

Children of Guest Workers in Europe: Social and Cultural Needs in Relation to Library Service

ALOIS STADLER

WHEN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES hired foreign workers in the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, they thought in terms of temporary employment, as did most of the foreign workers. In the majority of cases, however, the workers' ideas of acquiring wealth in a short time and of investing their money (probably in their home countries) were not practical. Workers were therefore joined by their wives and children, and young workers married. The industrialized European countries were thus no longer just employers of single foreign laborers, but became, gradually, host countries to an increasing number of foreign families. Finally, as a result of economic crises, practically all European countries stopped hiring laborers from foreign countries (although labor migration within the countries of the European Economic Community could not be prohibited, and was therefore not affected). After 1973 foreign employment decreased considerably. In 1973 foreigners constituted 10 percent of the working population in the Federal Republic of Germany, and in 1978, only 7.4 percent.¹ Due to a rapid increase in the number of families, however, the total number of foreigners changed only slightly: 3,966,000 foreigners were registered in 1973 and 3,948,000 in 1978.

At the present time the number of children of foreign nationality born yearly in Germany is about 100,000, or approximately 20 percent of all births (the foreign population represents 6.5 percent of the population). This increase is of special interest as it coincides with an alarming

Alois Stadler is former reference librarian for Yugoslav languages, International Youth Library, Munich, and former head of its Southeast European languages section, responsible for the special program for children of guest workers and immigrants.

decrease in Germany's birthrate. Demographic considerations, in addition to social and humanitarian ones, militate against a massive reduction of foreign workers at a time of relatively high unemployment.

France, although not suffering from a decrease in its birthrate, is host to more than 4 million foreigners. The increase in the number of foreign children is approximately the same as in Germany (see table 1).

TABLE 1
FOREIGN CHILDREN IN FRANCE, 1977

| <i>Age</i> | <i>Number</i> |
|-------------|---------------|
| 0 - 2 years | 200,000 |
| 2 - 5 | 175,000 |
| 5-12 | 400,000 |
| 12-16 | 175,000 |
| Total | 950,000 |

Source: Ministère du Travail. Secrétariat d'état aux travailleurs immigrés. *La Nouvelle politique de l'immigration*. Paris, 1977.

Most of Great Britain's 2.6 million foreigners are immigrants and can therefore not properly be compared with the guest workers in Germany, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Austria—countries which are still more or less reluctant to integrate or even naturalize their foreign populations because of the desire to maintain an element of control over their working force.

The longer foreign families stay in a country, however,—and the greater portion already remains eight years or more—the less is the probability of their return home. As living standards and salaries in their home countries have not improved considerably, workers are reluctant to return to lower standards of living. In the meantime, most of them have acquired the right of permanent residency, and many of them have lost cultural and social ties with their former environment. Children who have grown up in the new society would feel even stranger in their home countries. On the other hand, persistent social and cultural isolation keeps alive the wish to return someday. The attitude of the guest workers toward integration and returning home is ambivalent—if not schizophrenic—and we have to keep this in mind when speaking about the specific problems of guest workers' children.

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This contradiction was expressed in the following simple terms by a foreign girl in Germany: "I want to go home again, but I also want to stay."²

The factors which determine a family's return are well known, but it is difficult to predict how these factors, which are to a great extent economic, will develop. Ultimately, the contradiction cannot be resolved by either the foreigners themselves or the government of the host country. Both have to live with uncertainty and acknowledge the increasing probability that more than half of the foreign workers' families will stay, and that a large part of them may return one day to their countries of origin. In several countries measures to alleviate at least the legal uncertainty regarding the status of a foreigner have been taken or discussed.

The Impact of Uncertainty

The desire of guest worker parents to save money in order to be able to return home as quickly as possible forces them to dedicate all their time to working and initially to accept low standards of living. Both factors result in neglect of the children and of their education. In the partially well-intentioned and partially egotistical desire not to estrange the child from its native culture or from the family, some guest workers show a rather hostile attitude toward school education in the host society. Thus, some Turkish parents in Germany send their children to the public schools where they are taught in Turkish and German, and to Koran schools where the children memorize verses from the Koran in Arabic, even though they do not understand Arabic at all. It is obvious that this additional task exceeds the capabilities of most of the children already handicapped by social disadvantages.

General and Professional Education

Generally speaking, foreign children have the same difficulties as working-class children, that is, low motivation to learn, a limited vocabulary and ability to express themselves through language, and a limited horizon of knowledge. In addition, the children face difficulties because the schools in the host countries are not prepared to take into consideration their special backgrounds—different cultural heritages and different mother tongues. The schools for a long time regarded the assimilation of these children as inevitable, except in the state of Bavaria in Germany, where foreign children were, and still are, taught in

separate classes in their mother tongues. This so-called Bavarian model places the goal of integration on a secondary level, and has often been criticized for creating "ghetto" or "segregation" schools.

