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Intercultural education by governesses (seventeenth to twentieth century)

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One of the early forms of intercultural education was the upbringing of children by foreign governesses, who appeared on the European labour market during the seventeenth century. In Germany families of the gentry and the wealthy middle-classes began, since the eighteenth century, to copy the upbringing of princely children. They too wanted their sons and daughters to learn French at home from native speakers. Due to this high demand, French governesses could hold a monopoly in German home education of girls, until they were replaced in the second half of the nineteenth century by German resident women teachers.

German governesses not only worked in their own country but also went to teach abroad. They wanted to earn money, learn foreign languages and see something of the world. After the First World War the number of governesses declined rapidly in Europe. More women teachers found jobs in schools and due to a more equal income distribution fewer families could afford to employ a governess. But though governesses are a rarity today, they have never completely disappeared from the job market and some of their methods for teaching foreign languages continue to be applied.

Keywords: multilingualism; intercultural education; teaching methods; governesses; home education; women teachers; education of upper class girls; Fénelon

Introduction

Governesses first appeared on the European labour market in the seventeenth century to educate, supervise and teach in the home of their charges.¹ Some governesses worked in foreign countries where they acted as intercultural educators and language instructors. Anna Leonowens, for example, became famous because she taught from 1862 to 1867 at the royal court of Siam and wrote a book about her experiences.² But most of the foreign “Mademoiselles”, “Misses” or “Fräuleins” were later remembered only by their charges.

Over the centuries the demand for and the supply of governesses changed and so did their training and their work conditions. These changes become evident in sources like contracts of employment, royal instructions, ministerial records, autobiographies,

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¹Irene Hardach-Pinke, *Die Gouvernante. Geschichte eines Frauenberufs* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1993).

²Anna H. Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court: Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok* (London: Trübner, 1870).

diaries, letters and job advertisements. The focus in this paper is on the German situation in a European context.³

1. The origin of governesses

The upbringing of children by governesses and tutors had its origins in the educational system of the French court. Here the title “gouvernante” indicated an official who managed the household of female members of the royal family or that of royal children.⁴

When in Germany the lifestyles of the ruling classes became more elaborate in the seventeenth century, some princely families started to copy the example of Versailles by dividing their court into different households for different family members.⁵ At the head of such a household stood either a nobleman who wore the title “Gouverneur” or “Oberhofmeister” or a noblewoman who was called “Grande Gouvernante” or “Oberhofmeisterin”. As there existed many small princely courts in Germany, about 150 before 1803, more attractive positions for women court officials were available here than in any other European countries.

Young princes were left “in the hands of women”, as the saying went at the time, at latest until the age of seven when they were given over to a “Gouverneur” or “Oberhofmeister”. Girls often stayed much longer with their “Gouvernante”, sometimes until they got married or came of age.

What were the tasks of a “Gouvernante”? She managed the household of princely children, administered their income, organised their daily life and hired their nannies, sub-governesses and teachers. Sometimes she also gave lessons herself. Gradually the functions of a “Gouvernante” diverged into administration on the one side and education on the other.

The applicants for a position of “Gouvernante” or “Oberhofmeisterin” had to belong to the nobility and be of the same religious affiliation as the princely family.⁶ They had furthermore to be cultured, well bred and to know the ways of the court. Among the candidates older married women or widows were often preferred for the job. If they had children, they could bring them along.

The position of a court official was highly sought after, because only in such a profession could a noblewoman earn money without losing her social status.⁷ It also offered other assets: apart from a salary, lodgings, service and the right to a pension,

³The German word “Gouvernante” as well as the English “governess” derive from the French verb “gouverner” (administer). Today the housekeeper in a French hotel is still called “gouvernante”, while in Germany the same term always refers to a woman who educates and teaches.

⁴Jean-Pierre Erman and Peter Christian Friedrich Reclam, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des réfugiés françois dans les Etats du roi* (Berlin: Jean Jasperd, 1782–1799), III, 185; *Mémoires de Madame la Duchesse de Tourzel, Gouvernante des Enfants de France, de 1789 à 1795* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989).

