At the 1929 AGM, it was reported that the 'most flourishing of all the Social services are the feminine sections. Their meetings always show good numbers and the general atmosphere is excellent.'[56] Groups included the 'Reunion de jeunes filles' on Thursday afternoons and an 'At Home' every Sunday afternoon. A number of other religiously-motivated groups also met under the organisation's auspices almost entirely for women: 'on account of the prevailing passport and labour restrictions', few men were present.[57] Nevertheless, several other unaffiliated groups met in rooms on the Club premises, offering opportunities for (mixed) socialising.[58] In the 1930s, the Foyer Suisse's 'chief work' consisted of meetings established for Swiss girls 'who meet regularly on Wednesday evenings under the presidency of Rev. R. Hoffmann de Visme,[59] and on Sunday afternoons for discussions and lectures in winter and outings in summer.'[60] It was to one of these club events that G_____ G_____ went in 1931. She was working in very poor conditions and spoke no English, but a visiting German lady found the address for the Foyer Suisse for her. There she met a Swiss cook in whom she confided her story. The cook advised her to give in her notice in writing and she was subsequently helped by both the cook and the cook's own employer to move jobs.[61] For everyday enquiries and support, Madame Meylan was from 1934 'in attendance at the Club every day except Monday, and receives a large number of girls whose confidence she has

[54] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/2137/1932
[55] The Secretary reported that of the 1003 guests housed at the hotel in the previous 12 months, 689 were of Swiss nationality.
[56] 'The Foyer Suisse', *The Swiss Observer*, 29 Jun 1929, pp. 1899-1900.
[57] This is in accordance with findings in Chapter 3 on the post-1920 denial of male work permits.
[58] In 1934, the Swiss YMCA and the Union Chre□ tienne de Jeunes Gens de Langue Franc□ aise used rooms in the building.
[59] Rev. de Visme was a well-known and respected figure in the Swiss community of London during the 1930s, the vicar of the (Protestant) Swiss Church in Endell Street and vice-secretary of the Foyer Suisse.
[60] 'Foyer Suisse', *The Swiss Observer*, 30 Jun 1934, p. 1495.
[61] 'Case Files', 1931, WL, 4NVA/6/2/2/02.

gained, and who come to her for sound advice in their small and big troubles'.[62] Such facilities were thus important physical spaces of co-national community, peer support, socialisation, advocacy and information on employment rights, themes I return to in the second part of this chapter.

The NVA kept a file of clubs that had come to their attention in dubious circumstances, frequented by, or mentioned in cases involving, young foreign women. In 1938, they received a letter about one such club from a concerned individual who was 'rather anxious as to its bona fides and character.' Austrian girls apparently attended the club for dances and, allegedly, the director was introducing girls to 'various people'; one was even 'going to marry a man who was introduced to her in this way.'[63] The NVA sent one of its female investigators to the local police station where it was confirmed the club had been in existence for over fifty years and was not, in fact, considered a suspicious enterprise. Instead, the Swiss Club Schweizerbund, 74 Charlotte Street, was listed in the official addresses of organisations relevant to Swiss nationals in London in 1920,[64] and was a venue for a number of Swiss events and societies, including Christmas parties, tombolas, dances, concerts and rehearsals.[65] Such was the concern of members of the public and the NVA at the risk of immoral behaviour (and indeed the white slave trade) in spaces for women outside the home, these types of investigations were commonplace, and usually involved detailed enquiries made to the local police stations and other local sources.

**Religious activities**

The source files reveal a plethora of religious provision for foreign women, though some became popular perhaps more for reasons other than faith. Gordon House itself rented pews at a number of churches over the fifty years of its existence: the German Lutheran Church, Cleveland Street; St Pancras Church, Euston Road; Bloomsbury Chapel, Bloomsbury Street; Presbyterian Chapel, Regent's Square, WC; Holy Trinity, Marylebone; Regent's Park Chapel; and Marylebone Presbyterian Church. 'Many of the Germans like our English services and prefer to go with the residents to our places of worship', it was reported in 1888,[66] and the regular rental of pews was

[62] 'Social Service', *The Swiss Observer*, 30 Jun 1934, p. 1495.
[63] 'Clubs', 1938, WL, 4NVA/6/1/110a.
[64] 'Official Addresses', *The Swiss Observer*, 17 Nov 1920, p. 7.
[65] 'Schweizerbund (Swiss Club)', *The Swiss Observer*, 18 Dec 1923, p. 23.
[66] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1888*, p. 86.

likely in response to servants who either 'do not understand the English language sufficiently for them to attend the churches near' or those who 'live in families who do not observe the Sabbath'.[67] There is no evidence of how many girls actually attended these church services, but the use of German as the medium of worship will have no doubt been an important feature for at least the newly-arrived and devout, 'recalling memories of those at home and the Lutheran services in their towns and villages.'[68]

Based at the Gordon House Servants' Institute, Gordon House established a Christian Union of German Women in London in 1886, so that girls could 'esteem the Institute as a German rendezvous for all away from their Fatherland'.[69] Membership of the Union was set at 2/6 and entitled girls to attend social events on Tuesday evenings, Sunday afternoons, quarterly tea-parties held at Gordon House and talks delivered in both English and German.[70] That most of the events were held on Sunday afternoons was no coincidence: they were well aware of timetable restrictions of domestic servants, most of whom were not allowed to leave their duties on Sundays until after lunch had been cleared. Bible meetings, prayer groups and drop-in sessions on Sunday afternoons ensured as many girls as possible could attend. In its first annual report it boasted 135 members and ran Bible classes 'to draw them together on Sunday'. Attendance at these, however, was low: 'it has been as low as three on one occasion but it has reached as many as 22 and the average number has been 14 or 15.' Hastening to justify the lack of interest, the report claims that 'these foreign girls are scattered all over London [so] we think that the class must be valued to attract even as many as it does'.[71] Attendance at secular events appears to have been healthier: in 1895, 60 girls attended a 'Microscopical lecture on "The Wonders of Nature",' delivered by respected British science lecturer Richard Kerr RGS, for example.[72] Nevertheless, the spatial challenge for those in domestic service was alluded to multiple times in Gordon House's annual reports: 'Distance does not deter these

[67] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1883*, p. 151.
[68] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, p. 147.
[69] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1885*, p. 101.
[70] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 127.
[71] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1888*, pp. 146-7.
[72] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1895*, p. 149.

young friends from being present some having to come a journey of from 2 to 4 miles';[73] again, this shows the distances many of these women were travelling to spend time in the company of others.

The role of Judaism in the lives of the Polish and Russian immigrants featured less prominently in Jewish records, though traditional festivals were observed as part of Sara Pyke House events. Observing the Sabbath was difficult as a Jewish maid in secular or Christian households, and a few servants struggled to assert their right to not work on Saturdays. Practising Judaism was incompatible with domestic work in that sense, helping to explain the high proportion of Eastern European servants and household heads with shared nationalities found in Chapter 2, likely connected by being Jewish. In 1907, Sara Pyke House reported that Rose Springer had found a place as a mother's help in a Christian family, but the Committee decided first that 'a further attempt should first be made to find her a situation with Jewish people.'[74] In the reverse situation, Fanny Braunschweig was in service with Christians but expressed a wish to the SPH Committee that she would like to 'enter a Jewish family'.[75]

The practical aspect of associating with a religiously-connected club or home was evidently not lost on members.[76] Religion shaped the morals and operations of many of the clubs and social spaces available to foreign servants, not to mention the organisations they used to assist in their safe travel to London, finding work or assistance. However, the actual act of worship seemed less central to their needs than the social, cultural and practical role such institutions could play in their lives as migrants. This mirrors the interest in social activities being offered by other groups of the time too, including attempts at organising servants into trade unions. Set up in 1932, the Hampstead Domestic Workers' Guild offered servants 'dancing, theatre, table tennis, and a space to bring their young men', an array of activities clearly not available to them in their employers' homes. Its founder, Dorothy Elliott, reported in 1933, however, that 'at the present stage they seem very little

[73] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1883*, p. 151.
[74] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 19 Jan 1907.
[75] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 24 Oct 1906.
[76] Indeed, in the 1990s when au-pairing in Paris, I used the American Church noticeboard for similar (secular) purposes: to find work, connect with friends (leaving messages for friends on the pinboard) or keep up to date with issues that affected foreign workers in the city.

interested in politics and much more in practical industrial matters which affect their everyday interests.'[77]

**Political activities**

Despite Elliott's claim, there is some evidence that women of the same nationality actively sought each other out to pool resources and create a means of handling poor employment conditions. Correspondence held in the TUC archive from Toynbee Hall reveals that Austrian maids attempted to form a trade union organisation of their own while they were in London. In a letter dated 14 February 1936 addressed to the president of the TUC, Rudolf Gessner states that many of the Austrian maid-servants currently in England (especially in London) were former members of the Austrian Servants' Trade Union, which was affiliated to the Austrian Trades Union Congress. Some of them were former district activists in Austria and since trade union activity had become a 'necessary part of their life […] they are very anxious to re-erect an organisation of their own in this country'. He cited around 20 former members of the Austrian union were seeking support to set this up.[78]

Despite pockets of interest, there is very little evidence of successful attempts to involve foreign women in union activities, though,[79] and indeed Delap refers to the anti-alien and anti-Semitic nature of domestic servant unionising in the 1930s, when foreign women were actively excluded.[80] Nevertheless, some servants engaged in other types of political activities, though these had little to do with their occupations. After serving a year on an 'au pair' basis, Belgian-born Elizabeth Happ was issued a domestic worker permit in 1933, but a year later had a file created on her connection to a political figure from Bosnia, Bozidar Forcan. Born in Rogotica in 1900, Forcan had worked as a cabinet maker until he came under adverse notice in Austria, Czechoslovakia, France and Switzerland for being involved in political propaganda and disturbances in Yugoslavia. Elizabeth

[77] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 90.
[78] 'R. Gessner of the Toynbee Hall Universities' settlement to Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC', Feb 14, 1936, Warwick, Trades Union Congress Archive, MRC 292/54.76/4.
[79] For a broader discussion of British female domestic servants and the trade union movement, see L. Schwartz, "'What We Think Is Needed Is a Union of Domestics Such as the Miners Have": The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908-14', *Twentieth Century British History*, 25/2 (2014) and L. Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge, 2019).
[80] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, pp. 90-1.

met Forcan while he was visiting England and she left with him of her own accord, though he himself was deported on 13 April 1935. Together they travelled together to Spain (and onwards – see Epilogue) but she was blacklisted by the Home Office for her association with him.[81]

Emma Meta Lisbeth Bertram was a German nursery governess who had been working for about two years in London when her file was handed to MI5 for investigation. A year later, MI5 reported back to the Home Office that they had 'definite information' that she was 'a Communist sympathiser and ha[d] applied for membership of the CPGB [Communist Party of Great Britain].' Since as far as the agency could tell she had not yet taken 'any active part in the movement', the Home Office did not intervene immediately. However, her file states that 'this woman has changed her places frequently and think we should take the earliest opportunity presented by the next change to require her to leave the country'. Neither changing places nor latent political activity was against the terms of her work permit, but she evaded deportation (consciously or otherwise) by marrying her British fiancé, Ivan Tudor Collins, a year later.[82]

Engaging in political activity as a foreign servant mostly seems to have been a risky endeavour. In the autumn of 1934, Danish-born Astrid Ellingsen was refused permission to land at Harwich. She had been employed in England since 1931 as a nurse to four young children in Sunbury in the family of a bank clerk, and had successfully applied for extensions to that permit before she left in May 1934. However, in trying to re-enter the country four months later, an immigration officer reported that she was 'returning to the UK to resume associations with certain Indian and Chinese students who are members of an Indian Revolutionary Movement Club at Student Movement House […] she is of an immoral character and otherwise undesirable person'.[83] As a result, the Home Office advised the Ministry of Labour to grant her no further permits. Student Movement House was a social centre opened in 1917 in memory of students who died in World War I. Its aims were to promote international understanding and friendship by providing London's

[81] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1935, TNA, LAB 2/2085/AR/6847/1935.
[82] Marriage record, GRO/ Kensington/1a/382 Dec 1933.
[83] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2085/AR/8935/1931.

international students with companionship and social facilities.[84] In 1933 Mary Trevelyan, friend of T.S. Eliot, became its Warden, and Astrid would have been enjoying political discussions and social activities with international students including Jomo Kenyatta who had joined the Club that year (and was later the first president of Kenya). It is not clear why the Home Office believed Astrid to be immoral, but repeated permit extensions do not suggest she presented any such issues to her employer, and the trigger for her blacklist file was likely her association with a club that encouraged international contact.

**Self-improvement**

Other instances of free time activities could be broadly termed self-improvement, with passing references to educational establishments or classes appearing periodically in the case files. One of Arline Hedge's Swiss maids, Berthe Wettstein, attended the Hugo School of Languages, Oxford Street, for one hour on three afternoons a week.[85] Molly Amelie Rutschi left her position in 1934 to study dramatic art,[86] and friends Ida Graf and Mariette attended Mr Hoffman de Visme's French Club in 1932.[87] Frieda herself ponders on several occasions how she would want to spend any future spare time, were she to have managed to leave service: 'Will I ever have a job where I need not work on Sundays and have the evenings to myself. It would be like Heaven to me. What would I do with the evenings? I think I would attend evening classes.'[88] On another occasion she resolved that if she was able to finish work at 5pm, like the girls in offices she saw from her bedroom window, 'the first thing I would do there is make myself a nice cup of tea, and then I would tidy up my room. Perhaps in the evening I could attend some lectures.[89] Imagining a life of free time after five involved, for Frieda, participation in some form of education, of advancement and of betterment. This theme of advancement is further explored in the Epilogue, which examines the next steps of these women, so bound up as they were in gendered expectations.

[84] '1917 – International Students House', https://ish.org.uk/timeline/1917/ (23 Jul 2019).
[85] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2080/ETAR/7752/1931.
[86] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1930, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/4249/1930.
[87] 'Case Files', 1932, WL, 4NVA/6/2/3/02.
[88] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 36.
[89] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 68.

## *Emotional spaces*

Emotions are exceedingly difficult to recover from written sources, and here it is necessary to tread very carefully in applying any assumptions as to feelings held by the women in these cases. Frieda's writing comes closest to any sense of emotional expression relating to foreign servants during the period, but since she writes under a pseudonym, it is not impossible that her work is at least in part fictional. Nevertheless, there are many instances in the records relating to boyfriends, lovers and sexual relations and crucially these almost all take place outside the workplace.[90] Contact between young women and men took place therefore not only in their free time but also in spaces that were not 'home' to them. Here these encounters are explored in the context of space, to show that through contact with members of the opposite sex,[91] the servants actively pushed the boundaries of what was permissible, acceptable and, in the context of interwar legislation, legal.