Although the principle of integration, while simultaneously preserving cultural and linguistic identities, is formally accepted by all European governments, its educational realization varies considerably. In Belgium and Great Britain, courses in the mother tongue are possible only outside the obligatory curriculum. Responsibility for these courses lies in the hands of the foreign community organizations. In France courses in the mother tongue are possible during certain hours of the regular school day. This education has a double function—first, of encouraging integration into the French language, and second, of maintaining conditions for a reintegration into the country of origin. The growth of these courses has been hampered by a lack of foreign teachers. In Switzerland foreign children in most cantons have the right to claim two hours per week of education in the mother tongue (in language, history or sociology of the home country), if their respective consulates take the initiative.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, a variety of models have been implemented by the ministries of culture in the different states, and can be divided into three groups: instruction primarily in German, instruction primarily in the mother tongue, and instruction in both German and the mother tongue.³ Children who have attended school in the home country before coming to Germany are collected in "preparation" classes, where they receive intensive training in German as a second language until they are deemed able to compete in integrated classes.

Teachers of classes in the mother tongue are usually recruited from the children's countries of origin, but most of them have not had sufficient preparation for their positions (the curriculum in Turkish schools, for example, differs greatly from that in the German schools) and have only a limited knowledge of the language of the host country. The teachers are often as culturally isolated as the children they are teaching.

The results of the different models are presently being collected and evaluated, and are being fiercely discussed in the face of the increasing number of foreign children entering the schools. In the coming years, in some big cities like Frankfurt where the foreign population is concentrated, about 50 percent of the pupils will be foreigners. Whatever reforms finally result from these discussions, for the majority of the young foreigners now leaving the schools they will be too late. At least 60 percent of them leave the schools unqualified for professional

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schools and constitute 40 percent of the unemployed youth in the country. In 1978 the rate of criminality among this group had risen above the country's average for the first time.

It is not surprising that these unemployed, unemployable youngsters, who must have dismal outlooks on their lives, start to adhere to radical, fascist circles like the "grey wolves" (an organization of the Turkish fascist party) which provide the young people with the belief that they belong to a superior race. Reports on the growing activities (e.g., paramilitary training, terrorist acts against "wrong-thinking" fellow countrymen) of these camouflaged organizations have appeared in several German newspapers and periodicals in the last three years.⁴

The failure of schools regarding the guest workers' children cannot be overcome by simply opting for one of the above-mentioned models. According to specialists, for successful integration of the children into the schools, the following reforms are required:

1. intensive use of integrated kindergartens, in order to familiarize the foreign children as early as possible with their second language and to introduce native children to their foreign fellows and their cultures (models of bilingual, multicultural kindergartens have been successfully tested in the 1970s in countries like Germany and England);
2. better training of both foreign and native teachers for the special needs of the guest workers' children, and better cooperation between foreign and native teachers;
3. new schoolbooks and other educational materials which take into account the foreign children's sociolinguistic and sociocultural backgrounds, as well as the results of the most recent studies of bilingualism;
4. acknowledgment in the school certificates of competence in the mother tongue; and
5. encouragement of the host country children to choose one of the languages spoken by foreign children in their area as an optional subject.

The Social and Psychological Situation

Due to concentration on work, the guest workers have been living in social and cultural seclusion from their surroundings. This seclusion is often aggravated by the xenophobic attitude of the native population. The child is torn between two different cultural (emotional, social, ethical, and intellectual) systems. The gap is especially wide for the two largest guest worker groups in Europe: the Turks, who are living mainly in Germany; and the people from the Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco), who live primarily in France.

The two systems are usually experienced as being in competition with one another if not supervised by competent pedagogues, and

conflict within the child may result in superficial adaptation to the dominant society, retreat into national isolation, or lack of orientation. Superficial adaptation usually takes place when the child lives in surroundings dominated by natives of the host society, and is accompanied by hidden contempt or open negation of its own family. Retirement into national isolation often occurs when the child lives in a segregated area and attends a segregated school. It is accompanied by a hidden or open hostility toward the dominant culture.

Schooling and psychological development problems often prevent equal mastery of both languages, and may result in a dual half-competence, retirement into the ethnic language, or rejection of the ethnic language. Communication, as the Yugoslav psychologist Ivan Furlan has pointed out, is one of the basic means for the intellectual and emotional development of the child.⁵ This writer observed such emotional and intellectual retardation when a class of Turkish boys, ages fourteen through sixteen, visited an exhibition of Turkish children's and youth books. Each one of these youngsters, in jeans and leather jackets, had soon picked up a book and become deeply engrossed in reading it. The books which genuinely fascinated these young people were simplified Andersen fairy tales.

The Significance of Reading

Reading potentially enlarges a child's vocabulary, gives a base of grammatical competence, enhances the ability to handle schoolwork, and advances thinking in both languages. As the rate of reading is controlled by the reader, the child is not subject to the speed of spoken communication such as television or radio. This means that reading can help foreign children to avoid their usual frustrations, which often lead to either passivity or aggression.