⁵Jürgen Freiherr von Krüdener, *Die Rolle des Hofes im Absolutismus* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1973).

⁶Sophie Marie Gräfin von Voss, *Neunundsechzig Jahre am preußischen Hof. Aus den Erinnerungen der Sophie Marie Gräfin von Voss* (Berlin: Story Verlag, 2005); *Schiller und Lotte, Briefwechsel 1788–1805*, I, ed. Wilhelm Fielitz (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1879), 236. The mother-in-law of the poet Friedrich von Schiller was a governess at the court of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt; Schiller was proud of her.

⁷Irene Hardach-Pinke, *Ottilies Geheimnis. Als Schwiegertochter im Hause Goethe* (Königstein: Ulrike Helmer, 2008), 14–20, 122–23.

the governesses received expensive gifts like jewellery, silks or china. Governesses could also exert personal and political influence on their charges and thereby raise their own status and that of their families.

Princely parents generally went to great lengths to find a suitable governess for their offspring: they drew up detailed job descriptions, asked for recommendations and made the applicants write down their educational principles and programmes.⁸ But, in spite of all this, they sometimes made the wrong choices.⁹ Consequently the education of young princes and princesses often showed quite unhappy results and produced odd and inhibited adults.

If the parents did not supervise the upbringing of their children themselves, and this was often the case, their sons and daughters were at the mercy of court officials and could easily become the object of intrigues and schemes. When in a situation where they had nobody to turn to and to trust, the young princes and princesses felt utterly forlorn. On the other hand it was in many cases the governess who helped her charges to deal with difficult circumstances and complicated family situations. For some princely children she became therefore the most intimate friend of all.¹⁰

This was for instance the case with the Austrian empress Maria Theresia who never wanted to part from her beloved governess Karoline Reichsgräfin von Fuchs and, once an adult, made her head of the imperial household. Even death could not separate the two women and in 1754 the former governess was buried in Vienna in the Kapuzinergruft, the vault of the Habsburgs, as the only person who was not related to the imperial family.¹¹

From the eighteenth century, German families of the gentry and the wealthy middle classes copied the system of court education by employing educated women as governesses. They wanted their daughters to learn what the young princesses had acquired: good manners, elegant conversation, French, music, painting and drawing, fine needlework, history and geography.¹²

The theoretical justification for the education of girls by governesses went back to François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon whose works were widely read, not only in France but also in England and in Germany. In his treatise on the education of girls (*Traité de l'éducation des filles*), Fénelon in 1687 criticised wealthy families for sending their daughters to boarding schools and convents where they were not properly prepared for their future roles of wives, mothers, heads of a big household and landowners.¹³ He urged mothers to concern themselves with the education of their

⁸*Instructions de Frédéric Guillaume I et de la Reine Sophie Dorothee Pour Madames de Rocoul et de Mombail, successivement Gouvernantes des enfants du Roi, 1714 et 1721*, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin (GstA PK) BPH Rep 46 W 1.

⁹Luise von Preuße, In, Fürstin Anton Radziwill, *Fünfundfünfzig Jahre aus meinem Leben (1770–1815)* (Braunschweig: Georg Westermann, 1912), 12–15, 37.

¹⁰*Briefe der Herzogin Elisabeth Charlotte von Orléans an ihre frühere Hofmeisterin A.K. von Harling, geb. von Uffeln, und deren Gemahl, Geh Rath Fr. von Harling zu Hannover*, ed. Eduard Bodemann (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn'sche Buchhandlung, 1895).

¹¹Caroline Pichler, geborene von Greiner, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben*, I, ed. Emil Karl Blümml (München, 1914), 9 and 440, note 13.

¹²Irene Hardach-Pinke, "Erziehung und Unterricht durch Gouvernanten," in *Geschichte der Mädchenbildung*, I, *Vom Mittelalter bis zur Aufklärung*, ed. Elke Kleinau and Claudia Opitz (Frankfurt/New York, 1996), 409–27.