The challenge to society of women walking alone in public manifested itself particularly in unsolicited advances made by men. As well as being a vast metropolis, London and especially the West End, was 'a place traditionally imagined as a site of exchange and erotic activity, a place symbolically opposed to orderly domestic life'; in the late nineteenth century, servants simply window-shopping and walking along the pavements 'threatened to erase the protective identity conferred on them by family [and] residence'.[92] Being unaccompanied and in public continued to be fraught with challenges for servants well into the 1930s, though, evidenced in the way Frieda, for example, experienced walking or being alone, even in broad daylight. Taking tea at a Lyons' Corner House, she felt eyes on her. 'Not very far, at a table was sitting a man. He bowed to me. I think I blushed.'[93] Thirty years earlier the same thing was being reported. The Gordon House annual report described how a young German woman 'made the acquaintance of a young man in one of the parks […]. A few days afterwards she met him again and the real character of her admirer was

[90] Only one instance of alleged contact took place in the servant's own room, supposedly a place of privacy, but evidently not exclusively hers.
[91] I found no evidence of same-sex relations, though for evidence of a same-sex affair between domestic and mistress, see Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control', p. 336.
[92] J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), p. 46.
[93] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 59.

revealed.'[94] The detailed diary entries of a young Northern Irish migrant in London in the late 1930s also reveal this type of uninvited attention: 'I thought I was unsafe […] once on the Strand when a man was trying to pick me up. He bought me an ice cream, he was being, you know, very friendly. I was a bit nervous then.'[95]

Frieda's writing is brimming with a yearning for love and she longed for her own home and a husband. She detailed every small encounter with suitors, from a morose man at a dance to the numerous advances made by complete strangers in the street or parks: 'In the evening when I went home a man followed me. [...] He was a man of about forty with a clever face. [...] I felt thrilled.'[96] Another man occupied her thoughts and emotions for many weeks afterwards:

> I took a bus to Hyde Park. How beautiful the park is. ... On the bench a man was sitting alone. Hes (sic) started to talk - I answered. .. He told me he was [?] and married; but he was not happily married. He liked me from the first he set eyes on me. I could not understand how one could like a person after five minutes. [...] I am ashamed of myself. He kissed me and I kissed him. [...] When he touched me I had no other wishes but only to be near him. I believed every word he said. Or perhaps was it a little more than half an hour? It is only conventional not to permit to be kissed by a man after 30 minutes acquaintance.' [Having agreed to meet the following day, she returned to the park but] 'waited and waited in vain.'[97]

Frieda herself never did marry, so the stories she wrote in her thirties make for especially pitiful reading. Nevertheless, apart from hoping for some affection from the grown-up son of her employer who came for tea on a weekly basis, all her encounters with men occurred outside her place of work: in the street, in the parks, in a café and (once) at a dance. The story of the girls walking in Hyde Park (above) is pertinent to the subject of the public male gaze here. While they strolled and chatted together, the lady walking nearby had noticed that two strange men had begun following them and she had struck up a conversation with them by way of protection. That the incident was not subsequently reported suggests it was too commonplace to be deemed worthy of note. Instead, the file notes focus entirely on the fact that Mrs Averard, a fellow Swiss woman, had

[94] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1913*, p. 32.
[95] C. G. Pooley, 'From Londonderry to London: Identity and Sense of Place for a Protestant Northern Irish Woman in the 1930s', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 18/2–3 (1999), p. 198.
[96] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', p. 2.
[97] Ehrenstein, 'Only the Night is Mine', pp. 7-8.

recognised them talking her language and subsequently been able to help them leave their posts.[98] It seems that being a lone woman (or women) outside the home was to subject oneself to unwanted attention or an invitation for men to approach, which reinforced the common perception that unmarried women were much safer and more suited to life indoors.

Public spaces also offered opportunities for consensual liaisons too. With a 'no followers' rule applied to most service jobs, it is perhaps little wonder that women had to resort to creative places in which to meet members of the opposite sex. In the early summer of 1933, according to a routine police report, German-born Roman Catholic Maria Friedrich was 'charged in company with a man at Wandsworth Common police station with outraging public decency by having sexual intercourse on Tooting Bec Common.'[99] Over the previous two years, she had worked as a general domestic or housemaid at least five different households, but was not employed at the time of her arrest. It is unclear whether this was a case of prostitution or whether she simply had no place of her own which would allow her to meet, and have sex with, the man involved.

Given the restrictions on their time and privacy in their place of residence, it was in the very act of being beyond this that servant identities could be forged, unencumbered by any visible manifestation of an occupation seen by so many as anonymised and subservient, in which they were subsumed in their employer's identity through residency and dependence. Indeed, arguing against the notion that *woman* is synonymous with *home*, Massey reminds us that '[m]any women have had to *leave* home precisely in order to forge their own version of their identities'.[100] This observation underpins so much of life as a migrant woman: that in the very deliberate act of leaving home can she start to build her own sense of self. The restrictions on their free time, a lack of privacy and the risk of isolation within their own domestic jobs drove servants outside the home to both reclaim their identity and connect to a community. Both were vital not only for leisure purposes but in order for servants to protect themselves against poor work conditions, find positions, make friends, find lovers, seek practical help, explore the city and 'get on' in life. As

[98] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/4546/1929. Mrs Averard ran the nearby Averard Hotel in Lancaster Gate.
[99] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/6279/1933.
[100] Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 11.

independent, lone females seeking freedom outside the domestic space, they were all the more challenging to society, and they faced an ambiguous existence in public. Anonymity in the busy streets of London enabled them to reclaim an identity other than that of imposed servitude, yet in finding solitude and peace outside the home, they automatically invited (unwanted) sexual attention.

## Between jobs

Women did not always have a job to go to immediately on arrival in London, and many more found themselves out of work when between positions, due to illness, being let go by their employers or getting the sack for some misdemeanour. But servant unemployment is an under-researched area, and rather overshadowed in the literature by its connection to prostitution,[101] or as a means of absorbing women who would otherwise be a financial burden: to their own families, for example, or, as workhouse girls, to the ratepayers, and later even to the state, as Chapter 3 has explored. Yet unemployment while in domestic service is rarely addressed, largely because it is so hard to find. Leonore Davidoff, Sian Pooley and other historians of British domestic service stress the importance of the family in these circumstances, describing how most servants chose to go back to their parents between situations, making them difficult to trace.[102] Migrant workers and middle-class observers in Gordon's research on migrants to Scotland even 'expected the young women to retreat to parental homes in times of illness or slack work.'[103] For foreign servants, returning home was not a viable option at all given the considerable expense involved in travelling to London, as described in Chapter 5.

The naivety and vulnerability that their youth and foreignness was thought to encompass, prompted, as already described, the establishment of the foreign servant hostels across London. This infrastructure for girls away from home is discussed in Chapter 3, in the context of overseas travel, Chapter 4, in how recruitment networks operated, and Chapter 5, with reference to advocacy and support structures. For women out of work, this infrastructure was once again pivotal. Non-personal accounts of life and activities in each home are used, for the most part, sources which are

[101] See J. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York; Cambridge, 1980) and McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*.
[102] Pooley, 'Domestic Servants and Their Urban Employers', p. 424; Gordon, *Mill Girls and Strangers*, p. 101.
[103] Gordon, ""What, I Pray You, Shall I Do with the Ballance?"", p. 69.

naturally written for a specific audience to raise money (usually middle- and upper-class donors with religious, conservative values). But read against the grain and supplemented by genealogical records, newspaper reports and passenger lists among others, these disparate sources used together offer a new perspective on unemployment and its function for these international domestic workers.

## *Spaces of home*

> The female citizens of the world, come whence they may, are made welcome.[104]

**Residential homes**

Searches of the census returns show there were many hostels operating in Britain, often run by religious organisations, orders or charities, offering accommodation for women 'away from home'. However, few of the hostels provided for servants and those that did were populated almost entirely by foreign women. Clusters of foreign servants listed as boarders or lodgers appear in census schedules, their non-British nationalities and servant occupations suggesting they would group together when not in work, perhaps returning to the same boarding house between jobs. Thirty foreign women were enumerated at the Gloucester Road Roman Catholic Convent of the Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1911, of whom half were servants. A handwritten note added by the Mother Superior stated that: 'These boarders represent Roman Catholic girls and women, working or seeking work in London, and not having a home here'. They came from France, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Malta, aged 20 to 35.[105] Similarly, a lodging house in Westmoreland Road, Bayswater, run by a Swiss family, housed 16 foreign servants in 1911, from France, Austria, Switzerland and Germany and aged 18 to 32.[106]

Such clustering of course is to be found in the homes I have focused on throughout the thesis: the Ayahs' and Amahs' Home in Hackney, Sara Pyke House in Aldgate and Gordon House in Bloomsbury, all established to house specific nationalities or ethnicities, though over time these too became more diverse. An analysis of birthplaces stated on copies of ayahs' passports reveals they

[104] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1900*, p. 100.
[105] 1911 Census Return, TNA RG14/670/767.
[106] 1911 Census Return, TNA RG14/48/865/4.

came from all over the Indian subcontinent, including members of hill tribes bordering present-day Nepal and China. Mention is made of the different castes involved too, such that many of the ayahs who found themselves in Hackney were brought into much closer contact with each other than they might even have expected in India itself. Over time, as British families travelled further east to Malaya, China and Hong Kong, locally employed amahs joined their travelling retinues and by 1922, the Home was housing 'Indians, Singalese, Javanese, Chinese, Siamese, Japanese, Malays,'[107] as well as Portuguese and Burmese women. Catering for up to 30 residents at a time, the Home charged mistresses 14/s on a full board and lodging basis.

In the early 1890s, Sara Pyke House was catering for around 150 unaccompanied immigrant women a year, mostly from Russia, Polish Russia and Germany, placing a third to a half of them in service, as outlined in Chapter 4. In the years before the outbreak of World War I, SPH housed 13 or 14 girls in its rooms but many more appeared on a regular basis in the details minutes of cases.[108] Gordon House was established 'for the benefit of German girls of the humbler class', and in the first seven months of it opening, it had welcomed 118 German girls, 12 French and 89 English, but both the number of women and their places of origin increased over time.[109] By 1901 it was home to young women from France, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Jamaica and Hungary, including Lutherans, Romans Catholics and Jewish girls.[110] Over the period to 1912, it was receiving 9 to 10 new residents per week (see Figure 58) and catered for about 400 foreign individuals a year (representing just under 10% of all foreign servants in London at the time). With a capacity of 40, girls wishing to stay at Gordon House would pay 2/6d per week for a dormitory bed, or 4s for one of the more private cubicles on the first floor, plus an extra 4/6d per week for breakfast, lunch and tea. All residents had access to the dining room, sitting rooms, baths and a library.[111] Of the ten HWGL homes, only Gordon House catered specifically for foreign women and hardly any domestic servants were housed outside it. Figure 57

[107] A. C. Marshall, 'Nurses of our Ocean Highways', *The Quiver*, Aug 1922, p. 926.
[108] In 1907, there were 13 girls recorded in the home: HL, MS173/2/8/2, 12 Jun 1907; a month later there were 14: HL, MS173/2/8/2, 10 Jul 1907.
[109] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1881*, p. 19 and p. 31.
[110] Ancestry.com, 1901 Census, RG 13/136 p. 14.
[111] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1881*, p. 18.

shows the range of servants who stayed there and Figure 58 charts the overwhelming proportion of foreign residents from 1881 to 1911.

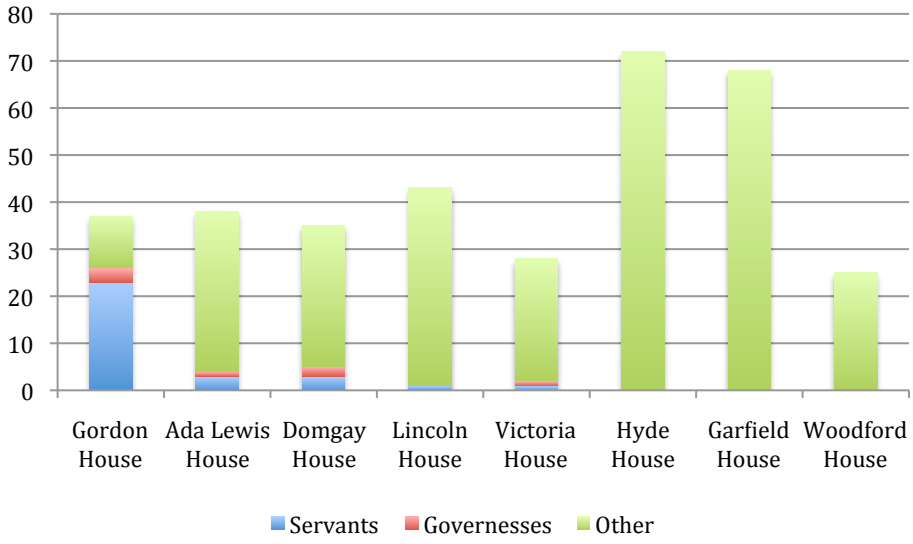
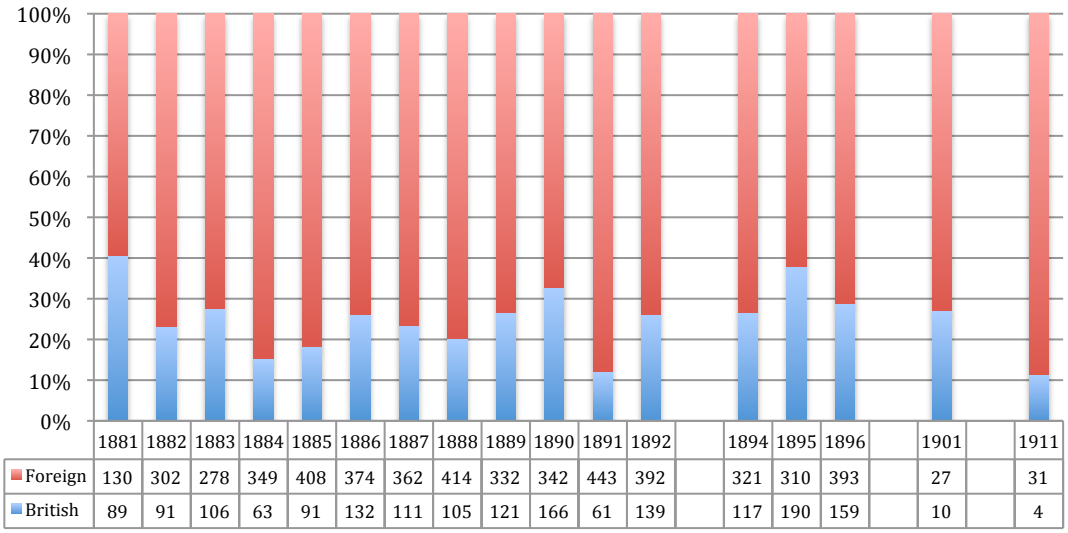



**Figure 57: Number of occupational types at each of the HWGL homes (source: 1911 census returns)**




| | 1881 | 1882 | 1883 | 1884 | 1885 | 1886 | 1887 | 1888 | 1889 | 1890 | 1891 | 1892 | | 1894 | 1895 | 1896 | | 1901 | | 1911 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Foreign | 130 | 302 | 278 | 349 | 408 | 374 | 362 | 414 | 332 | 342 | 443 | 392 | | 321 | 310 | 393 | | 27 | | 31 |
| British | 89 | 91 | 106 | 63 | 91 | 132 | 111 | 105 | 121 | 166 | 61 | 139 | | 117 | 190 | 159 | | 10 | | 4 |

**Figure 58: Annual proportion of foreign and British residents at Gordon House 1881–1911 (source: HWGL annual reports and 1901/1911 census returns)**

### Family domesticity

Despite the variety of nationalities staying at all three homes, they shared strong similarities in the way they were run, beyond the obvious focus on the gender and occupations of their residents. At their core were religious philanthropic intentions, taking on 'the character of a mission and preventive agency', protecting their vulnerable charges from 'untold dangers' of the city while

exposing them to a religious message.[112] Importantly, they were all established on the notion of a domestic 'home', fervently differentiating themselves from institutions or mere common lodging houses. The language used to frame the homes was strongly familial and much is made of the superintendents performing parental duties towards their charges, regardless of their age. In the Ayahs' Home, residents reportedly referred to the missionary and his matron wife as 'mudder and fader', despite the average age of an ayah being 35, with many travelling into their 50s and 60s. In Gordon House, the superintendent's maternal instinct to guide and support was seen to be the foundation of the home's success. '[…] we can testify that Miss Seebo the superintendent has been a "home-mother" to *all* who have lived under the roof of this house.' In Gordon House's Rules and Regulations, the daily prayers are referred to as 'Family Prayers', and social get-togethers as 'Family Parties'. The reports' author(s) are adamant as to its value and worth as a home, not simply as lodgings: 'One of the desires of 'its promoters that these houses should prove not simply places of refuge but *real homes* to those who accept the advantages they provide.'[113]

The surroundings in the homes were designed to mimic those of a British household, with drapes, wallpaper and decorative items mirroring middle-class family environments. Gordon House was described as giving 'the impression of a real English home, conducted on homely lines', replete with piano and even a canary. The innate suitability of the women to domestic roles could thus be reinforced in this environment. The minutes relating to the management of SPH indicate various building and decorative improvements, hinting at what the interior may have looked like. The home definitely included a piano, which was at one point sold to raise £3, and in 1907 one of the communal areas was repainted:

> Mr. Moses Davis of Ladbroke Grove called at SPH to see the girls' sitting room (to put coloured glass in upper panes). 'He objected strongly to the color of the walls as he said colour wash always contains arsenic. He very kindly undertook to wash it off and paint the walls blue, also the door and put new finger plates. [...] In the end they opted for terra cotta instead of blue and white crystal glass in the windows in place of the colored in order not to darken the room.[114]

[112] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, p. 145; 'A Home of Nations', *LCM Magazine*, 1921, p. 143.
[113] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1883*, p. 63.
[114] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 11 Sep 1907.