Children's and young people's books which deal with migration can contribute to a recognition of the child's difficulties which are not a result of personal failings, but consequences of economic and social factors created by human beings, and therefore changeable. Although there is presently a considerable number of children's books which deal with migration in Italy, France, Germany, England, and the Scandinavian countries, only a few of these titles, unfortunately, are of high quality. Worthy of mention, however, are the books being published by the German-Austrian publishing house, Jugend und Volk. In 1973-74 it issued a series of thirteen bilingual picture books for children, both fantastic and realistic, which deal with essential problems faced by

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foreign children. Some of the authors belong to the guest worker nationalities, and some are German or Austrian.

Reading books written for children of the host society can help the foreign child to understand the behavior standards and ideals of the native children. Reading books written for his own nationality, the child learns to understand his cultural traditions so that a possible reintegration is made easier, and so that the child feels reassured in his first cultural identity.

Factors Which May Prevent Reading

Many guest worker parents originated from rural areas and read nothing themselves as children except school texts. Since these parents know very little about their new cultural surroundings, they are afraid of exposing their children to possibly negative, and in any case, uncontrollable spiritual influences.

Foreign children are unable to comprehend native jargon. Children, as well as adults, are simply frustrated by the many terms and idiomatic expressions unknown to them. On the other hand, reading books in the mother tongue becomes increasingly more difficult. Children who are capable of speaking the language are not taught to read it fluently. Books in the native tongue may also be rejected if the child considers his first culture inferior. Finally, there is an insufficient number of books and other materials held by libraries and schools in the languages of the guest workers' children. This is, perhaps, the most aggravating barrier.

Library Service

Only of late have European libraries begun to consider multilingual service for guest workers. Most efforts thus far have been concentrated on library service for children. Due to their concern with work, their lack of a desire to read and other factors, adult guest workers have not seemed readily attracted to the public libraries. Children, on the other hand, have more time, and need special attention because of their threatened personality development. They are also perceived as a kind of bridge by which adults can be reached.

The first impulse to introduce library service for foreign children came in 1967 at a seminar of the Danish Unesco School Project. Margot Nilsen, at that time consultant for Stockholm's school library system, pleaded for school library holdings in the languages of the guest

workers' children. The International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich prepared on request basic acquisition lists in the languages of the guest worker nationalities. The astonishing demand for these lists encouraged the IYL to enlarge the number of its selection lists and to publish them as a special catalog, *The Best of the Best*, in 1971. A revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1976, in which children's and youth books from 110 nations or national groups were listed.⁶ This reference tool was supplemented by an address list of book dealers.

The legitimate right of the guest worker to special library service was acknowledged on higher levels by the Danish and German library associations. In 1973 in Denmark, a commission called the Foreign Workers and the Public Libraries was founded, while in Germany a project group, Library Service for Foreign Workers, was established under the auspices of the German Library Institute in Berlin. The IYL, as one of the five members of the latter group, published a series of annotated selection lists (with annotations in German, and sometimes in English and in the language of the nationality concerned), each of which described the best children's books published in one of the languages of the guest worker nationalities. Each list included an introduction to the history of the nationality's literature. The German library center at Reutlingen, Einkaufszentrale (EKZ) für Öffentliche Bibliotheken, purchased the selected titles, provided solid library bindings and catalog cards, and offered them to libraries in packages of twenty to thirty books. Between 1973 and 1978 the company sold more than 30,000 children's books in foreign languages to about 100 different libraries. Libraries acquiring the most extensive holdings were the city libraries of Frankfurt, Duisburg and Munich. In Berlin a library for the Turkish community, the Namik-Kemal-Bibliothek, already had 7500 titles in Turkish by 1974. In Sweden at the city library in Stockholm, in Denmark at the Gentofte Kommunebibliotek, as well as in Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, special efforts have also been made to build library service for guest workers' children.

Due to the rising sales, publishers and various private and national distribution organizations became interested in the International Youth Library as a leading consulting institution in the field of acquisition of children's and youth books for guest workers' and immigrants' children, and offered their cooperation. On the principle of shared responsibility, children's book exhibition catalogs were prepared in conjunction with the National Institute in Madrid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, the Yugoslav Federal Publishers' Association in Belgrade, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Athens, and a group of

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experts in Istanbul. These catalogs, listing between 400 and 700 recently published titles of each country's children's literature, provided several libraries with basic book selection tools. The Turkish, Yugoslav and Greek exhibitions were displayed in several libraries in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, and were accompanied by a number of free catalogs and posters.

Outlook

During the 1978 Frankfurt Book Fair, the International Youth Library organized an international seminar entitled "Children of Foreigners and their Literature." A selection of the statements made at the fair was published in 1979.⁷ European contributors emphasized the fact that guest worker migration has changed most European countries into multilingual, multicultural societies which thus require multicultural library service.

The achievements of the last ten years in this field, however, must be attributed to the initiatives of a few widely scattered, far-seeing, engaged people who have had to struggle valiantly (and still do) against conservative administrations, limited funding, and public opinion. To ensure continuous development, permanent positions will have to be created for language specialists in at least the larger libraries which serve foreign populations. Foreign children will have to be attracted not only by books but also by multimedia materials, professional service and special programs (like puppet shows, storytelling, and painting) to help them overcome their devastating isolation and passivity. Self-expression is the precondition for self-understanding as well as for mutual understanding.

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