¹³François Fénelon, *Über die Mädchenerziehung. Traité de l'éducation des filles*, 1687, ed. Josef Esterhues (Paderborn, 1956).

daughters and to employ intelligent and gifted women to help them with this task. Thus Fénelon defined the governess as a support and replacement for the mother. And though his target group was the Catholic French nobility, Protestant German middle classes too began to follow his ideas.

The wealthier a family, the earlier a governess was employed and the longer she stayed on. She first supervised the nannies and nursemaids and later gave lessons. Her charges were boys until the age of seven and girls of all ages. What were the necessary qualifications of a governess? While tutors were generally university graduates of moderate means who were waiting for their first post in church, law, administration or science, only very few governesses had the opportunity to acquire some kind of formal training before the first half of the nineteenth century. But that did not mean that they were not qualified for their job. Governesses from noble families had been educated by governesses, tutors or in boarding schools, while governesses with a bourgeois background were often the daughters of parsons, teachers, scientists or artists and had been taught by their fathers.

Some very capable governesses were able to give lessons in literature, history, French, music, arithmetic, drawing, geography, natural science, needlework and mythology. Others could teach only two or three subjects, for example French, music and needlework. And again others were able to impart only superficial knowledge whatever the subject. Furthermore not all governesses took their educational responsibility seriously. Thus disappointments on both sides could occur, although governesses were employed only on personal recommendation by former employers, parsons, pedagogues and society ladies.

In Germany the position of a governess in the household of her employer was regulated from the late eighteenth century by law.¹⁴ A governess was defined as a resident teacher or supervisor of a child's education and like tutors and personal secretaries she did not belong to the servants but had to eat at the table with the family of her charges. That could create uneasy situations. Governesses from the self-confident bourgeoisie might find the conversation of their noble and wealthy employers trying, and the parents of their charges might feel uncomfortable if they had to take their meals in the company of strangers who were obviously ill at ease. Often, though, employers and governesses respected each other and became good friends.

2. "Frenchwomen"

As the education by governesses spread during the eighteenth century from courts to the gentry and to wealthy families its key element remained the teaching of the French language. Why was that so? French had become in Germany as in other parts of Europe the language of the upper classes which everybody had to master who wanted to converse in polite society and write elegant letters. But that was not all: in order to cut a good figure on social occasions, children had to acquire French etiquette and ways of behaviour. A lack of "bonne conduite" and "plaire au monde" was at all costs to be avoided. That was why even those parents who wanted to further the use of their native language by writing and talking in German saw to it that their children learned French. Consequently all nannies and governesses whose

¹⁴*Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preussischen Staaten von 1794* (Frankfurt and Berlin: Metzner, 1970), 425.

mother tongue was French were highly in demand.¹⁵ French-speaking nannies, called “Bonnes” in Germany, had a higher social status than their German counterparts but a lower one than governesses.

In the course of the eighteenth century French-speaking governesses became so numerous in German education that the word “Frenchwoman” (“Französin”) was used as a synonym for “Gouvernante”.¹⁶ A similar monopoly of foreign women teachers did not exist in any other European country and, though many foreign governesses worked in England, their cultural impact on society was never as far reaching. The education to multilingualism in the home with the help of native speakers became known in France as a German invention.¹⁷ The French pedagogue Mme de Genlis advocated this new method and put it into practice when she was herself entrusted with the upbringing of princely children.¹⁸

Though being called “Frenchwomen” in Germany, not many governesses actually came from France, where the vast majority of the population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. As the demand for protestant governesses was higher in German families, they recruited their “Frenchwomen” during the seventeenth and eighteenth century mainly from the Huguenot communities. Among these Calvinist refugees from France were some educated aristocrats with elegant manners. And though they had never been received at court in France because of their faith, they were sometimes employed as court officials in Germany. In Prussia for example Marthe de Rocoule (1659–1741) climbed to a very high position. In 1691 she became governess to the three-year-old crown prince Friedrich Wilhelm and in 1712 governess to crown prince Friedrich and his sisters. She remained with the two future kings until they were each seven years old.¹⁹ Frau von Kameke, who belonged to the Prussian nobility, administered the children’s households and stood in the court hierarchy above Mme de Rocoule (Figure 1).²⁰