Such detail invested in interior style reinforces the idea of these hostels being more than just somewhere to sleep; these were middle-class British 'model' homes in replicate. Similar attention to detail was given to the interior layout of Gordon House, described in its 1883 annual report thus:

> The sitting rooms with library are on the ground floor and underneath are the dining room kitchen baths and lavatories. The first floor only is divided upon the cubicle system, i.e. little compartments divided off for those who can pay for a cosy bedroom. In each there is a chest of drawers serving also as a washstand, stool, piece of carpet, book-rack and looking glass with a framed illuminated text of Scripture over each bed. The rooms on the second and third floors are on the dormitory system, the bed is being arranged along the walls. Everything is exactly the same as on the first floor except that each sleeping accommodation is not partitioned off.[115]

It too featured a piano, on which many a recital was played during social events, the walls were covered in pictures and the library was furnished with books given by donation (though not before these were vetted first by the Honorary Director, lest they be deemed 'questionable literature').[116] At the Ayahs' Home, residents had access to a common room, a dining room and a back garden, where they were known to sunbathe. The bedrooms were 'large, lofty rooms with striking dadoes and gaily distempered walls that play up to the Eastern passion for colour […] with characteristic stools instead of the unappreciated Western chairs'.[117] Women were allocated sleeping quarters according to their origins, with the bedroom doors labelled "'Indians", "Chinese", "Javanese", "Malay States" etc.'[118] Despite the 'Asian' features of the bedrooms, the lounge and dining areas were communal and decorated in a highly English style with wallpaper, framed pictures and porcelain figurines (Figure 62). The care taken over the interiors of the buildings is suggestive of the importance placed on the homely and domestic influence the organising committees wished to impress upon the residents.

[115] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1881*, pp. 18-19.
[116] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, p. 149.
[117] Marshall, 'Nurses of our Ocean Highways', p. 926.
[118] Marshall, 'Nurses of our Ocean Highways', p. 926.



IN THE AYAHS' HOME (HACKNEY).

**Figure 59: Interior of the Ayahs' Home, Hackney (1902)[119]**

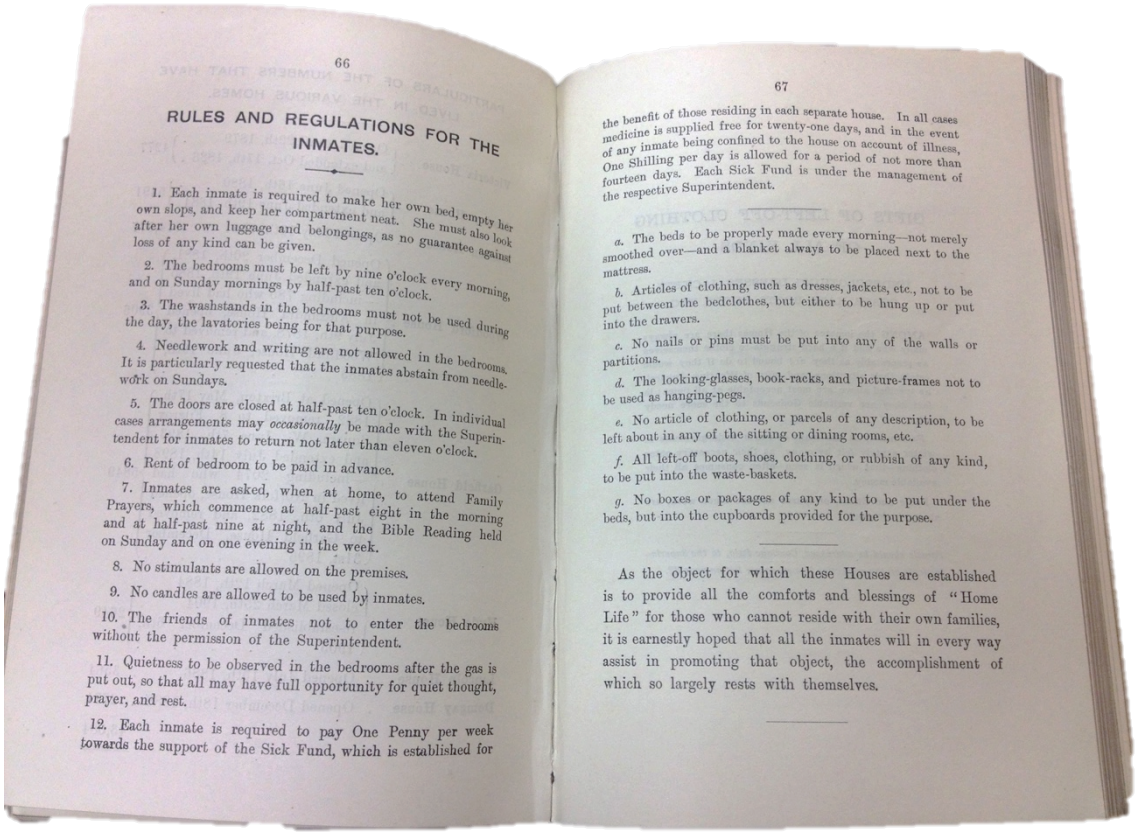
Gordon House underlined the importance of their girls finding domestic work in decent homes as a good model for their subsequent roles as wives and mothers: by 'securing a good and comfortable home in a respectable family, […] the "future woman" will be developed by the daily-life surroundings in her new home.'[120] Aspirations for marriage were not necessarily shared by the residents, however. In a comment piece in 1900, it was 'disappointing to know how few of the young women who pass through the Homes marry, and yet the majority are thoroughly respectable and would be reasonably attractive to the young men of like positions to themselves'.[121] The Home's management lamented the factory and shop work chosen by some (mostly British) girls, and instead urged their residents to take up domestic work instead, 'for undoubtedly it is the best life for them and our civilisation will not be wholly Christian until it ceases … to call our daughters from the home to the store and factory to do the work which is more properly man's. Women's song is service — a quieter labour'.[122]

[119] G. R. Sims, *Living London Vol. III* (London, 1903), p. 279.
[120] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1885*, p. 96.
[121] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1900*, p. 56.
[122] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1895*, p. 77

Middle-class young ladies were encouraged to be part of the efforts in 'homing' the residents too. In 1906, a Miss Jane Jones had kindly undertaken to teach the unoccupied girls at SPH a little plain sewing on Monday afternoons.[123] That away from their own homes and those of an employer these women should be most appropriately housed in a pseudo-family environment was a means of ensuring a constant reinforcement of the feminine virtues of home-making, and keeping masterless women supervised and indoors. Even the ayahs, whose site of employment was a ship not a nursery, were held up as paragons of femininity by embracing their natural propensity for childcare: 'these dusky females from the tropics are born nurses',[124] they claimed, where an ayah was 'exercising her primeval instincts inherited from Mother Eve herself of cherishing the young and bringing babies up'.[125]

The rules for Gordon House survive in printed form, placing an emphasis on the communal life of the home, respect for others and following a modest lifestyle, all the while promoting a message of domestic harmony integral to 'the comforts and blessings of "Home Life" for those who cannot reside with their own families' (see Figure 60). Although SPH's rules do not appear in their files, girls who disobeyed them were ejected for any number of reasons, including insolence and disobedience. Those unable to pay for their accommodation were not, however, removed. Instead, it was decided that they should instead 'sit at a separate table and be denied pudding or some other luxury which the other girls received'.[126] Such punitive measures are reminiscent of nursery rules, applied to errant children who misbehave; a further familial structure applied to the home's environment.

[123] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 10 Oct 1906.
[124] Marshall, 'Nurses of our Ocean Highways', p. 924.
[125] Marshall, 'Nurses of our Ocean Highways', p. 924.
[126] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 19 Jan 1907.



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RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE INMATES.

1. Each inmate is required to make her own bed, empty her own slops, and keep her compartment neat. She must also look after her own luggage and belongings, as no guarantee against loss of any kind can be given.

2. The bedrooms must be left by nine o'clock every morning, and on Sunday mornings by half-past ten o'clock.

3. The washstands in the bedrooms must not be used during the day, the lavatories being for that purpose.

4. Needlework and writing are not allowed in the bedrooms. It is particularly requested that the inmates abstain from needle-work on Sundays.

5. The doors are closed at half-past ten o'clock. In individual cases arrangements may *occasionally* be made with the Superintendent for inmates to return not later than eleven o'clock.

6. Rent of bedroom to be paid in advance.

7. Inmates are asked, when at home, to attend Family Prayers, which commence at half-past eight in the morning and at half-past nine at night, and the Bible Reading held on Sunday and on one evening in the week.

8. No stimulants are allowed on the premises.

9. No candles are allowed to be used by inmates.

10. The friends of inmates not to enter the bedrooms without the permission of the Superintendent.

11. Quietness to be observed in the bedrooms after the gas is put out, so that all may have full opportunity for quiet thought, prayer, and rest.

12. Each inmate is required to pay One Penny per week towards the support of the Sick Fund, which is established for

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the benefit of those residing in each separate house. In all cases medicine is supplied free for twenty-one days, and in the event of any inmate being confined to the house on account of illness, One Shilling per day is allowed for a period of not more than fourteen days. Each Sick Fund is under the management of the respective Superintendent.

*a.* The beds to be properly made every morning—not merely smoothed over—and a blanket always to be placed next to the mattress.

*b.* Articles of clothing, such as dresses, jackets, etc., not to be put between the bedclothes, but either to be hung up or put into the drawers.

*c.* No nails or pins must be put into any of the walls or partitions.

*d.* The looking-glasses, book-racks, and picture-frames not to be used as hanging-pegs.

*e.* No article of clothing, or parcels of any description, to be left about in any of the sitting or dining rooms, etc.

*f.* All left-off boots, shoes, clothing, or rubbish of any kind, to be put into the waste-baskets.

*g.* No boxes or packages of any kind to be put under the beds, but into the cupboards provided for the purpose.

As the object for which these Houses are established is to provide all the comforts and blessings of "Home Life" for those who cannot reside with their own families, it is earnestly hoped that all the inmates will in every way assist in promoting that object, the accomplishment of which so largely rests with themselves.

**Figure 60: Rules and regulations for the Homes for Working Girls in London**[127]

**Settled domesticity**

There is a discernible tension in the way the hostels were at once providers of safe spaces for *migrant* women in a hostile city, while also advocating for the benefits of static, indoor virtues of womanhood. This was apparent in all three homes, and reveals how the old ideas of service, surveillance and settlement were being played out in these servant hostels, where a subtle undertone of the negative effect of movement on women persisted in the sources over time. The presence of British permanent residents (compared to their migrant foreign sisters) is noted by Gordon House as positive: 'Their influence is useful and healthy to the "comers and goers",' it was claimed (where the comers and goers were the foreigners).[128] This notion of those who come and go, who travel and move jobs, is contrasted with stability and commitment, things which are seemingly feminine, healthy and natural. This extends to the scheme of rewards at both SPH and Gordon House (as mentioned in Chapter 5) which were offered to incentivise servants to remain in their positions for

[127] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907*, pp. 66-7.
[128] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1881*, p. 19.

at least a year. The very *raison d'etre* for SPH was to handle and process newly-arrived unaccompanied (Jewish) women,[129] but here too was a tension between the unnatural state of women's mobility and a need for them to be appropriately homed. In 1899, the members warned against helping married women: 'extreme caution should be used in extending the assistance of the association to such persons' and was only to be given 'where the married woman was very young and stood in great danger'.[130] Interference in the private household, therefore, was far beyond their remit, indicating, by implication, that a marital home was both safe and/or the ultimate destination for (as-yet-unmarried) women.

It was difficult for the London City Mission to chastise the ayahs' mobility since they were critical to the British families travelling to the colonies, yet here again is the tension between movement and settlement expressed in the pages of their magazine reports. The underlying attitude towards them is that being away from their own home is an unnatural state for a woman: 'after each round voyage she wandered back to her dusky loved ones at her own home, her base and headquarters on the outskirts of a great be-mosqued and minaretted city among the palms.'[131] The fact that these women are away from their rightful place in the world (both geographical and spatial) is understood as temporary and, by extension, framed as an aberration.

## *Spaces of community*

> Life is never dull in this Home, it is too cosmopolitan for that.[132]

Beyond the stated aims of the organisations' annual reports was a space somewhere between (familial) surveillance and functional purpose. These homes were not just spaces of accommodation, of beds and rules and prayers before tea. They consisted of a community of people (mostly women) who moved in and out of the physical hostel but who remained loosely connected when they moved away and drifted back, according to need. The superintendents were pivotal and performed both a supervisory role, as employees of the organisations, as well as a

[129] Although they had a formal agreement to meet Christian women from the boats to, before handing them to the Travellers' Aid Society.
[130] HL, MS173/2/2/5, 4 Dec 1899.
[131] Marshall, 'Nurses of our Ocean Highways', p. 923.
[132] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1905*, p. 118.

parental one, in caring *in loco parentis* on a day-to-day basis for young women many miles from their own families. Miss Seebo was matron at Gordon House for 29 years from its foundation in 1881, well-liked by the 'girls' and was referred to often as a friend. The superintendent of the Ayahs' and Amahs' Home in Hackney was a male missionary, but his wife 'Matron' provided the food and social setting for her Asian boarders. In the minutes relating to the management of Sara Pyke House, a great deal of care was taken over new matron appointments, with Miss Catella being offered a probationary period for three months in 1907 before being confirmed in place.[133]

They appear to have been dedicated to their positions. None of the (non-missionary) matrons married, which also reinforced the feminine character of these environments. Each seemed to take a personal interest in all the women who stayed under their care, and acted *in loco parentis* for many of the residents. Indeed, the strain of this responsibility was at times excessive. Miss Seebo had assistance from her brother's German wife when she was ill in early 1901 and Miss Hug, superintendent of the Gordon House Institute, took three months off work in both 1890 and 1891 due to illness.[134] The health of SPH's first matron, Bertha Darnstein, was 'suffering from the strain' just seven months after starting,[135] and Miss Bloomfield, appointed matron of the SPH in November 1904, was advised to take a holiday, since 'she seemed rather run down' after just a year in post.[136] The service they provided, however, was indispensible to those who had access to it: just as in the boarding houses used by Wendy Gordon's single migrant women, they 'developed a network of friends which took the place of direct support from parental families.'[137] As discussed in Chapter 5, those who had access to this type of urban 'family' infrastructure were more likely to be able to weather the challenges they experienced as single migrants, and the presence of a community of women will have been a vital space of community and support.

**Rest and recuperation**

The annual reports relating to the running of such establishments tend to focus on the positive, polished versions of the events at the homes. However, they do reveal a multitude of activities in

[133] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 12 Apr 1906.
[134] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1890*, p. 189 and *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1891*, p. 162.
[135] HL, MS173/2/1/2, 24 May 1895.
[136] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 27 Dec 1905.
[137] Gordon, ""What, I Pray You, Shall I Do with the Ballance?"", p. 60.

which the residents participated, offering us a rare glimpse into life as a young woman away from home and thus the ways in which these institutions functioned for them. The homes were often spaces from which to apply for or await the start of new positions, as explored in Chapter 4, but they could also be a time of rest and recuperation. An Austrian nursery governess had, in 1907, just lost her mother, and was struggling with grief and how her 'bereavement had disturbed her nervous system'.[138] Her mistress took her to Gordon House where she stayed for two or three weeks before returning to work again. Girls were also sent elsewhere, supported by the Home, in order to recover. "A.E." was 'much run down by overwork.' She was able to 'start afresh' once the superintendent found her a suitable situation, after she had been cared for and rested at Miss Dudin Brown's Home.[139] Homes could also be places of temporary respite. When Ada Goldstein's (16) mistress went on holiday for a fortnight, Ada went to SPH to sleep overnight, then going to her situation every morning.[140] In 1908 a young German servant was facing rather lonely circumstances, and was 'recommended to call in and see the Superintendent' of Gordon House. She asked to 'call in occasionally and spend an hour with her own countrywomen' and became a regular at the Sunday Afternoon Bible Class.[141] In this way, she was able to use the hostel as a means to connect to other Germans to stave off her sense of isolation in her new post.

**Parties and outings**

Much of the appeal of the homes was companionship and community, something each was keen to show was not available in private or boarding house lodgings. Secular events at Gordon House centred around the quarterly tea parties at which various entertainments would be presented: cinematograph/pathephone demonstrations, talks and debates (including one on 'women's rights' in 1892), lantern lectures, musical recitals (a Canadian sleigh bell performance in 1905) and incidental entertainers, such as the ventriloquist who visited in 1900. Glee parties and hymn-singing featured songs in English as well as other languages; in 1907, eleven languages were being spoken at

[138] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907* (1908), p. 107.
[139] This home was established by Miss Ann Dudin Brown at Rest Dene, Richmond Road, Kew, where Miss Dudin Brown was herself superintendent and proprietress in 1891. Kelly's Directory of Kent, Surrey & Sussex, 1891. [Part 3: Surrey]. p. 707.
http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4/id/187730 (31 Jul 2019).
[140] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 11 Sep 1907.
[141] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1908*, p. 107.

the Home.[142] Outings that took the girls beyond the walls of Gordon House might be divided into two: those hosted by paternalistic home-owners and trips to the seaside or sites in London for entertainment. The women could look forward to day trips to Southend on Sea (listed annually from 1890 until 1913), Windsor, Epping Forest, Palmers Green, rambling near Cricklewood, the British Museum, Kew, the Zoological Gardens, and the Museum of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Numbers enrolled on these outings ranged from 24 to as many as 50, with the Southend trips being the most popular.

Mr Shrimpton, the HWGL secretary, wrote regularly to the newspapers urging 'friends' to invite the HWGL girls 'to their country or suburban residence, giving them free access to their grounds or meadows, and generously providing meals for the day' or suggesting they bear 'the expense of sending a number of them for "a day at the seaside"'.[143] This resulted in regular trips for the Gordon House girls to suburban villas and rural mansions. For most of the 1890s, residents spent their August bank holiday at Dollis Hill House (see Figure 61), the summer residence of Lord and Lady Aberdeen (Gordon House's founders), entertained by games of Aunt Sally, donkey rides, picking wild flowers, playing tennis, swings, and singing hymns to the sound of a harmonium: 'a cheery spot in the midst of much that is very dull in a working girls (sic) life in London'.[144]

[142] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1894*, p. 108.
[143] 'Letter to Editor, 'Homes for Working Girls", *Hampstead & Highgate Express*, 11 Jul 1891, p. 6.
[144] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1891*, p. 84.

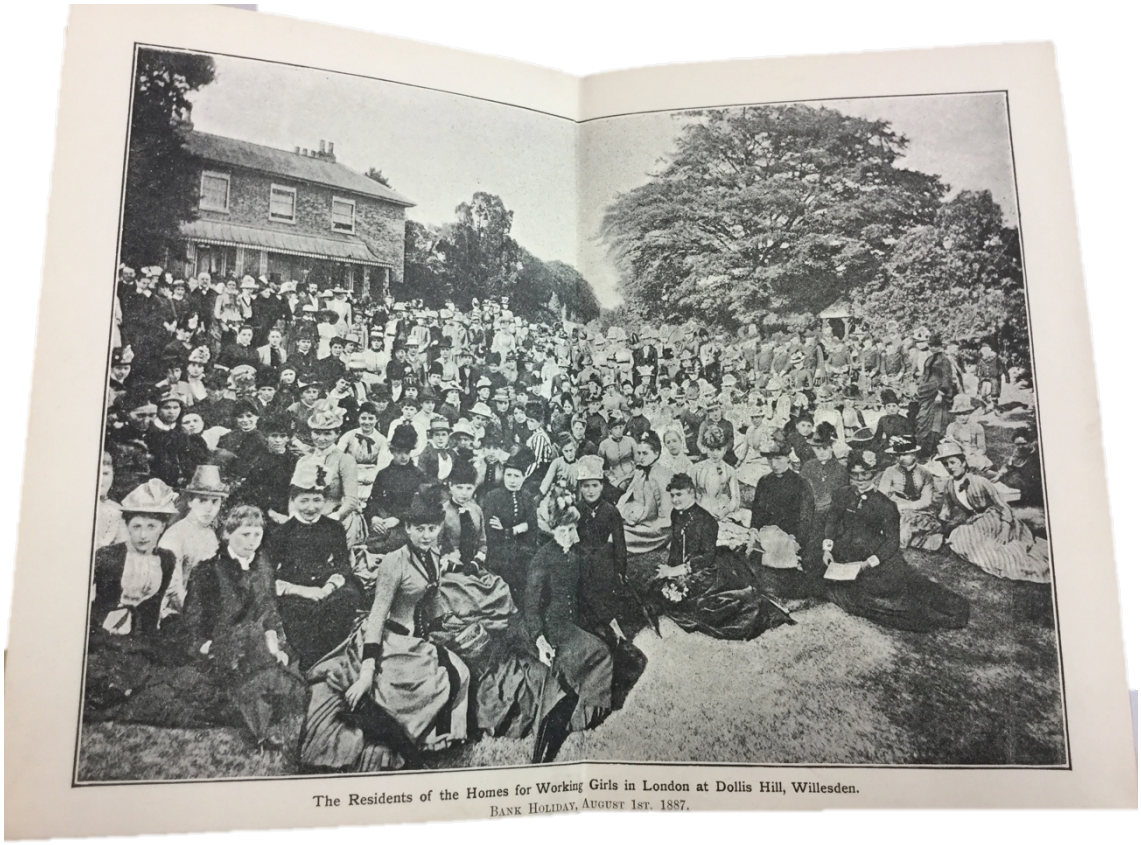


**Figure 61: HWGL Dollis Hill outing, 1 August 1887**[145]

Other houses to be made available for a day's outing included the New Barnet home of Frau Hieber (wife of a German baker and confectioner); that of the Werners, a German/Swiss couple living in Forest Hill; and in 1912 residents were hosted by the Lathams of Strood, in their house formerly owned by Dickens. When 42 residents were invited to the Kentish home of a German corn merchant (Herr Teichmann) and his wife, they were treated to a specially laid-on train carriage to take them to Chislehurst, where they were entertained all afternoon playing croquet, see-saw and singing German songs. The archery and croquet players received prizes and tea consisted of lemonade, 'a great deal of chicken', salad, jelly, and pastry. The annual outing to Southend took place during the summer months, where they had free time to enjoy paddling, promenading the pier, boating and souvenir shopping. In 1907, forty residents took part, representing 'seven different nations'.[146] 'These breaks into the monotony of life in kitchen and nursery were greatly

[145] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1887*, frontispiece.
[146] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907*, p. 110.

enjoyed,'[147] it was claimed, with the author of the letter of thanks printed in the report expressing her thanks to 'Miss Seebo for all her care and trouble, for her motherly feeling to us.'[148] In a style suggestive of community cohesion and familiarity, the letter was signed: 'Yours respectfully, The Gordon House Girls'.[149]

Sara Pyke House offered similar outings to their residents, often to the same type of places as those of the Gordon House girls: Kew Gardens, or the Earls Court Exhibition, for example. Epping Forest was a favourite destination for a day trip and wealthy benefactors would donate concert, zoo or theatre tickets for the superintendent to distribute as she saw fit. Over 60 joined in the annual trips to Chingford in 1905 and 1907, more than 80 went to Epping Forest and smaller numbers were invited to wealthy homes for tea: six went to visit Mrs Bernstingl at her home in Limpsfield, Surrey, in 1905, for example.[150] The ayahs, located in the East End, were taken to Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the Palace, or London Zoo, but spent much of their time near the home, walking in the nearby Victoria Park in (once again, supervised) small groups of two or three.[151]

**Religious festivals**

Those who ran the homes were not unaware of the possibility for women to be using their services for purposes other than those for which they had been designed. A discussion recorded in the General Committee Meeting minutes of JAPGAW in 1896 revolved around concerns about women arriving in London and using the society while leading immoral lives.[152] In some cases, the religious nature of the Homes was utterly incidental to those using them. In 1913, 'a young Jewess from Austria sought admission to Gordon House solely to see what a Christian home was like. She fraternised with her companions but took no interest in the religious privileges of the household.[153] But religious activities, holy days and ceremonies formed a large part of the social life of these

[147] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1897*, p. 92.
[148] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1897*, p. 92.
[149] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1909*, p. 95.
[150] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 27 Sep 1905. Mr Bernstingl was one of the original trustees of Sara Pyke House.
[151] Robinson, 'Travelling Ayahs', p. 50.
[152] HL, MS173/2/1/3, 17 Jul 1896.
[153] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1897*, p. 29.

spaces, and were thus fundamental for many in finding community and comfort among other foreign servants, often of a similar regional or religious background to their own.

Religious holidays such as Purim, Hanukkah and Passover were observed at SPH, marked by a concert, tea party or other entertainment, the sponsors of which being faithfully recorded in the minute books: Lady Rothschild offered to defray the expenses of the Purim party in 1897; a sovereign was pledged for the Hanukkah Party in 1906; and a pound treat was given by Mrs Henriques for Purim in 1905. The Hanukkah party in 1905 attracted forty guests and with the Home rarely housing many more than a dozen permanent residents,[154] it shows SPH was reaching beyond its own residents in its religious celebrations.

Gordon House welcomed Catholics as well as Lutherans, although the organisation was Protestant in nature. Christmases were cheerfully celebrated with an emphasis on the centrepiece for the season: 'Our German friends *will* have a Christmas-tree or the season is not like Christmas-tide to them'.[155] Accounts in the annual reports pointed out the generosity of Lady Aberdeen who sent Christmas trees and presented roebuck, pheasant and other game for the meal, while puddings and desserts were supplied by the Kinnairds.[156] Numbers attending the Christmas meal ranged from 30 to 85, though many girls dropped by for just some of the day to spend some of their Christmas away from work. The Ayahs' Home, run by successive missionaries after 1900, was a centre for conversion, so the Bible had a prominent role in the daily communal life of the residents. A daily (optional) religious service was held to which almost all were said to have attended, despite their religions being recorded as 'followers of Mahomet, Buddhists, Confucians, and others'.[157] 'We teach these women portions of the Word of God, and Gospel hymns, and send them back to India and China singing the Glad Tiding of Redeeming Love', reported the LCM magazine in 1924.[158] Bibles featuring pictures are mentioned, to help teach the women who could not read English, and since

[154] On Jan 23 1907 there were 14 girls in the home; in June that year 13 were recorded as permanent residents.
[155] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1887*, p. 85.
[156] Lord Arthur Fitzgerald Kinnaird was a Scottish baron and banker, whose philanthropic roles included presidency of both the YWCA and YMCA. In 1870 he co-founded the Homes for Working Boys of London organisation, on which the HWGL was based.
[157] A. C. Marshall, 'Human Birds of Passage', *LCM Magazine*, 1922, p. 106.
[158] *London City Mission (LCM) Magazine* (1924), p. 63.

the Missionary superintendent spoke Hindi, Hindustani and Maratic, readings of the scriptures were carried out in 'the language best understood' (see Figure 62).[159]



**Figure 62: The Ayahs' Home Missionary, Mr Fletcher, reading from the Bible to seated ayahs and amahs c. 1924 (LCM)**

**Advocacy and social work**

Beyond the accommodation and sociability they provided for women between positions, the functions of the homes quite often extended into job placement, intervention in employer disputes or advocating on behalf of wronged servants. For the newly arrived, even the basics proved challenging for many. In 1884, the Gordon House annual report claimed that '[v]ery few of them can read English even if able to speak it to a certain extent.'[160] Here they came for tea and a chat with the superintendent, Miss Hüg, who also helped with writing letters in English, translated advertisements and was a cultural focus point for young foreign women in the city.

> Some of the foreign girls have made this institute a "home of call". We all know what a pleasure it is to have a friend or family circle with whom we are always welcome. To take counsel, to have a chat and a cup of tea when out for the monthly holiday, to have a time of prayer, to have English letters translated into their own language, to be able to get a

[159] *LCM Magazine* (1924), p. 191.
[160] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1884*, p. 88.

> Bible, magazine or good book; in fact to be able to ask for advice on any little detail which may be troubling them.[161]

The relaxed, drop-in nature of the Institute is likely to have been of enormous help to servants 'isolated' in service and restricted by their long working hours. That the women were actively making use of this, particularly given the distances some of them had to travel across London, is testament to its social and practical functions.

The influence of the Homes extended far beyond their own four walls. With so many women in transit, the homes were naturally linked globally to organisations in other countries. In 1906, Annie Honig wrote to the SPH Committee after she and a friend, Helena, had left England to take domestic places in New York. Helena was not very happy in her place and regretted having left England. Annie had a 'comfortable' place but expressed a wish for them both to be 'visited'. One of the committee members, Mrs Halford, offered to contact a friend of hers, Mrs Morris Harris of New York, who would be able to support them locally.[162] These international links were mirrored in the Homes' connections with other rescue establishments abroad. In 1904, the Committee decided to recommend to all girls leaving for the USA the services of the Clara de Hirsch Home: 'Envelopes will be printed with the address on for "girls leaving for New York".'[163] Run along very similar principles of supporting unmarried immigrant Jewish women, and run by the wealthy established Jewish community in New York, it is often mentioned in the minutes of the Committee as a safe onward base for (trans/e-)migrating young women via London.[164]

**Charitable activities**

An intriguing aspect of life in the homes was the girls' participation in charitable acts towards other members of their community in poorer conditions than their own. Scholarship has traditionally seen servants and service as (almost) the lowest social rung, particularly for young migrant women (foreign or otherwise). Yet what has emerged from the sources is a sense of some of the girls and women accommodated in such homes positioning themselves as distinct in class from some of

[161] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 120.
[162] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 12 Apr 1906.
[163] HL, MS 173 2/8/2, 8 Nov 1904.
[164] The home opened in May 1899 ('Clara de Hirsch Home for Girls Opened', *New York Observer and Chronicle,* 1 Jun 1899, p. 722). More information on the Clara Hirsch Home can be found on the Jewish Women's Archive: https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/clara-de-hirsch-home-for-working-girls (6 Aug 2019).

their own immigrant countrymen and women. For many years after it opened, Gordon House would host an annual Christmas party to which they invited poor German children and their families from the East End. Guests would admire the tree before 'each child was presented with an entire suit of garments and a number of toys mostly furnished by the residents' own labours and as kind gifts from the members of the Christian Union of the German Women in London.'[165]. Charitable activities were not confined to Christmas, though. In 1883, 1885 and 1886, 'as the result of many spare hours' work on the part of some of the residents […] whilst out of situations',[166] parcels of cuffs and comforters, destined for the North Sea Fisherman, were sent to the Thames Church Mission. In 1888, £2 was collected among the residents for Mrs Sorabji's mission schools at Poona, India (see the Epilogue for more details about this connection);[167] they raised money for the famine fund for the China Inland Mission in 1890;[168] and in 1899 they made articles which were then distributed among 'some of the poor but respectable families known to the Superintendent'.[169] Even in their invitations to 'German old women' from the East End to visit for tea, the residents of Gordon House were enacting a form of middle-class philanthropy, in line with the notion they were to aspire to be ladies of their own households one day, and emulating the ladies of leisure who populated the charitable committees that ran the very hostels that housed them.

Despite these displays of Christian generosity, the homes were highly reliant on donations. In 1884, Gordon House appealed for 'left-off clothing (not articles that are *useless*) […]; for it is often a great trial to know how the required garments of the less fortunate residents can be obtained.'[170] Every year, all gifts received were faithfully recorded at the end of the report, ranging from religious tract pamphlets to bouquets of flowers. In 1885, a number of girls who attended meetings at the Institute even managed to collect £5 in order to buy a second-hand piano.[171] In a curious way, the residents were thus both receivers of charity and givers of it, following the model of an ideal form of female philanthropy perceived to be so central to the role of middle-class domesticity.

[165] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1883*, p. 86.
[166] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1886*, p. 69.
[167] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1888*, p. 151.
[168] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1889*, p. 80.
[169] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1899*, p. 116.
[170] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1884*, p. 57.
[171] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1885*, p. 9.

The LCM and SPH records hold little evidence of charitable donations to others, though Conway hypothesises that the residents' needlework projects at the Ayahs' Home were sold to raise funds for the Mission. While this seems perfectly possible, she cites no evidence for her claim.[172] In the case of SPH, it was more often the case that individuals were gifted items, perhaps for good behaviour or for being in particularly dire straits. In that sense, the girls were the recipients of munificence and thus unable to be placed anywhere but at the bottom rung of the social ladder. What they did have in common with Gordon House was how departing girls sent gifts or donated unwanted possessions to the home. In January 1905, 'blouses and underclothing' were donated to SPH by Lena Fruchter 'an old inmate who has gone with a family to South Africa';[173] and a German girl offered Gordon House six fancy flowerpots for the dining room table, before she set sail for India with her new employers.[174]

These small acts of individual charity were perhaps demonstrations of their own sense of advancement and progression, or perhaps treating the home communities as they would a family. The charitable activities engaged in as a group, however, challenge the literature's understanding both of foreign diaspora in London being based on a settled and spatially-bound community, and of each diaspora being united by its own regional origins. Did the foreign servants feel closer to their working sisters resident alongside them in the Homes (regardless of their nationalities or religion) than to the elderly or impoverished Germans or Swiss families they made gifts for at Christmas? This simultaneously occurred in the context of appeals by the homes for donations from higher up the social scale, from wealthy 'ex-pat' Germans, Swiss or the settled Anglo-Jewry: access to suburban villas for holidays; cast-off clothes for girls, donations for day trips or exhibition tickets. Dutiful charity was thus engendered in the very act of participating in home life.