Families of the gentry and the rich bourgeoisie also employed Huguenot governesses for their children but in the long run the supply could not cover the demand. Another problem was that the Huguenots lost their living language in the course of time and mixed it with German. A solution was found by “importing” governesses from the francophone regions of Switzerland. These women were of protestant faith, spoke authentic French and had a good reputation as educators. That is why the writer Karl August Varnhagen van Ense observed in 1832 that certain professions were typical of certain places: from Berlin came publicists, from the Swiss territory of Neuchâtel governesses.²¹ From 1874 a non-profit-making employment agency

¹⁵C. Meiners, *Geschichte des weiblichen Geschlechts. Vierter Theil* (Hannover: Verlag der Helwigischen Hofbuchhandlung, 1800), 257–58.

¹⁶*Oeconomische Encyclopaedie, oder allgemeines System der Staats-Stadt-Haus u. Landwirthschaft in alphabetischer Ordnung*, XIV, ed. Johann Georg Krünitz (Berlin, 1778), 749–51.

¹⁷Mme de Genlis, In *Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne*, XVI (1854), ed. J.Fr. Michaud (reprint. Graz, 1967).

¹⁸Mme de Genlis, *Adèle et Théodore ou Lettre sur l’éducation* (Paris, 1782); *Madame de Genlis, sa vie intime et politique 1746–1830 d’après des documents inédits*, ed. Jean Harmand (Paris, 1851).

¹⁹Hans Droysen, “Aus den Briefen der Königin Sophie-Dorothea”, in *Hohenzollern-Jahrbuch* 127 (1913): 211.

²⁰Antoine Pesne, Marthe de Rocoule (1735), Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Potsdam-Sanssouci.

²¹Fürst Hermann von Pückler-Muskau, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, III, ed. Ludmilla Assing-Grimelli (Berlin, 1874), 127.



Figure 1. Antoine Pesne, Marthe de Rocoules (1735). © Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg/Fotograf: Roland Handrick. Used with permission.

existed in Geneva, which helped school teachers and governesses to find jobs in foreign countries.

Though often severely criticised by German pedagogues, the “Frenchwomen”, whether from France, French-speaking Switzerland or the Huguenot communities,

were generally successful and taught their pupils to understand, read, speak and write French.²² Their didactic method was called “natural”, “direct” or “motherly”.²³ Learning French by listening, memorising and applying the language immediately did not mean that girls had no chance to learn the rules of the language. Though many governesses could only teach “par manière de conversation”, others were quite able to teach grammar.²⁴ But, in any case, the main emphasis in the teaching by governesses was laid on dialogues in everyday situations, on drama, poetry, fairytales and fables. Among the special textbooks for this kind of instruction, the works of Mme de Beaumont were by far the most popular until the nineteenth century. Still famous today is the story “La Belle et la Bête” in her “Magasin des enfants”, which appeared first in 1756.²⁵ Mme de Beaumont was herself a former governess and had taught French in upper-class English families.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the “Frenchwomen” lost their privileged position on the German job market as German language and literature experienced a revival among the upper classes. French behaviour and attitudes being no longer fashionable, German governesses were able to break the monopoly of the foreigners in German home teaching and expanded their job opportunities. Wealthy families now employed a German, a French and an English governess at the same time. English governesses had the reputation of being modern because they brought new measures of hygiene with them and advocated “fresh air and common sense”.²⁶

3. German governesses abroad

Private and public institutions for the training of women school teachers and governesses expanded rapidly from the nineteenth century in Germany.²⁷ Since 1837 women could also pass a formal teacher’s examination in Prussia and prepare for it at home or in a school. Special training establishments for governesses opened for example in Droyssig and Kaiserswerth around the middle of the century.²⁸ They offered a curriculum which corresponded to that for women teachers at higher schools for girls and included among other subjects two modern languages, generally French and English, and music.

²²Irene Hardach-Pinke, “Französische Einflüsse auf die deutsche Mädchenbildung,” in *Das Kind in Pietismus und Aufklärung*, ed. Josef N. Neumann and Udo Strätter (Tübingen, 2000), 61–77.