Driven by middle-class ideals of womanhood being most naturally fulfilled in a domestic, indoor setting, life in the homes explored in this part of the chapter revolved around a pseudo-family

[172] S. Conway, 'Ayah, Caregiver to Anglo-Indian Children, c.1750-1947', in S. Robinson and S. Sleight (eds), *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World* (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 54.
[173] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 25 Jan 1905.
[174] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907* (1908), p. 107.

structure, headed by a parental figure with residents treated as childlike dependents. Guided by a strong religious code and established to house and protect women in need, the homes instead became active spaces of cultural contact, recruitment opportunities, companionship, support and leisure, used by the women as important sites of community. Although the domestic spaces were designed to shape the life expectations of the servants they housed, many simply made use of the facilities at a practical and social level, hinting at how such organisations were being co-opted by servants as part of their own (women-led) migrant support network, albeit tempered by pervading attitudes towards servants that tolerated mobility and migration so long as the women were housed in domestic, family, indoor environments, whether in work or not.

## Conclusion

While the notion of the indoor household to those outside of it is distinctively private, for the servants it was anything but. The impact of employer restrictions on their privacy (both in terms of time and space) had a direct impact on the way servants experienced London, often at odds with other working women and girls of the period, whose hours of work were at least set, if not always shorter. Instead the conditions of their occupation drove them to find 'homeplaces' in public, beyond the household. The freedom and sense of self they derived from being out of reach of their employers challenged the social ideal of womanhood as being most appropriately embedded in a domestic environment. Such was the social concern around women's vulnerability, and continuing unease at their personal independence, that the structural forces explored throughout this thesis (from members of the public to NVA workers to the foreign servant hostels) felt compelled to construct a web of homeliness, family and domesticity around those who ventured away from home. By offering supervised, appropriate leisure activities, regardless of the age of their residents, they were able to extend the influence of the domestic space to outings and day trips. In turn, the foreign servants made use of these facilities to find community and support, vital for those so far from home unable to rely on their own family and friendship support networks. Although the homes were infused with middle-class ideals, they were nonetheless embellished with details from another culture. In serving both an occupational and ethnic or nationality group, each of the homes

thus became ethnic women's spaces, albeit separated from one another, for the different foreign servant populations of London, their connections to other members of their diaspora fractured by class and geography.

The experiences of the foreign servants who made use of public space echoes Harzig: 'to socialize, stepping out of the isolation and invisibility of the private household workplace, helps to take the stigma and degrading effects out of being foreign and a domestic worker.'[175] Further, I argue that in the conscious act of stepping 'outside', liberated from both distant family control and domestic employment restrictions, foreign servants found the potential for friendships, lovers, political activities, hobbies and independent identities – for many, this was the very appeal of service abroad in the first place. Nevertheless, as foreign women they navigated a narrow path of behavioural acceptability by partaking in life in the public sphere, risking their right to remain in Britain if they were found to stray too far from 'womanly' conduct. When not engaged in residential service, the women were induced to be housed instead in homes constructed around a notional family, where transgressions were punished in the manner of young children and behaviour continued to be tightly controlled. Domesticity was thus designed to act as a centrifugal force that pulled them inevitably towards settled family life, though to what extent this was borne out will now be explored in the Epilogue.

[175] Harzig, 'Domestics of the World (Unite?)', p. 67.

# Epilogue

## "To get on in life seems to be the aim of all womankind and not of mankind only."[1]

One of the most compelling aspects of exploring the migration of domestic servants to Britain has been to place them in the broader context of their own lives, both before and after service. In line with the approach set out in Chapter 1, understanding servants beyond their occupation is vital in recovering their voices and experiences as a marginalised group. Having explored their initial reasons for moving to London and how they experienced their work and non-work lives there, this section now focuses on the next phase of their lives. As Delap claims, 'service has been labelled a life-cycle job, filling the years between school and marriage,'[2] and yet this time was not static or unproductive, as the rich experiences of those women working in London have shown. The nature of the sources makes it likely that those who stepped beyond the boundaries of acceptable social behaviour were more likely to be visible in the record. As such, those who came to London, worked for a year or two as a general domestic or nurserymaid before returning to their own countries are probably under-represented. It is therefore with caution that any generalizations are made here about what the foreign servants did next, but the available evidence suggests they fell into three groups: those who returned to their home countries, those who stayed in Britain and those who migrated further. The reasons for their decisions are explored here, using their onward experiences to help shape the conclusion, both of their own time in London as well as the thesis project itself.

## Return(ed) migrants

### *Voluntary and reluctant departures*

As established in Chapter 2, foreign servants were thought to spend two or three years in Britain before returning 'home'. Such women are often invisible in state files since most left no trace of criminality, scandal or trauma and government surveys fail to capture those whose stay did not

[1] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 86.
[2] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 46.

coincide with the census years. But these women did exist in their thousands, and as foreigners, fragments of their experiences are littered throughout records compiled for other purposes. Women such as a young German, writing a thank you note to Miss Seebo in 1898: 'thank you for all your kind interest and thought for us German girls. Only we who are strangers in England can thoroughly appreciate the motherly care and love of Miss Seebo. I am now leaving for home after four years' stay in London.'[3] Some stayed longer, like Elly Michel, who accompanied her employers to the UK for seven years before wishing to return to her 'own family in Germany'.[4]

I___ W___and H___ W___(unrelated to each other) had gone missing en route home to Switzerland after working as general domestics near to each other in Barnes. The NVA had become involved after I___'s parents had not heard from her, and they enlisted the help of their local village pastor to find the girls' whereabouts. Ultimately, H___ returned to her parents and prepared for her wedding that was due to take place a week or two later. I___, however, did not return home, instead staying with relatives in Biel and seeking another position.[5] Born in the village of Ortschwaben, part of a municipality of around 2,500 people today, I___ faced the prospect of returning to her parents or staying in Biel, a large town fifteen miles away (current population 55,000). The implication is that her prospects were limited at home in a rural farming community with her parents, but in a town she could be better connected to continue to find work. It was usually rare to find an exact destination to which the women returned, either 'home' to marry someone they had met prior to migrating (as did H___) or settling in an urban area to continue to work (as did I___). It was enough in official records and annual reports to know they had returned to their own country, assumed perhaps to be protected by their own families once again.

There were strong feelings, however, among those who did not want to leave London at all, with some of the pressure to return coming from the women's own families. In an Employment Exchange report on an employer, it was noted that their maid, Regina Beckert, was 'obliged to return home owing to illness in her family. She speaks English quite well and seems very reluctant

[3] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 138.
[4] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1934, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/1505/1934.
[5] 'Case Files', WL, 1928, 4NVA/6/1/035.

to leave her employment.'[6] Other maids feared the costs involved at the prospect of being sent home. In the correspondence detailed in Chapter 5 between Frida Glatthaar and the Ministry of Labour, she believed that she and her fellow maid would be forced back to Germany if they resigned, triggering the cancellation of their employer-linked work permits. 'We have committed no offence whatever and have done our best', they pleaded. Besides, 'we must make good our losses and earn money to pay for the return journey.'[7] The strength of their emotions in the letter is clear: they had no (immediate) wish to leave the UK and were fearful (if defiant) at the prospect of being forced to. Rosa Hartmann seemed only too aware of this. Struggling to keep up with the workload after the first fortnight working for a Mrs Matthissen, she fell ill with a severe sore throat. Her employer asked if she would wish to go back to Germany, but Rosa refused and gave notice to leave shortly afterwards, in order to avoid being sent back.[8]

In attempting to estimate the number of French people leaving London, Huc-Hepher and Drake concede that return migrants are a 'notoriously elusive cohort the world over,' especially since there are no global figures on the scale of return migration.[9] There was a natural assumption that women would only be in service for a limited period of time, so it would not have seemed unusual to have returned, yet life in one of the world's biggest and most cosmopolitan cities must have had an effect on the next phase in these women's lives. Indeed, König's work on German servants in Paris revealed that after leaving, they 'often had different expectations for their own lives. Their ideas had changed about whom to choose as a partner but also about the age for marriage, the education of children, gender roles, and food.'[10] A mixture of emotions must have been at play when leaving (or faced with leaving) Britain, as London would have seemed to many of the women as being so very different to their own early experiences. Colin Pooley's work on the diary of a young Northern Irish woman who migrated to the capital, offers tangible evidence of the appeal of London, even on the eve of World War II: 'I see only a very few advantages and a whole lot of disadvantages [to leaving London]. The chief is, I think, that I would not be able to do exactly as I like. (Diary, 15

[6] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/7373/1933.
[7] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/8097/1932.
[8] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/7885/1931.
[9] S. Huc-Hepher and H. Drake, 'From the 16ème to South Ken? A Study of the Contemporary French Population in London', in M. Cornick and D. Kelly (eds.), *A History of the French in London: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity* (London, 2013), p. 394.
[10] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 110.

Sept. 1938)'.[11] This sense of freedom and disconnect from the closer supervision back home (from both family and society) might well have been difficult for migrant women to relinquish. Having brought back the modernity of the cities, did foreign servants then have difficulty reintegrating into their former (often provincial or rural) lifestyles? It is not surprising that many decided to find places in urban centres, or resisted leaving London altogether.

## *Forced departures*

> We have a lot of tiresome people in this country and we have to endure them, but there is no reason why we should endure them if they are foreigners.
> (Magistrate's comments on issuing a deportation order for convicted shoplifters)[12]

The fate of many servants, as discussed at length in Chapter 5, whose behaviour was deemed unacceptable (or was at risk thereof) faced either a formal deportation order (usually in cases of successful criminal prosecutions) or heavy official pressure, supported by protection organisations, to return to their own countries. Enshrined into law until the early 1920s, this social expectation that women from elsewhere would (and should) return to their rightful home in the absence of a responsible guardian, is embedded in the theme of the masterless woman, explored throughout this thesis. Having terms 'cut down' was a power granted to the Minister of Labour. Under the terms of the Aliens Order, permission to remain in the UK was predicated on holding a valid work permit; terminating that permit early effectively rendered the women illegal immigrants, and justified their departure.

In cases of successful criminal prosecutions, it was the prerogative of a magistrate under the Aliens Order to make a deportation order, which normally required the alien to be escorted immediately to a departing ship. As outlined in Chapter 3, deportation usually meant no further application to re-enter the UK could be made and no further work permits would be issued. It was not mandatory to deport foreign criminals, however, and custodial sentences were on occasion meted out without the condition of expulsion: Wally Breitbarth was sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment for larceny in 1932,[13] and Marie Uecker served a sentence of hard labour for stealing a motor rug.[14] Others

[11] Pooley, 'From Londonderry to London', p. 197.
[12] 'Servants go Shoplifting', *Hendon and Finchley Times,* 25 Dec 1931, p. 11.
[13] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/10013/2/1932.

served time before being deported. Marta Bottcher and Kathe Pickel, for example, served sentences in prison for not notifying changes of address to the local police and were subsequently deported.[15]

There were certainly severe consequences to being found guilty of a criminal offence, therefore, with young women facing either the harsh conditions of a foreign prison or deportation, or indeed both. But there were other instances when it was deemed better for them to be back in their own countries, either for what was considered their own sake, or to avoid having to house another prisoner in a London gaol or asylum. Magistrates had some degree of flexibility in this, but others played a part in the outcomes of criminal proceedings too. In such cases, no deportation order was sought, but the effective consequence for the individual was ejection from the UK. In the case of Marie Adelbert, (who had stolen the knives and travel clock from M&S; see Chapter 6), her employer vouched for her character and she avoided prison on two conditions: she was bound over in her own recognisance of £5 for six months, and had to agreed to be placed under the 'care' of Miss Balmforth, a Roman Catholic probation officer attached to the court.[16] Others were ejected without having to endure any kind of harsh prison conditions. Myrian Miko avoided both a prison sentence and a deportation order, despite being charged with two offences, on the condition that she 'left England and remained out of the Empire for three years' (the empire stipulation an unusual additional sanction that seems to emphasise the increasing rigidity of British 'borders').[17]

Many were deported through no fault of their own and in the absence of any crime. Failing to notify a change of address was explicitly illegal under the Order, with multiple instances of women falling foul of its stipulations and facing a magistrate. There were cases where such transgressions were handled with just a warning, and others in which it was often a useful charge on which to deport women whose behaviour was questionable. In a sad case involving an illegitimate baby, Eleanore Scholten was charged with failing to notify a change of address after staying a few days with a friend before entering a maternity home. The real reason for her ejection is hinted at in a *Morning Post* report of the trial: 'Superintendent Neal said he had information that Scholten was sent

[14] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/5105/1931.
[15] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1931, TNA, LAB 2/2083/ETAR/6580 1931.
[16] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/7598/1932.
[17] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/523/1933.

from Germany in order to dump her unwanted baby in England.'[18] The Home Office granted an order for deportation and the mother and baby were committed to prison to await departure.[19] Just as Lucassen found with foreign servants in the Netherlands, they faced the same risk of expulsion when their conduct was deemed "'frivolous" or "immoral" [even including] going out with (different) young men and coming home late'.[20] Women who have featured throughout this thesis faced forced repatriation by having their terms cut down. German-born Else Friedrich, for example, who 'proved unsatisfactory' and was described as a 'woman of loose moral standards'; after six years working in London her conditions were cut down and she was forced to leave.[21] Rosa Furi too, described as 'a very loose character', failed to notify changes of address and since she insisted she did not want to leave of her own accord, her conditions were cut down. Under the supervision of a police officer, the Sister Superior of the hostel where she was staying and the Swiss Benevolent Society, she eventually boarded the train home.[22]

The variety of societies instrumental in the positive outcomes of foreign-servant criminal cases was impressive: the NVA, the HWGL, Anglo-German Society, Swiss Benevolent Society, religious bodies, employers and well-meaning friends. They might have been motivated by sympathy at the age and perceived innocence of the girls involved, since many workers were uncomfortable committing such vulnerable young women to prison. Discovering that the employers of a young maid caught stealing were determined to prosecute her, Miss Seebo's 'heart was touched that one so young should be sent to prison'. She managed to persuade them that if the maid returned to Germany they would withhold proceedings to which the employers, eventually, agreed.[23] The Danish maids who were found guilty of stealing from M&S were charged £5 each, sentenced to 21 days' imprisonment and recommended for deportation. However, when the Danish Vice-Consul appealed to the magistrate on the basis that the girls had learnt their lesson and were sorry, it resulted in just a fine; the custodial sentence and deportation order were removed completely.[24] Ida

[18] 'Beaconsfield Court', *Morning Post*, 19 Aug 1933, p. 5.
[19] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/2279/1933.
[20] Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control', p. 331.
[21] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1929, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/2044/1929.
[22] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/2343/1927.
[23] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 113.
[24] 'Servants go Shoplifting', *Hendon and Finchley Times,* 25 Dec 1931, p. 11.

Sawalsky, a Christian maid in a poor situation in Brighton, was also repatriated thanks to the support of JAPGAW and the German consulate in 1907.[25]

Nevertheless, these organisations could work against the women too. The nature of her crime is unclear, but when Marguerite Chatelain faced a prison sentence, Mr Theo Ritter, former Chancellor of the Swiss Legation and then Secretary of the Swiss Benevolent Society, informed the magistrate that if he discharged her 'he would see that she returned to Switzerland that day, further that he will communicate with the Swiss Legation in London and have her passport cancelled so she could not return to this country'.[26] As a result, the magistrate agreed that 'on that condition' he would discharge Marguerite. The Society subsequently paid for her train fare. Elsewhere, Charlotte Butzke had been found guilty of the theft of items to the value of £1 from her employer. The magistrate had not sought to apply a deportation order, so the prosecutor himself offered to pay her fare back to Germany. In possession of the funds, she was placed in the care of Miss Evelyn Erbtosser, Secretary of the Anglo-German Agency, who agreed to see her off at Victoria station that afternoon.[27] The ayahs did not escape the state intrusion into their presumed desire to return home either, with the Ayahs' Home was called upon to assist in repatriating (via a working passage) a number of ayahs whose employers had abandoned them. In 1919, one found herself abandoned in a charity hospital after the death of her mistress. In the ensuing legal wrangles over who was responsible for her, it was decided to send her to the Ayahs' Home, from where she could work her passage back to India. Neither the India Office nor the ayah's employer nor the hospital was prepared to cover the cost of her train fare from Devon to London but, when it was discovered that she had some savings, it was decided she should pay for her own ticket.[28]

For the foreign servant women in Britain after the Aliens Order, the system was applied so flexibly that it was capable of both criminalising and exonerating misbehaviour. The very structural mechanisms on which these women had relied for support, accommodation and community simultaneously worked actively (whether for or against the servants' wishes) to expedite their

[25] HL, MS173/2/8/2, 26 Apr 1907.
[26] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2081/ETAR/8667/1932.
[27] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1933, TNA, LAB 2/2085/ETAR/9601/1933.
[28] Robinson, 'Travelling Ayahs', p. 52.

removal from the country. Returning women who stepped outside the accepted boundaries of social and legal expectations was a priority. Indeed, the prevailing attitude among government and protection agency staff was simply that 'she is better off in her own country than in London'.[29]

## Immigrants

### *Marriage and settlement*

Tracing women who stayed in the UK is a challenging task. If married, they would usually cease work as a servant and take their husband's name, so they become largely invisible again in the record. The literature assumes that domestic servants 'left their posts at the first possible opportunity, whether for a different kind of job or for marriage'.[30] Was this the same for foreign servants? A number of weddings were reported in sources, though it was noted by Gordon House in 1906 that the 'fortunes of marriage for our girls are not always auspicious'.[31] We are led to believe that that settling down was not a common occurrence, given the attention such events did attract. A French girl staying at Gordon House in 1907 had met an Englishman in 'comfortable' circumstances and settled in the UK, much to the 'joy' of the home.[32] And in 1907, Mary Coland's wedding took place at the SPH itself, with cakes donated by a well-wisher.[33] Some found onward travel awaiting them after marriage: 'This letter is to thank you most heartily for the wedding Bible and the little book. My husband joins me in appreciation of your good wishes for our new life in the foreign mission field.'[34] In 1906, a German and an Austrian were working together as maids when they both met their fiancés. One married an artist and moved to New Zealand while the other's husband was the proprietor of a laboratory in Liverpool, where they stayed.[35]

Detailed genealogical research into certain individuals also revealed marriages of foreign servants in Britain. Hildur Nilsson, a Swedish house-parlourmaid in Hampstead enumerated in the 1911 census, stayed on beyond World War I to marry George Worth, a 53-year-old widowed plumber

[29] 'Case Files', 1932, WL, 4NVA/6/2/3/02.
[30] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain, p. 197.
[31] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 114.
[32] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907* (1908), p. 107.
[33] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 23 May 1906.
[34] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 139.
[35] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 114.

and decorator, in 1919.[36] The witnesses to their marriage were both Swedes (Anna Madsen and Johan A. Holmqvist), suggesting she had wider connections within the London Swedish community. They settled into married life near Petersfield, Hants, where they were be found at the outbreak of war in 1939;[37] by the time of her husband's death in 1944, Hildur had anglicised her name to Hilda, perhaps a strategic move during wartime concerns over the foreign presence.[38] German-born Pauline Schweikert first arrived in London as a domestic servant in 1934 but having been exempted from internship in 1939, continued working as a parlourmaid in London throughout the war. As part of the internment assessment procedure, she was asked if she wished to be repatriated; her answer is recorded in the negative.[39] After the war, she married Paul Alexinsky at Kensington Register Office, a lieutenant in the Royal Medical Corps, though it was not possible to trace them further.[40] Swiss-born Rosa Zybach was working as a child's governess from 1924-26 when she was found to have been living with a married man (whose home she had broken up) and as a result had been refused permission to land by the immigration officer.[41] Somehow she managed to return to marry Jacob Rickli in Walthamstow in 1927,[42] and they are listed together on the 1939 Register with anglicised names, John and Rose.[43] John was working as a head waiter, though his nationality is unknown; as neither appeared in the alien internees list it might be assumed he was not of an enemy alien nationality. They had a child, Veronika, in 1929 and it seems they all settled in Essex where Rosa died in 1986, aged 85.[44] Such life histories are difficult to uncover in many cases, but offer rare opportunities to understand the impact of short-term service on a woman's life choices.

## *New occupations*

Despite the availability of, and perceived freedoms associated with, factory jobs, labour transfer between domestic work and factory work more generally was relatively uncommon. A British

[36] Ancestry.com, England & Wales Marriages, Hampstead, 1A/1389, Mar 1919, Worth/Nilsson
[37] 1939 Register, RG 101/2355F/010/44.
[38] Ancestry.com, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar, 1944, George Worth.
[39] 'Schweikert Pauline' 1939, Female Enemy Alien Exemption from Internment cards, London, TNA, HO396/83/801.
[40] Ancestry.com, England & Wales Marriages, Kensington, 5C/2708, Sep qtr. 1951, Alexinsky/Schweikert.
[41] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1925, TNA, LAB 2/2081/EDAR/3245/1925.
[42] It is not clear whether this was the same (married) man. Ancestry.com, England & Wales Marriages, West Ham, 4A/579, Jul 1927, Rickli/Zybach.
[43] 1939 Register, RG 101/0991B/004/7
[44] Ancestry.com, England & Wales Marriages, West Ham, 4A/586, Jul qtr. 1929, Veronika M. Rickli; Ancestry.com, England & Wales Births, Colchester, 9/2800, Feb 1986, Rosa Elizabeth Rickli.

Women's Industrial Council survey, from the beginning of the twentieth century, found that domestic servants were more likely to have worked as dressmakers or shop assistants than take industrial jobs.[45] For women who had initially relied heavily on residential employment on arrival, what occupational mobility did service offer them? Scholars elsewhere do justice to the topic connecting service (and unemployed servants) to prostitution.[46] There were very few instances of foreign servants suspected to be prostitutes in the sources consulted, though that is no suggestion that it was not happening. However, as Wierling observes, '[p]rostitution as a way out of the miseries of service is given more attention than more common routes of escape, like marriage, or alternative occupations.'[47] The different occupations in which the foreign servants engaged are presented here, though these are mostly evident from records of the interwar period. Todd claims that 'the striking difference between the 1900s and the 1940s was that young women were increasingly able to leave service for better-paid work rather than for marriage,' and this seems to be borne out in the evidence.[48]

**Needle trades**

Moch found that 'in the nineteenth century many women did not return to rural and small-town homes, but rather they used domestic service as an entrée into the city then moved from service into the needle trades'.[49] Delap too found service roles, such as a lady's maid, being an apprenticeship for further work, such as dressmaking.[50] This seems to be the case for foreign women too. Ilona Singer (Figure 47) was listed as a parlourmaid in the 1939 Register, but her police registration card records her as working as a dressmaker and a machinist from 1941 onwards.[51] Needle trades were often selected for girls at SPH who were not felt 'suited to service' (being weak or sick, for example): Regina Crongold was initially given a trial as a housemaid since she had good references, but she suffered a type of 'hysteria attack' and lost the use of both legs. Once out of the infirmary, she was put to work as a dressmaker instead.[52] Some seemed even to opt for the

[45] McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 47.
[46] See especially J. Laite, 'Between Scylla and Charybdis: Women's Labour Migration and Sex Trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century', *International Review of Social History*, 62/01 (2017) and Slater, 'Pimps Police and Filles de Joie.
[47] Wierling, 'Women Domestic Servants in Germany', p. 48
[48] Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain, p. 198.
[49] Moch, *Moving Europeans*, p. 141.
[50] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 46.
[51] 'Ilona Singer', 1937, TNA, MEPO 35/34/6.
[52] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 8 Mar 1905.

precarity of piecework needlework over residential service. Jewish Bertha Springer had been 'so kindly found' a position by Mrs Schiff looking after a child, but she lasted less than a month before returning to dressmaking.[53] Of course, for those who entered the country in the interwar years, their immigration conditions forbade them from entering any other occupation without prior permission from the Home Office. A Danish maid employed initially as a domestic was six months later found to have 'taken employment as a tailoress in Weymouth'. As a result her immigration condition was cut down and any further (domestic work) permits were blocked.[54] The interconnection between service and needlework was clear, but since needlework rarely entailed accommodation, it tended to be an option for those who had the means to live out or those housed in homes such as SPH.

**Hairdressing**

Living-in offered servants the opportunity to save more of their wages. As explored in Chapter 3, the considerable distance from home meant a potential freedom from the burden of remittances, which meant some women were able to save considerable sums. The ayah stranded at the Devon hospital (above), for example, had saved £40 in her Post Office account, equivalent to almost two years' salary for a nursemaid in London at the time. McBride found that during the nineteenth century, 'servants used the period of service to acquire either the skills or the working capital or both to launch a small commercial venture, perhaps as a dressmaker or hairdresser',[55] and this also endured until at least the 1930s.

Among the few surviving police registration cards held at the National Archives is one belonging to Ms Irma Ceuterick, a Belgian national who arrived in London in 1920 aged 24 to work as a lady's maid.[56] Over the following thirty years her addresses and occupations were recorded every time they changed, totalling over seventy addresses in London, the Home Counties and Nottingham, and over fifteen changes of employment type. Initially engaged as lady's maid to a wealthy aristocrat, she travelled around the country and overseas to Jamaica, but from 1928 she began to

[53] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 10 Oct 1906.
[54] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1927, TNA, LAB 2/2082/EDAR/7151/1927.
[55] T. McBride, 'Social Mobility for the Lower Classes: Domestic Servants in France', *Journal of Social History*, 8/1 (1974), p. 64.
[56] Irma's work history is listed on her Registration Card ('Irma Ceuterick', 1920, TNA, MEPO/35/24/1).

take on hairdressing roles as a ladies hairdresser in between positions as maid, some temporary contracts as an assembler at the Earls Court Exhibition after the end of the war, and several short periods of unemployment. She registered briefly as a child minder then went back to being a lady's maid, companion and eventually a housekeeper-cook. At the end of 1952, Irma was awarded naturalisation, thus ending the catalogue of entries, and indeed the tedious responsibility of reporting to a police station every time she moved. She died unmarried in 1988, aged 92. Her movement through three decades of work (and periods of unemployment) are illuminating, offering a very rare glimpse into the progression of a career servant during the inter- and post-war years: it seems hairdressing was the only real employment option available to her beyond service, thus confirming the narrow prospects faced by women during this period.

**Hospitality and nursing**

A variety of other possible occupations were revealed in the course of the research. Should they have been brave enough to risk deportation for entering into a non-service occupation, some found employment in restaurant, café or hotel work, which had, until World War I, traditionally been the preserve of foreign workers.[57] Bertha Picard was found a place as a housemaid by SPH when she arrived in the UK in 1907, but a month later left her position to work at 'a restaurant in Whitechapel'. This was likely only possible since she claimed to have had 'a young man who will look after her', and as such she was not reliant on work-provided accommodation.[58] Others were able to move into employment through vocational training, though most not until after World War II. Having worked as a servant up until and throughout the war before her marriage, Pauline Schweikert was registered as an assistant nurse by 1949, forming part of the infant NHS which was to rely so heavily on foreign staff.

The superintendents who featured so prominently in the lives of London's foreign homes were often the product of service themselves. While there is no trace of Miss Seebo before her appointment to Gordon House in 1883, her brother's wife, Mrs Seebo, who assisted her in the

[57] P. Panayi and S. Manz, 'The Rise and Fall of Germans in the British Hospitality Industry, c. 1880-1920', *Food and History*, 11/2 (2013), p. 243. Panayi and Manz estimate that ten per cent of waiters in pre-1914 London were German. The familiar trope of the foreign waiter continued to feature in popular TV programmes such as Fawlty Towers as late as the 1980s.
[58] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 8 Aug 1907.

management of the home was formerly a German governess at a Yorkshire boarding school. Gertrude Kurzhals, who assumed Miss Seebo's duties on her retirement, was previously a governess; in 1901 she was working for a surgeon's family in Northamptonshire. And before taking over at SPH, Miss Catella had been housekeeper for at the Jewish Home for Incurables. These (female-environment) trajectories from service to management of a domestic home or agency were not uncommon among immigrant women in America. Lintelman observed the same phenomenon among former Swedish domestic servants who subsequently set up their own recruitment agencies and became sponsors of new migrants.[59] Such female-centred networks are rarely explored in the British literature, however, but these connections stretched further than just London or even Britain.

## Onward migrants

### *Travelling servants*

What is strongly apparent is the continuous international dimension to these women's lives. Perhaps having moved country once, the prospect of onward migration was not as daunting, as Henkes' German maid's experience from Chapter 3 demonstrates.[60] Emboldened by their ability to adapt, and armed with improved English skills, many women left London for other countries entirely. Weaving together census records, birth, marriage and death listings and passenger lists, it has been possible to trace onward journeys made by some of the women found in the qualitative sources and census records, to understand how London service was able to connect young working women to further international futures.

After being enumerated as a servant in 1911, Rosa Erni travelled out the following year to Adelaide, Australia, intending to live there. Aged 27 she is listed on the passenger list as a 'domestic', alongside 22-year-old Julie Erni, possibly a sister. Twelve years later, she is to be found again on a passenger list headed back from Australia to London, this time listed as a housekeeper and embarking once again for Australia that year as a governess. Since occupations were supplied by the

[59] J. K. Lintelman, "'Our Serving Sisters": Swedish-American Domestic Servants and Their Ethnic Community', *Social Science History*, 15/3 (1991), p. 392.
[60] Henkes, 'Maids on the Move', p. 227.

passengers themselves, it is perhaps difficult to rely on them as accurate descriptors of their roles, but that Rosa was still working in some kind of service and continued to be internationally mobile is of relevance here. Rosa's experience of international mobility was not unique at all. Indeed, Adam McKeown writes that '[u]nderstanding migration simply as relocation from one nation to another tends to create a simplified historical narrative whereby home is conflated with the past, and historical change is identified with integration and settlement in the new land.'[61] The movement backwards and forwards, to and from work placements, thus further complicates our understanding of migration as a linear process or indeed one that frames destinations in the singular.

In part, the international (if segregated) environments of mixed nationalities in London's foreign servant hostels fostered a sense of mobility. Such a concentration of domestic servants in one space meant that women at Gordon House, the Ayahs' Home and even SPH found job opportunities through dormitory talk or the superintendents' contacts. The homes were always pleased to record at meetings or publish in their reports news received from former residents. Girls at the SPH would send back word of their arrival in New York, Toronto, Paris and South Africa. Geitel Beluche's uncle wrote to communicate his appreciation to the SPH Committee when she arrived in Canada in 1905, for instance.[62] Others accompanied their employers wherever they were bound, exposing them to international travel and culture that few of their peers would have experienced. In 1898 one servant wrote that she was going to Johannesburg with an English family;[63] a decade later a German girl sail for India with her new employers;[64] and in 1909 a Jewish lady's maid found a position accompanying a mistress to Australia.[65]

London for these women was therefore neither a destination nor a starting point, nor was it necessarily their first time or position overseas. In an account of two German girls recognising each other at the supper table while staying at Gordon House in 1906, it transpired they had 'often used to see each other in China,' possibly accompanying employers.[66] Indeed, while it often functioned

[61] McKeown, 'Global Migration, 1846-1940', p. 180.
[62] HL, MS173 2/8/2, 27 Sep 1905.
[63] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 137.
[64] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907* (1908), p. 107.
[65] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1909*, p. 96.
[66] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 114.

as a stepping stone to another destination, London also represented a place to return to – sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently – at a later point in women's lives. A German woman who had lived at Gordon House in its early days returned to London twenty years later, after the death of her husband. They had lived for many years in South Africa and, in widowhood, she had travelled back to England to find a situation through the home.[67] Another had spent thirty years working in service and was travelling back to Germany to retire. Arriving from Japan, she spent 'a little holiday in the old Home' before she returned to Germany, 'which through her small savings and a legacy she could now do.'[68] Keeping in touch with the superintendent and the community at Gordon House was thus an important function of keeping open options later in life. This accords with modern accounts of return migration, in which it is 'often the case that migrants go home to retire, having spent their working lives abroad'.[69]

The international movement of servants occurred throughout the period. Letters sent back to Gordon House's Superintendent tracked women to destinations all over the world, from addresses in Colorado, New York, Geneva, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Japan. In 1892, letters to the Gordon House Institute came from 'all parts of Germany, from Holland and Switzerland, and even from China, Brazil, and America'.[70] In 1900, 'Four or five […] found good situations in South Africa and America and have written to say how happy they are.'[71] Their new lives away from London were not always a positive step forward though. One wrote of her difficulties in her new home: 'Since I landed here in New York I have had so many ups and downs and jostles and trials that I am quite down-hearted. Work is much harder here and —a great disappointment! — wages are not so high as I expected. I have seen many who have been 20 years here but they cannot yet forget that they are foreigners in America.'[72] In contrast, Frida Glatthaar (see above) found British working conditions the worst she'd experienced:

> I have been in service 20 years 15 of which have been abroad but thank God have never before met anything like this. […] the nigth (*night*) not ligth (*light*) at the important places -

[67] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1906*, p. 114.
[68] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1911*, p. 104.
[69] K. Koser, *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2007), p. 51.
[70] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1892*, p. 161.
[71] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1900*, p. 104.
[72] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1889*, p. 79.