²³*Méthode naturelle ou maternelle de lecture et d’écriture*, Paris, n.d.

²⁴David Etienne Chofin, *Grammaire nouvelle à l’usage des dames et des autres personnes qui ne savent pas de latin. Neue französische Grammatik für Frauenzimmer und andere Personen, welche kein Latein verstehen* (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1782).

²⁵Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, *Magazin des enfans ou Dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusieurs de ses élèves de la première distinction* (St Petersburg, 1794).

²⁶Harvey Pitcher, *When Miss Emmie was in Russia: English Governesses before, during and after the October Revolution* (Southampton, 1977), 28.

²⁷James C. Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women: Secondary and Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); *Luisenstiftung 1811–1961. Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen* (Berlin, 1961); *Droyßig 1852–1902. Eine Festschrift zum 50jährigen Bestehen der Droyßiger Anstalten am 1. Oktober 1902*, ed. Paul Meyer (Breslau, 1902).

²⁸Karl Bormann, *Die Prüfung der Lehrerinnen in Preußen nach ihrer Vorbereitung, Vollziehung und Wirkung* (Berlin: Oemigke, 1865), 98.

As a result of the growing number of teachers' training institutions for women and an expanding school system for girls, surprisingly enough home education by governesses took an unexpected upturn in Germany. Why was that so? Parents desired more and better education for their daughters, and if they lived in the countryside they were eager to provide their children with access to knowledge similar to that available in towns. If on the other hand they lived in town, they often wanted to let their children and especially their daughters profit from extra lessons in living languages and music. Aristocratic families anyway, still regarded home education as the best way to prepare children for their rank.

The demand for home teachers was met by an increasing supply of trained governesses. More and more young women enrolled in teachers' training establishments in order to get some further education, universities being closed to them. After graduation many of them started to look for gainful employment, either in schools or in families. They were often advised to acquire some work experience as a governess first before facing a whole class in a school.²⁹

Training establishments also acted as employment agencies. Governesses, for example, who came from renowned schools such as Droyssig or Kaiserswerth had no problems finding a good job. Others had to obtain the recommendation of a parson, a society lady or a successful colleague for a vacant position. As a last resort they advertised in newspapers or registered at scholastic agencies. A formal recruitment process was new to them and they often resented being judged according to their market value. Those governesses who could not procure a formal qualification depended even more on contacts and recommendations, their chances being limited to finding an opening through newspapers and employment agencies.

German governesses also went to work in foreign countries in the hope of earning money, learning the language, broadening their mind and seeing something of the world. In the expanding global labour market for home teaching, they had to compete with French, English and Swiss governesses, while Polish and Russian governesses worked only in their native country, their mother tongue not being in demand abroad.³⁰

In many European countries upper-class children were supposed by then to converse fluently in French, English and German and it was a widely held view that these languages were best taught at home by native speakers. The methods and expectations had not much changed since "Frenchwomen" had given lessons to German children "par manière de conversation".

With the expansion of the labour market for home teachers national stereotypes became popular on a European level, the "Mademoiselle" being expected to be coquettish and rational, the "Miss" dry and stiff and the "Fräulein" blonde and efficient. Whether these French, British or German women were qualified teachers or not did not make any difference to the clichés (Figure 2).³¹

Though national stereotypes were the same across Europe, the actual work situation of governesses differed from country to country. It depended on the local conditions of supply and demand, the position of children in the household and the social

²⁹O.M., "Hauslehrerin oder Schullehrerin?", *Die Lehrerin in Schule und Haus* 3 (1886–1887): 321–23.

³⁰The famous scientist and Nobel Prize winner Mme Marie Curie had worked as a governess in her native Poland.

³¹The governesses of Princess Luise Viktoria of Prussia (from left to right): Fräulein von Saldern, Mlle Lauru and Miss Topham.