> it is against the Law in many fault, I know in America and in Germany the Department of Labour will control as well the Department of Health.[73]

In demonstrating her awareness of the hygiene and employment standards in Germany and the USA, she shows how women were capable of mobilising their international experience to improve working conditions. Experience in a variety of homes and countries may well have emboldened some of the servants to expect more from their employment terms, and may also have enabled different methods and approaches to housework to travel across boundaries.[74] Harzig and Hoerder, for example, describe how domestics from Prague and Budapest helped to create Viennese cuisine in Austria, demonstrating that such influences were portable through migrant servants.[75]

Onward movement abroad was sometimes driven by periods of unemployment, particularly in the lead up to World War I: 'Employment has not been so easy to find during the past year especially for those whom we might term nursery helps or governesses,' claimed the Gordon House annual report. Mistresses sought better educated young women and more robust qualifications than could be offered by those recently arrived in the capital.[76] Gordon House advised these women to look elsewhere for work, 'in another part of the British Empire', in particular, and accordingly several emigrated to Canada 'where they quickly found situations.'[77] At the heart of the Empire, then, London was an important site of connection to English-speaking countries across the Dominions and beyond.

Tapping into the British Empire for work and connections was precisely how the shipboard ayahs and amahs were able to find work. Based near the shipping ports of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Karachi, the Indian travelling ayahs were well placed to be allocated by the shipping companies to attend to families for the journey. Although most plied the same routes to and from London, there is plenty of evidence that many were hired in one port, set down in another, and worked their

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[73] 'Blacklisted Aliens', 1932, TNA, LAB 2/2084/ETAR/8097/1932. This is a translation made by a Home Office official of the original letter written in German.
[74] See L. K. Humphreys, 'Domestic Labour , Metropolitan Middle – Class Households , and the Wider World , 1850 – 1914' (PhD, Queen Mary, University of London, 2016) for a detailed analysis of global domestic influences in London households.
[75] M. König, *Deutsche Handwerker, Arbeiter Und Dienstmädchen in Paris: Eine Vergessene Migration Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Mu□ nchen, 2003); Harzig and Hoerder, 'Femina Migrans', p. 156.
[76] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1908*, p. 103.
[77] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1908*, p. 104.

return passage back to yet another destination. As British interests expanded in Asia, so their need for flexible travelling nurses increased, driving a market in local women as travelling nurses across the empire. Lachhi accompanied a number of different families as a travelling ayah throughout her working life.[78] Firstly, she was married to Param Singh and moved to Amritsar. From there she made many journeys to and from the ports of Bombay and Calcutta, each at least a day's train journey from her home. The earliest trip she can be identified on from the passenger lists was in 1920, aged 24, accompanying an army officer's family. In 1928 she travelled from Ireland to Bombay. A year later she travelled to London, staying at the Ayahs' Home and returning to Bombay a few months later. In 1935 she was ayah to a merchant's family staying in Surrey; the following year she stayed with her charges at a London hotel and in October 1938 she and a Scottish nurse travelled from Edinburgh to Liverpool to board a ship along with three children under four years old.[79] Yet ayahs were to be found further afield too, travelling to Australia, Japan and African ports as well as to other European centres in Italy, France and Germany. A painting in the National Maritime Museum collections shows a sari-wearing ayah holding a Caucasian child on a ship in the West Indies ('Passengers Aboard the Garonne in the West Indies, 1893', by W.L. Wyllie), indicating their presence whither the increasingly mobile British family was bound.

### *Occupational mobility*

For those wishing to travel further, there were few clear occupational choices available. Domestic service provided shelter, food and wages from the moment of arrival, and was, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, the most socially-acceptable occupation for working women away from home. It was not the only option recorded in the sources, though. Accounts of missionary and religious work were printed in the pages of Gordon House reports, though featuring these may have been over-representative, given the Christian philanthropic profile of the organisation. Nevertheless, the very nature of their work took women to distant destinations. In 1898, one former Gordon House girl was 'glad to write you that I have passed the last examination and have been accepted by the Missionary Board and in November I expect to go to China.'[80] In 1887,

[78] According to her passport she was 5' 4½" tall and born in 1896 in Bakloh, one of the hill stations in northern India.
[79] Robinson, 'Travelling Ayahs', pp. 57-9.
[80] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 139.

Gordon House played host to a talk by Mrs Sorabji,[81] of Poona, who 'gave an very interesting account of God's work in that part of India' to a room 'packed' full of German girls. 'It so happened that Mrs Sorabji was desirous of finding some young friend who would go with her to India as a bible visitor and worker.' Some days later, one Fraulein Bertha Fehr (boarding at Gordon House) volunteered and subsequently accompanied Mrs Sorabji upon her return three months later.[82]

On rare occasions, occupational mobility beyond service and missionary work was evidenced. Liesel Happ, whose dalliance with the subversive Forcan had her placed on the government's blacklist, was subsequently found travelling with him from Madeira back to Plymouth in 1934: both were listed as journalists, so she had clearly moved away from service through her association with him. In a letter to Miss Seebo in 1898, one former Gordon House girl wrote: 'I have now been seven years in New Zealand […]. For the last five years I have held an appointment under the Government as operator in the Telephone Exchange. It is a good position for me, better than that of a lady's maid'.[83] The very same 'old German inmate' is referred to again in 1907. Apparently having 'done well in the telephone department in New Zealand', she had been given '12 months holiday and is going round the world to see her relatives and friends. It was a great pleasure to the superintendent to welcome her especially as they had kept up correspondence together ever since she left'.[84] Such instances of long distance friendship, contact and indeed occupational mobility are rare to find in the record, but offer a window onto the onward lives of former foreign servants in London.

Even those who had married in Britain forged new lives and work opportunities abroad. Pauline Savidan was born in Lannion, Brittany, France, and moved to London to work as a lady's maid in a large household in Westminster, alongside 15 other servants, where she was enumerated in the 1911 census.[85] In 1917 she married British-born engineer, William Mitcheson and together they

[81] Susie Sorabji was a missionary and sister of Cornelia Sorabji, first female advocate of India and the first woman to read law at Oxford University. Their father was a missionary and Susie worked in Zenana circles.
[82] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1887*, pp. 151-2
[83] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1898*, p. 137.
[84] *HWGL. The Work of the Year 1907* (1908), pp. 108-9.
[85] Ancestry.com, 1911 Census, RG 14/433 p. 1.

emigrated first to Vancouver, and then to Los Angeles, California, where they applied for naturalisation in the 1930s.[86] A housewife in the 1920 census in Canada, she subsequently entered clerical work, and was enumerated in 1930 in California as a doctor's assistant at a hospital.[87]

In some cases it has been possible to piece together events over a much longer period of a servant's life, showing the combination of occupational, social and international mobility. P____ L____'s case was exceptionally demonstrative of this phenomenon.[88] Born in 1912 in Bavaria, the seventh of ten children, she moved to London aged 20 to work as a domestic servant, during which time she met and accepted a proposal of marriage to a man twenty years her senior. It was subsequently discovered that he had financial and mental health issues, and as a result P____ was warned by both the German Consul and the NVA, such that the engagement was broken off. Her background was described as 'socially distinctly of a lower standard than the man', and during the period leading up to his trial for financial fraud, it was agreed she would go into hiding to prevent him from making contact with her. With this episode behind her, P____ remained in the UK and was exempted from internment as an enemy alien at the outbreak of World War I by virtue of being a probationary nun at the Convent of Notre Dame, Northampton. In 1953 she appeared on a ship's list heading for South Africa, listed as a teacher and bound for the Convent of Notre Dame, Forest Row. Her obituary in 2009 described how she had gone to London as a 'governess' in order to learn languages, and subsequently joined Holy Orders in 1937, going on to teach languages at Notre Dame convent schools in South Africa, where she died, aged 98. From a large, modest family in rural Germany and escaping marriage to an older man, working as a servant in London led to a life in religious work and teaching overseas.

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[86] Ancestry.com, England & Wales Marriages, St. George Hanover Square, 1A/920, Jun qtr. 1917, Mitcheson/Savidan; Ancestry.com, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Naturalization Index Cards of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, Central Division (Los Angeles), 1915-1976, 1935, Pauline A. Mitcheson.

[87] Ancestry.com, California Census 1930, Huntington Park, Los Angeles, 9B/1317.

[88] The conditions of her anonymity prevents me from sharing named source material, but the case is held in 'Case Files', 1932, WL, 4NVA/6/2/5/04; further records were found on Ancestry.com: Female Enemy Alien Exemption from Internment cards, London, TNA, HO396/51; 1939 Register, RG 101/6110K/014/24; Passenger Lists Leaving UK, 20 Aug 1953, Southampton-Cape; and her obituary published online in *S___ C___*, Apr 2011.

## Shifting goals

In charting the onward movement of these women, it is important to remember that they did not necessarily set out with any clear intentions of their eventual futures, in contrast to the migration theories based on rational push/pull assessment mechanisms. Marie Rasmine Pedersen, for example, originally claimed in her correspondence with the Ministry of Labour that she wished to work in a British family in order to perfect her English in preparation for mission work in India. Sent to London via the Danish YWCA, her goal was to spend a few years in service before being sent into the field. But her file reveals that after just over three years in London, she was engaged to marry an Englishman, and intended to stay. The experiences of the foreign women are explained less by linear one-way movement and more by episodic experience, shaped both by structural constraints and individual purposeful and conscious decision-making within those. While, on arrival in America, foreign women were using service as a bridge to assimilation and further work opportunities, according to the literature,[89] the experience of foreign women in London was more international. Women wrote back to Gordon House from all over the world, compared to just the few who found themselves in more provincial cities in Britain, and there is very little evidence of many of them entering employment in other sectors; indeed, until the cessation of the domestic work permit that tied servants' immigration to one occupation, it was difficult for foreign women between 1920 and 1939 to demonstrate any occupational mobility out of service at all.

It has been assumed in the literature that service as a lifecycle occupation was endured for a period before marriage, or in very few cases to lifelong careers as servants. This final part of the thesis has challenged this narrow view by exploring a number of diverse ways women's lives developed once they left service. Where possible, and using extensive nominal record linkage, it has been shown that foreign servant experiences in London were a catalyst for more than marriage or returning to their natal families. While their motivations prior to emigration defined why they left, it would be simplistic to think subsequent choices were not altered in some way by their experiences thereafter. Some women left service but not London. Some left London but not service. Some left both and some left neither. But at all stages they were making purposeful decisions based on information

[89] Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, and Sager, 'The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant', for example.

available to them at the time, and usually without family or community involvement, demonstrating large degrees of agency not hitherto recognised in the literature. Migration through service was thus, for them, a constantly evolving decision-making process that had no fixed beginning and no planned end.

# Conclusion

The accounts of what happened to the foreign servants after they left service or London (or both) bring their story of London service to an end while bringing into focus the themes of the thesis as a whole. What were the implications and consequences (positive or otherwise) of being foreign, female and employed in service during the period 1881–1939? How were these women able to leverage their own choices through what many see as a restrictive occupation? And what do their experiences reveal about how service migration functioned for thousands of foreign women working as servants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

The I-CeM big data census project was instrumental in defining the size and shape of the foreign servant group in Britain, and brings into focus their exceptional marginalisation in the literature to date, most especially by historians of British immigration. The numbers are unavoidable: upwards of 200,000 women experienced service in Britain from 1881 to 1939. Further, the newly-enacted immigration laws connecting women to service, combined with post-war economic upheaval in Europe, had the effect of stimulating migrant numbers to Britain, challenging the notion that significant migrations ceased after 1914, as economic historians such as Williamson posit.[90] In many ways, the women shared features with their British counterparts: they found little pleasure in the restrictive nature of the occupation, they worked the same hours for similar rates of pay, their progression through the servant ranks was linked to their age and, indeed, the majority were young and single, somewhere between school and marriage. The two cohorts both displayed enormous variety, as much in relation to their own background origins as those of their employers, and in this they add to our understanding of domestic service, as a vast and diverse sector, from the late Victorian to interwar periods. While many foreign servants worked in wealthy households at West-End addresses, an increasing proportion were to be found in the single servant household of more modest means and as such do not form a superior class of servants as had previously been assumed. Those with the least choice were often the youngest, those who had not travelled beyond

[90] As argued by Mckeown, 'Global Migration, 1846-1940', p. 176.

their homes before, as well as those arriving penniless with little prior service experience, often Jewish women fleeing Eastern Europe. Service for them resembled the subsistence that it offered to groups such as British workhouse girls. By contrast, certain nationalities, ethnicities and age groups were appealing to the London employer for certain roles: the ayahs and amahs in shipboard childcare, the Swiss as nursery nurses and indeed the under 30s for most positions. But the nationality-linked job types were not as dominant as expected; far more typical for a foreign servant in London was as a general servant in a small household. These findings challenge our understanding of foreign servants as luxury accessories, as asserted by Horn, and instead reveal an emerging peripheral employer class composed of foreigners willing to hire other non-British staff.[91] The combined quantitative and qualitative approach to the analysis reveals a hidden multitude of foreign women servants, most of whom moved in and out of the sector and country between each census year, indicating how an uncritical assessment of census returns in relation to international migrants completely distorts our understanding of their presence.

That histories of immigration and diaspora in Britain have been written without recognising (if not dedicated to) one of the largest occupational group of foreigners is telling: migration theory is based on *homo migrans*. Women, hidden in private homes and invisible as a discrete group, have hitherto been unable to compete with the dominance of the male migrant in British accounts of immigration and migration more generally.[92] The act of migration for these women was not a singular decision made at the point of origin, based on a rational comparison of conditions and wages, standards of living and transition costs in the host and sending countries. Migration for them was piecemeal. Messy, even. Their motivations were a broad mixture of expectations, where economic gain played only one part. Neoclassical migration theories, derived from orthodox economics, are based on rational *man* assessing push/pull factors before emigrating, but such presumptions are excessively individualistic and fail to account for the constrictions in the decision-making process faced by the women. Moving from home to a local town to a city and even to other countries before reaching London was characteristic of these women's experiences, in line with

[91] P. Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Stroud, 2004), p. 35.
[92] See especially work by Kushner and Panayi.

Baines' argument.[93] Since at every stage they were responding to changing situations and acting on shifting levels of information, such theories are thus unfitted to explain the combination of restrictive (oppressive even) structural contexts as well as the purposeful behaviour they were able to assert within these as single women abroad and away from home. This challenges what scholars such as Bras and McBride have asserted about service functioning as processes of social mobility, bridging or urbanisation. Such analyses appear too linear and premeditated to explain the episodic approach that shaped foreign servants' lives, in how they responded to opportunities or succumbed to misfortunes. Indeed, according to their arguments, London should have represented a 'destination' for these women, yet evidence of the servants' onward lives suggest the city, including the networks they built within it, was actually a portal to further mobility.

The mobile and indeed dispersed nature of service should also sharpen our definition of what it means to be a settled diaspora, and how such groups fractured along class lines. This was evident in the hierarchies of charitable giving in servant homes, and the placement of servants in households of extended communities of the diaspora, to wealthy Germans and ordinary Russians alike. Traditional analyses of people and occupations associated with certain nationalities have their place in scholarship, but the overemphasis on their importance as breadwinning occupations have not only reduced our understanding of diaspora as being bound to physical places (the Swiss in Soho or the German settlements around Camden or Islington),[94] but in doing so scholars such as Panayi and Holmes have cropped the experiences of vast numbers of foreign female domestic workers from historical analysis, dispersed as they were. Instead, by tracing the servant throughout her migration experience, the thesis has revealed a female-centred spatial map of a London that is little known: from stations to rescue homes to suburban villas to churches to shopping streets to prisons to westward-bound docks. Such lone female presence in the traditionally masculine city is at odds with our understanding of women as creatures of immobility, home, the local and the family, a perception highlighted by both Massey and Walkowitz.[95] Treading in the footsteps of foreign

[93] Baines, 'European Labor Markets', pp. 38-39.
[94] P. Barber, *'A Curious Colony' Leicester Square and the Swiss* (London, 2011); W. F. Brand, *London Life Seen with German Eyes* (London, 1902), p. 117; also see D. Renshaw, 'The Other Diasporas: Western and Southern European Migrants in Charles Booth's Life and Labour of the People in London', *Journal of Migration History*, 5/1 (2019).
[95] Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 9 and Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 24.

servants maps a new diaspora in the capital, one that skirts the traditional centres of a foreign male or family presence and instead crosses parish borders and household thresholds to extend our understanding of a layered, intersectional London with women at its heart.