Figure 2. Prinzessin Luise Viktoria, Herzogin von Braunschweig. After *Bilder der Kaiserzeit. Lebenserinnerungen* (Göttingen/Hannover, 1969). Every effort has been made by the author to locate the copyright holder of this figure.

importance of education. In these respects upper-class Russia was often regarded as the best place for a well-trained, capable governess and England the most difficult one. In England class-consciousness worked against the inclusion of a governess in the social life of her employers and the fact that she was an educated woman did not have the same importance for her social standing. Parent–child relations were not as close in upper-class Britain as in Russia or Germany. And because children did not take part in many of their parents' activities, neither did the governess.³²

Nevertheless most German governesses who wanted to work abroad went to Britain as their chances of finding a suitable position were much higher there than in any other country. This was due to the fact that Queen Victoria employed German governesses for her children and was therein copied by the British upper classes. A German governess gave prestige to a household and was better paid than her English counterpart.³³ For her it was not only the salary that represented an important asset but also the possibility of improving her proficiency in English and thereby her market chances at home.

In France the demand for foreign governesses was not as high as in Britain, Russia or Germany, because many girls received their education in boarding schools or convents. Furthermore, to know modern languages was in the French upper class not considered an important personal asset and, even if a girl was encouraged to learn a foreign language, it was English rather than German. Governesses who went to France, mainly to Paris, wanted first of all to learn the language in order to teach it at home in Germany.³⁴ They often only worked "au pair" and enrolled as pupils in language classes. The situation in French-speaking Switzerland was similar. Here too German governesses could generally only work for their keep as many Swiss women teachers were bilingual.³⁵

Swiss and German governesses sometimes felt shy when they arrived for the first time in Britain or France, entered London, a town with over a million inhabitants, or were confronted with genuine Parisian elegance. But mostly they adapted quickly and profited from the foreign lifestyle which gave them back home the aura of a woman well versed in the ways of the world and able to educate the daughters of aristocratic families.

English, French, francophone Swiss or German governesses also went to Egypt, South America, Australia and the USA, as well as to India and to many other countries. It was often not only the need to earn money that drove them far away but also their curiosity, their thirst for adventure and "wanderlust". Through their jobs they came into close contact with luxury and glamour but also with ways of life which they perceived as crude and backward. In Southern Europe and Turkey they lamented the position of women in society and especially that of their charges, who were brought up for a secluded life. They considered with resignation that they were not able to change anything there and often left as soon as possible. If they had worked in a harem, they would find it very difficult to get new employment.

³²Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon, 2001).

³³Meta Wellmer, *Deutsche Erzieherinnen und deren Wirkungskreis* (Leipzig: Reinboth, 1890), 96.

³⁴"Ratschläge für die deutsche Lehrerin in Frankreich," *Die Lehrerin in Schule und Haus* 26 (1910): 664–68.

³⁵N.L., "Meine Erfahrungen während meiner Laufbahn als Erzieherin," *Der Frauenanwalt. Organ des Verbandes deutscher Frauenbildungs- und Erwerbs-Vereine*, 4 (1873–1874): 286–91.

Eager to bring about change, governesses often chose enthusiastically the role of ambassador for culture and progress in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, South America and other countries. Though they were generally much poorer than the parents of their charges, they often felt morally superior and more sophisticated. This attitude usually changed the longer they stayed in a country and the better they knew it.

Sometimes also their pupils taught them a lesson. When a French governess in Russia regretted in front of her charges that Napoleon and his army had not successfully conquered the Russian Empire, the children reacted by miming realistically and with obvious talent the retreat of the Napoleonic soldiers. The children of an aristocratic Hungarian family dressed up in all kind of skins and furs in order to make fun of their German governess and her prejudices, and ran around crying “we are the hunns, the wild hunns”.³⁶

4. Associations of foreign governesses

German governesses had to defend their position against their French, Swiss and English colleagues, against tutors and against schools. This context given, their concerns dealt with competition, training and methods of teaching. Their market position was not nearly as bad as that of British governesses whose discussions focussed on their “plight”, that is, their overcrowded profession, their low salaries and the – to them – demeaning fact that they had to work for their living instead of being a wife and mother. In Germany governesses had a higher social status, thanks also to the “Frenchwomen” who had been sought after and who had opened up the job market for them.³⁷