The international infrastructure that emerged in the 1880s to protect the perceived vulnerability of the migrant young woman effectively became a space to sustain her international mobility, offering opportunities for decision-making and independence as a result. The help provided by the NVA and its international counterparts to unaccompanied foreign women, provided both the means for them to investigate positions and conditions in advance and the reassurance to their own families of the safety of their migrant daughters en route and on arrival. They were able to make use of this servant superhighway to find jobs, verify the suitability of employers, travel safely and co-opt local support in times of need. Beyond their work, they made use of agencies, clubs, hostels and national societies for building friendships, seeking practical help, recruitment, recuperation and a social life. Indeed, this approach, using Giddens' structuration theory model to find the spaces in which migrant servants found ways to leverage opportunity, reveals a level of agency not hitherto acknowledged in the literature. The findings thus align with newer scholarship (such as Schrover or Agustín) that seeks to move the focus from victimhood narratives to more nuanced interpretations of agency, such as 'multiple motivations that undergird meaningful action [and] motivations that exceed rational calculation and articulated intentions'.[96]

The internationally-connected global network of safe passage, advocacy and protection concealed a darker and more coercive role of surveillance and control, however. Responding to the threat of white slavery, protection organisations and subsequently charities and national associations developed functions to combat both the temptations and the dangers for women 'abroad' in London. By the turn of the century, this combined with a social alarm at the growing independence of the working-class young woman. Both narratives have their genealogies in earlier social attitudes towards the rightful and appropriate place for women: to be 'mastered' and connected to a 'place', through service, surveillance and settlement. This endured until at least the interwar period, where

[96] Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration'; Agustín, 'Challenging Place: Leaving Home for Sex'; Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', p. 335.

it was enshrined in British immigration policy encouraging migrant women (but not men) to access a very specific sector of the indoor economy: domestic service. Indeed, it was not until 1993 that 'au pair' visas ceased to be issued to women only, when British immigration law was altered to admit male applicants.[97]

Exploring the space between structural forces and individual decisions to foreground personhood has brought the findings of this thesis in line with those of Agustín and Laite. Although working on prostitution migration, an occupation perceived to be just as dirty, degrading and victimised as service, they both argue that the prostitutes were able to exercise levels of agency not normally associated with their positions. The women's own wishes to change their lives for the better they felt could be achieved through a particular occupational sector, in which they too made conscious decisions, preparations and judgements along their migration routes. In aligning the work with such person-centred understanding of migrants, it simultaneously challenges much of the literature on domestic service migration as a temporary bridging mechanism prior to full assimilation/acculturation into the host society as advanced by scholars of North American immigration such as Meyerowitz or Katzman.[98] That so many foreign women continued in service both in London and in other parts of the world, as well as so few marrying locally, does not suggest foreign servants sought to escape service as soon as possible or gave up work as soon as a marriage proposal was secured. In this sense, therefore, scholarship such as Horn's that posits service as a last resort, or as a discrete period of economic necessity between the natal and marital homes, is not applicable to the foreign servants in this research and forces us to consider service instead as containing latent possibility.[99] Simultaneously, a new understanding of service as a global strategy for women's mobility extends Todd's and Delap's work on the continuities rather than the decline of service in the interwar period, whilst challenging them to see their work both in a more international context and in longer perspective.[100]

[97] R. Cox and N. Busch, '"This Is the Life I Want"', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 6/4 (2016), p. 324.
[98] Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, and D. M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York, 1978).
[99] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, p. 36.
[100] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, and Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain'.

As proxy for her natal family, the purity and charity organisations involved in the servant superhighway acted *in loco parentis*, a role which was absorbed eventually into state legislation. These institutionalised social attitudes reinforced earlier notions of unmarried (unmastered) women as ideally static and passive. The social, philanthropic and state backdrop to this sixty year period, then, reveals a much longer association between unsupervised women and the challenge of controlling them, and in this sense really extends the scholarship that focuses on rescue organisations as a purely Victorian or post-Stead phenomenon.[101] The role of immigration policies in the interwar years served to reinforce both Victorian notions of the feminine virtue of domesticity and of the rightful place of vulnerable (i.e. othered) women to be in a home, as well as earlier concepts of settlement and surveillance. Although writing about compulsory service in the medieval period, Bennett's observation could equally apply to the period 1881-1939: 'service was always about more than labour shortage, for it was imbued from the outset with anxieties about not only uppity workers […] but also women on their own.'[102]

While connecting the structural constraints that bound them to much earlier social attitudes to mobile women, focusing on the period 1881-1939 has also revealed a rupture in 1920 as to how women before and after the Aliens Order experienced service. The detailed analysis of the policy changes in the years after the Aliens Order (Chapter 3) directly challenges Kushner's chronology of changes to the permit system.[103] Further, this has implications for Delap, Holmes and others whose understanding of foreigners in pre-World War II domestic service relies on his inaccurate interpretation.[104] The impact of the interwar regulations had a marked effect on the women servants, and while supervision and social attitudes towards women outside the home changed little, the threat of deportation for deviant behaviour exposed the later cohorts to particularly brutal and discriminatory treatment. Tying immigration status to employment (particularly one in a private home) likely exacerbated exploitative forced labour and intensified the power imbalance in the employment relationship, where a maid could be dependent on her employer's temperament, or her own moral behaviour, for her right to remain in Britain.

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[101] For example, Attwood, 'Stopping the Traffic'.
[102] Bennett, 'Compulsory Service in Late Medieval England', p. 41.
[103] Kushner, 'An Alien Occupation', p. 557.
[104] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p. 90 and Holmes, 'Love, Labour, Loss', p. 2.

In other ways, changes and continuities across the period can be explained by the domestic service market itself. Initially employed in upper servant positions in large, wealthy establishments, the skilled lady's maid was forced to downgrade her expectations after the excesses of large staff retinues in the early twentieth century were scaled back, and the advent of interwar suburban life brought mistress and maid into closer contact. While earlier servants operated similarly to their British counterparts in securing work, and were often positioned as representing a positive difference within the household, later in the period women were sought to prop up the service sector in suburban and remote homes on the edge of London, working for employers who were, themselves, on the periphery of middle-class society who struggled to recruit locally. These divisions in opportunity within the domestic service market add significantly to scholarship on service as an amorphous, all-absorbing sector during the period, and help to segment both the discrete servant groups and the employers they served. Despite new employment opportunities for women emerging in the interwar period, the servants were prevented from moving out of service by the domestic service permit regulations. Hindering their ability to 'get on', this may have caused women to leave Britain altogether, and may explain the multinational destinations that appear in the record. Nevertheless, a more positive legacy of this period was in the infrastructure itself. For so many Jewish women to have found sanctuary through service in Britain in the late 1930s,[105] relied on the provision of servant permits, the acceptance of foreigners as indoor servants and a model for supporting foreign females away from home; all of which were forged over many years since the 1880s.

The women who were able to demonstrate the most agency were those who had access to an urban network that functioned similarly to a family structure. Leveraging support from organisations such as Gordon House or the Swiss Benevolent Society could mean access to a job, despite having no references, or to a place of leisure and friendship despite the long hours of service. And even for those who had been found guilty in court, financial assistance or a suspended sentence was possible with the right connections to a support agency run for foreigners. Arriving in London in poorer

[105] Kushner, 'Asylum or Servitude?'.

circumstances, the Jewish refugees of the late nineteenth century had far less choice. Poor, treated as children and set to work to earn their keep they had few alternatives, but many still demonstrated agency through resistance or defiant rejection of help. Women able to speak (or write) in English were able to seek support themselves, allowing the ayahs and amahs, with experience in the language through raising British children, to navigate transport networks, appeal for government help or buy goods to trade back home. While the sources do not reveal clear class origins of most of the women, Gordon House residents were considered to be of poor or modest means throughout the period.[106] If women had to be more educated to secure the upper servant roles of children's nurses or lady's maids, it follows their own backgrounds were probably more comfortable. However, it was not clear whether those of more comfortable family backgrounds were able to exert a greater influence over their own circumstances and there was no discernible direct link between the upper servants and access to support. Indeed, youth and visible vulnerability engendered the greatest sympathy among members of the public and authorities, which in many cases led to positive outcomes for the women. Nevertheless, the converse was also true, in that women over 30 were deemed old enough to cope alone. Those able to demonstrate the most resilience in service were therefore likely younger, English-speaking servants with access to a co-national or co-religious network.

What was clear was in a growing market for servants from 1880 onwards, was that foreign servants had little competition for work. To avoid poor working conditions they only needed to move jobs; the longer they were in London, and the more people they came into contact with, the easier that became. However, the Aliens Order of 1920 represented a sudden contraction in their ability to exert agency over their lives. The strategies they had used to maximise their gains (in wages, working conditions, geographic proximity to social centres) suddenly came under greater scrutiny with severe consequences; their behaviour (either in, outside or out of work) was now linked to their desirability as a migrant in Britain, with strong similarities to other European contexts.[107] The inconsistency with which the rules were applied by the authorities – sometimes deporting a woman on the basis of job-hopping other times allowing her to stay after committing a crime – meant the

[106] The 'poor but respectable' women, for example, at Gordon House (*HWGL. The Work of the Year 1911*, p. 100).
[107] Especially in the Netherlands: Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control', p. 331.

landscape in which the foreign women were operating was no longer clear or predictable and blurred the boundaries of job hierarchies, age, nationality and experience. Just as in Europe, recruitment of overseas servants in the interwar period became more targeted and planned, rather than unsolicited,[108] and geopolitical changes saw the disappearance of the poor Eastern European Jewish arrivals and an increase in Belgian refugees and, later, Germans and Austrians. Despite these shifts, access to a support network was no less important, however, and the strength of the networks many servants were able to build is a testament to their understanding of the need for support as single migrants abroad, connections which in some cases spanned many decades. Their experiences of a geographically- and socially-diverse free time disrupt notions of service as a hidden, isolated occupation, as claimed by Davidoff,[109] or of foreigners integrating and communing with their British neighbours, as Tabili argues.[110] Instead, their networks operated well beyond their individual workplaces, often away from a settled diaspora. The findings thus accord better with May's work on migrant servant networks in New York as being a means to sustain themselves in the absence of family, legislative protection or unions.[111]

By placing the individuals at the centre of this study, and by connecting the micro-historical with the urban and global context, the focus of the thesis has moved migrant women servants from victimhood to personhood. With such an approach, following both Stanley and May, do they 'suddenly appear less passive'.[112] Their perceived naivety did indeed make victims of some of them: they were targets of scams and in many cases endured employment abuses that would now be recognisable as illegal forced labour. While they operated in a narrow corridor of opportunity, defined by notions of femininity, domesticity and passivity, they were not simply responding to structural forces, but actively mobilised their foreignness. At times this was a positive marker of difference, and thus a means to access certain jobs, households, hostels, financial support and legal counsel. Yet otherness made them visible, particularly to the institutions that also simultaneously enabled them to work, and thus any behavioural transgressions were identifiable and magnified, something their British counterparts were able to avoid. The foreign servants trod a fine line

[108] Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium', p. 367.
[109] Davidoff, 'Mastered for Life', pp. 408-9.
[110] Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*.
[111] May, *Unprotected Labor*.
[112] Stanley, 'Maidservants' Tales' and May, *Unprotected Labor*, p. 4.

between vulnerable victim best housed in a home – in their own country, preferably, but failing that a sex-segregated hostel or that of an employer – and dangerous independent woman best sent out of the country – whether or not an actual crime had taken place. Their otherness thus bestowed upon them both precarity and privilege.

As explored in the Epilogue, the onward lives of the foreign servants were varied. Few would accept that life in London did not alter their future outlook in some way, and yet service is so often written about in sterile terms: a barren space before marriage or a tedious drudgery to endure. This is not borne out in this research and challenges our idea of service as a lifecycle economic necessity as espoused by scholars such as Horn or Laslett.[113] Instead, domestic service functioned in a particular way for foreign-born women. Theirs was not a story of taking the only available job in a local town, having their mothers attend interviews with them or falling into service as a last resort. Rather, it was a continuous, iterative and active process of negotiating work, travel, contacts, support networks and officialdom which they did largely without the safety net of family or kin. Indeed, it was *precisely* because the servants were distanced from their families that they were able to cultivate and maintain their independence, both financially and socially, and this accords with the literature on similar service migrations in Europe.[114] Those who demonstrated the least amount of independence were those most reliant on protection organisations for work and sustenance, particularly the newly-arrived Jewish women in the period before World War I. Others relied on a pseudo-family, the members of which shifted constantly between different actors: colleagues, local tradesmen servant hostels, protection agencies, government departments and a host of other structural mechanisms that both sustained them and, if unlucky, worked also to constrain them. The very conditions of work they endured drove women into public sphere and into the path of social moral disapproval, but these also reveal that the anonymity of urban life helped to shape their identities. Indeed, it was clear that only in leaving the home (both metaphorically and literally) were these women able to shape their own sense of self.[115]

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[113] Horn, *Life below Stairs*, and P. Laslett, 'Population Investigation Committee Size and Structure of the Household in England Over Three Centuries', 23/2 (1969).
[114] For example, Hajtó, 'Hungarian Domestics in Belgium, 1930-1949', Lucassen, 'Administrative into Social Control' and Van Drenth, 'The City and the Self'.
[115] Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 11.

Traditionally an occupation associated with the past, mired in traditional concepts of deference, dependency and loyalty, domestic service played a very modern role for these women, one in which they co-opted a traditional gendered occupation as a route into a different future, one which few had imagined, much less planned, from the start. In this, the findings support those of Delap and Todd, who argue that service was not always a negative last resort, that many moved in and out of the sector at different stages of their lives and used service as a strategy (in Todd, for 'getting by, making do').[116] Oscillating between tradition and modernity, the very conscious act of migration for the servants imbued 'traditional feminine role models with new alternatives'.[117] International service migration permitted escape from a future at home that many chose not to return to, and offered the potential for a new identity away from their past. For all their leverage and agency in this process, constantly shifting and adapting to changing circumstances, they were ultimately constrained by the very structure that enabled their movement, beginning with the family and ending with the state. The challenge they posed by stepping outside those roles was intricately linked to a much longer concern over the masterless and mobile woman and a newer fear of working-class independence. The foreign servant operated in a restricted environment which sought to keep her hidden, passive and temporary, but in and of itself gave her the opportunity to travel, the potential for a new identity and the transformative effect of changing her life course. The ticket to this was indoor domestic service.

In considering the uniqueness of their otherness, the way structural forces collided with personal decision-making and the highly gendered attitudes towards women in service, I advance the suggestion that a distinct subfield of Service Migration History might be explored. These women's experiences are incompletely explained by their gender (Women's History), mobility (Migration Theory or Immigration History) or occupation (Labour History), and their demographic profiles differ significantly from the native servant cohort. Examining their lives intersectionally would not only permit a better understanding of how millions of international women migrants responded to, and were positively and negatively affected by, life in service; but would reposition women as

[116] Delap, *Knowing Their Place*, p.32, and Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', p. 198.
[117] König, 'German Domestic Servants in Paris', p. 105.

mobile agents in a longer timeframe than contemporary anthropological or sociological studies have yet acknowledged.

The foreign servant experiences thus frame service in an uncharacteristically favourable light, offering women of modest means and backgrounds the same opportunities to see the world and experience cultural diversity as the wealthiest families they served, and playing a role in their lifecycles that permitted them to devise new futures. Aided by institutions formed around the stubbornly persistent notion that unmarried women were vulnerable outside the home, and made visible by their foreignness, they were able to make use of a servant superhighway stretching from Oslo to Osaka, and Barbados to Cape Town, however unpredictable or unplanned each step. Their very mobility lay the infrastructural groundwork to enable generations more women (young and old, childless and mothers, married or not) to seek their own version of a new identity and a different future. Though ensconced in other people's households, their outlook as emigrants was likely more global than those they served.

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