Nevertheless German governesses too had many problems, especially when they worked abroad. They were trained for the educating and teaching of German children and felt sometimes at their wits’ end when confronted with quite different circumstances and expectations. Another problem concerned the recruitment process. Though training establishments helped their graduates to find jobs, and though many governesses were successfully networking and informing colleagues about vacancies, more and more of them had to make use of employment agencies. Not all agents were honest people. Some took the money the governesses had to pay when registering and then sent their clients either to unsuitable jobs or to non-existent ones. Cases were known where governesses travelled as far as the Balkans only to discover that nobody expected them there. A further difficulty arose when governesses did not know where to go between jobs or during holidays as they were reluctant to make use of charity institutions, especially of those which also cared for domestic servants.³⁸

Furthermore every country presented its own problems. In Britain, their “Eldorado”, German women arrived in increasing numbers and competed for jobs in home schooling.³⁹ Some of these women had no training or talent for teaching and would hardly ever have gained a job as a governess in Germany. They were perceived by their trained

³⁶ Hardach-Pinke, *Die Gouvernante*, 214.

³⁷ Julius Einsiedel, “Das Gouvernantenwesen in England. Eine Warnung,” *Zeitfragen des christlichen Volkslebens* 9 (1884): 4–46.

³⁸ Hardach-Pinke, *Die Gouvernante*, 214–16.

³⁹ Mathilde Lammers, *Deutsche Lehrerinnen im Auslande* (Berlin, 1884).

colleagues as dubious competition that might spoil the good reputation of German governesses in England.

As a reaction to this situation a group of German governesses in London decided to help themselves. They had come together for some time to read German newspapers and to discuss problems connected with their jobs. One of them was Helene Adelman who had been in England since the 1860s.⁴⁰ It was her idea that governesses took the recruitment process into their own hands by opening an employment agency, developing a job profile and defining the requirements for a capable ("tüchtige") governess.

In 1876 the "Association of German Governesses in England" was founded by 46 members. It was apparently the first association of women teachers in England. Adelman, being a gifted fund-raiser, got enough money to lease a house for the association at a good address in the West End. It accommodated a home for governesses, an employment agency, a reading room and other facilities. In 1894 the association, which by this time had 720 members, also opened a convalescent and holiday home.

After the turn of the century the demand for German teachers in England declined rapidly and so did the number of German women who wanted to work there as governesses. In Germany, by now, women teachers were more often employed by state schools and could become civil servants. If they went to England, it was no longer to look for work but to learn the language as fast as possible. Here again Helene Adelman reacted and successfully turned the former home for governesses into a language school for German women teachers. The First World War put an end to this.

During the nineteenth century benevolent institutions had been founded for governesses in several countries. In England as a reaction to the difficult labour market for educated women the "Governesses' Benevolent Institution" came into existence in 1841. German governesses could find support at the "Emily Pfeiffer Trust for German Governesses in distress", which was administered by the German congregation in London.⁴¹ In France several organisations helped foreign governesses who were out of a job, for example the "Institut protecteur pour les femmes de la société" in Paris. All these institutions were considered a last resort by the governesses and against their professional identity.

German governesses were much preoccupied with their identity as modern and capable teachers. By calling themselves "educators" (*Erzieherinnen*) instead of "Gouvernantes" they wanted to mark a professional difference from the "French-women" of the old days. Later, from the end of the nineteenth century, they preferred the term "home teachers" (*Hauslehrerin*) because they did not want to be confused with kindergarten educators who were of a lower educational and social standing. In 1885 when the journal for women teachers in schools and homes was founded, it made a distinction in the title of the publication but otherwise talked only of "women teachers".⁴² The general public though continued to speak of resident women teachers as governesses.

⁴⁰Magdalene Gaudian, "Helene Adelman: Ein Lebensbild," in *Dem Andenken an Helene Adelman*, ed. Magdalene Gaudian and Helene Lange (Berlin: Moeser, 1916).

⁴¹The Trust still exists today. Emily Pfeiffer was a successful British author and the wife of a German merchant in London.

⁴²*Die Lehrerin in Schule und Haus. Zentralorgan für die Interessen der Lehrerinnen und Erzieherinnen des In- und Auslandes* (Leipzig, 1884/85–1909/10).

The example of the association of German governesses in England was copied in other countries. In Paris a home for German governesses and maids had been opened in 1886, but though it could boast of two entrances, one for the governesses, one for the maids, it was not accepted by trained teachers. Therefore in 1890 the association of German women teachers in France opened a home of their own which offered French language courses and ran an employment agency.⁴³ In the USA an association of German women teachers was founded in 1898, its headquarters being in New York. Its members were teachers who worked in schools but mainly in homes. In Hungary German-trained governesses associated themselves with the "Home Suisse", a benevolent organisation originally founded for governesses and maids from French-speaking Switzerland, and attached an employment agency to it.

Governesses who stayed long in a foreign country faced in the long run the same problem the "demoiselles francaïses" from the Huguenot communities had faced decades ago: they must not "go native". The contact with their colleagues in the associations for governesses helped them to stay "German" by conversing in their mother tongue, sharing books and discussing the situation at home.

Conclusion

In the history of governesses, the First World War is often perceived as a turning point because the number of resident teachers declined rapidly from the 1920s. As far as intercultural education is concerned, the war in fact had an impact. Governesses from enemy countries were dismissed. In Britain and France the associations of German governesses were disbanded. But there were more fundamental reasons for the decline of home education by resident teachers. The educational system expanded and the growing number of public schools, private schools and boarding schools made it less necessary for parents to have their children taught at home. More women teachers found jobs in schools and became civil servants. Finally, due to a more equal income distribution fewer families could afford to employ a governess.

Though governesses have largely vanished from everyday life, they are still able to haunt the imagination as they appear in novels, stories and films as figures of romance and mystery or as long-suffering heroines. In the role of enterprising strangers they enter a family circle for a short while and experience emotional turmoil and adventures. Autobiographies on the other hand offer a more sober picture. In their own writings governesses generally describe themselves as dedicated educators and teachers who are often confronted with demanding and difficult work conditions. And in the recollection of their former charges governesses represent a wide range of characters, ranging from guardian angels to evil tyrants.

Nevertheless there is a positive legacy. The "German method" of using resident native speakers to teach children foreign languages at home proved to be successful, and the teaching of beginners "par manière de conversation" is today generally accepted. With globalisation it has become even more important to learn foreign languages and intercultural etiquettes from an early age onwards. The curriculum of a well-schooled child contains nowadays a wider range of languages, which often include Spanish and Mandarin Chinese.

⁴³:"Ratschläge für die deutsche Lehrerin in Frankreich," *Die Lehrerin in Schule und Haus* 26 (1910): 664–68.

Does globalisation thus offer a second chance for governesses? Governesses have become a rarity but have never completely disappeared from the job market. While many well-to-do parents employ nannies and au pairs in order to introduce their young children to a foreign language, celebrities and very rich parents have a governess for their older children. British agencies such as “Royal Nannies” or “Little Ones” help them to find the suitable person.

The structure of the tasks and qualifications of resident teachers has not changed since the time of Helene Adelman. “Royal Nannies” state on their website:

A governess is a female employee of a family who teaches children within their home. In contrast to a nanny or a babysitter, she concentrates on teaching children, not their physical needs. Governess is in charge of school age children, not babies. The position is highly demanded within large and wealthy households, countries in Saudi Arabia (Saudi royal families), UAE, Russia and others, where parents prefer to educate their children privately at home rather than send them away to boarding school.⁴⁴

The agency “Little Ones” offers permanent governess services in London and worldwide and claims to have experience placing governesses in Europe, Russia and the Middle East. It also lists in detail on the website what may be expected of a governess and mentions, for example, that she often teaches the child a second language and social etiquette.⁴⁵

The salaries offered by both agencies are high, the work conditions attractive. Nevertheless the position of a resident teacher in the family of her charges in a faraway country does not seem any easier and is less challenging than in the old days when a governess had to travel by carriage over dusty roads.

Notes on contributor

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⁴⁴<http://www.royalnannies.co.uk/governess.html> (accessed June 2, 2010).

⁴⁵<http://www.littleoneslondon.co.uk/governess> (accessed June 2, 2010).