Introduction

Conceptualizing the "Guest Worker" Question

The One-Millionth Guest Worker

On 10 September 1964, fewer than twenty years after the end of the Second World War, the one-millionth guest worker arrived in the Federal Republic of Germany. His name was Armando Rodrigues, and he came from the village of Vale de Madeiros in central Portugal. Like the hundreds of thousands of labor migrants who preceded him, Rodrigues moved to West Germany to work in its factories. He was part of a massive foreign labor recruitment program, which began in 1955, to ensure a continuous supply of manpower for the postwar economic miracle. With limited prospects for employment in his homeland, he applied to the Federal Republic as a guest worker and eventually obtained an assignment. His plan was to return from West Germany after a few years with more money than he could save in a lifetime of labor at home. Forsaking family, friends, and familiar surroundings, Rodrigues embarked on a forty-eight-hour train journey into the unknown.

In many ways, Rodrigues fit the typical profile of a guest worker entering the Federal Republic during the mid-1960s. He came alone, leaving his wife and two children in the village. At age thirty-eight, he cut an impressive figure – strong, well-built, in the prime of his life. He possessed precisely the kind of vigorous male body that West German government and industry officials sought to fuel the boom economy. Rodrigues was

NOTE: In the first drafts of this book, I deliberately placed quotation marks around "guest worker" and "foreigner" in order to emphasize the socially constructed and euphemistic nature of these terms. While I have removed the quotation marks from the final version, readers should continue to think of these terms as under interrogation.

part of a vast wave of workers from the rural regions of southern Europe, including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, and Yugoslavia. But he did not belong to a dominant national group within the broader demographic spectrum of recruitment. During the 1950s, Italians constituted the largest percentage of workers, while from the late 1960s on, Turks outpaced all other nationalities, eventually coming to personify the very image of the guest worker in German public discussions of migration.

Before his arrival, Rodrigues's journey followed the same anonymous trajectory experienced by most guest workers on their way to the Federal Republic. First he traveled within his home country from his village to the urban center where an auxiliary branch of the German Federal Labor Office (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit) had been opened. Next he filed an application for work, underwent physical tests, and endured a long waiting period until he received a job assignment. Finally he embarked for West Germany on a train reserved exclusively for guest workers, with a ticket paid for by his future employer. In Rodrigues's case, however, the endpoint of the migration journey was far from ordinary. Once the train carrying twelve hundred Spanish and Portuguese workers pulled into the station on the outskirts of Cologne, Rodrigues was whisked away from his countrymen by German officials, led across the platform, and positioned in front of flags and laurel trees for a photo opportunity. These "strange men," according to press reports, "presented him with a bouquet of carnations and steered him to the seat of a motorcycle. 'This belongs to you,' they said. 'You are the one-millionth guest worker in the Federal Republic.'"[1] As newspaper photographers' flashbulbs went off, a workers' band from a Cologne cable factory struck up the German and Portuguese national anthems. Journalists on the scene claimed that Rodrigues's fellow passengers let out a cheer: "Viva Alemania!"[2]

This public fanfare signaled a new kind of self-consciousness about the scope and significance of Germany's massive labor recruitment. The event was planned and staged by the Federal Organization of German Employers' Associations, with a host of industry dignitaries and government representatives (including the Minister of Labor) in attendance. Using the celebration to highlight the program's indisputable success, these officials emphasized the crucial role of the guest workers in the triumph of the economic miracle. "Without their collaboration," declared the president of the Employers' Association of the Metal Industry, "this

[1] Fritz Mörschbach, "Großer Bahnhof für Armando: Der millionste Gastarbeiter in Köln feierlich empfangen," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11 September 1964, 20.
[2] Ibid.

development is unthinkable."[3] The thrust of the message was that West German prosperity directly depended on foreign laborers such as Rodrigues and that recruitment was working out well for all involved.

In 1964, government and business leaders had little sense of the labor migration's long-term social and cultural impacts. Again and again they insisted that guest workers would return home once the economy no longer required supplementary manpower. But, in fact, many foreign laborers chose to remain and eventually sent for their spouses and children. By 1990, well over five million migrants claimed permanent resident status, making West Germany home to the largest foreign population in Europe.[4] This demographic transformation included a second and third generation, which had been born, raised, and educated in Germany with little or no immediate knowledge of their nominal homelands. In practical terms, if not according to official rhetoric, the Federal Republic had become a "country of immigration."

It is important here to consider a second level of historical meaning in the Rodrigues celebration, what might be described as the ideological construction of the guest worker in rhetoric and imagery. Indeed, the very need for a public performance – the fact that German industry and government leaders felt compelled to convince the public of the recruitment's vital importance – suggests that the larger historical significance of the migration cannot be reduced to labor shortages, policymaking, and demographic shifts (even though early government officials certainly tried to do so). It was this media spectacle at the Cologne train station, in fact, that crystallized the initial official position on the guest worker question, conveying very specific messages about the role of foreign laborers in West Germany.

A Deutsche Presse-Agentur photograph (Figure 1), taken at Rodrigues's arrival, documents the event. It shows Rodrigues perched on top of the gleaming new motorcycle, surrounded by a crowd of applauding German dignitaries. Among these officials is the president of the Employers' Association of the Metal Industry, who leans against a podium and prepares to deliver a speech. This carefully scripted scene presents Rodrigues as the guest worker par excellence: he stands for the 999,999 imported

[3] Wolfgang Kuballa, "Großer Bahnhof für Armando Sá Rodrigues: Der millionste Gastarbeiter in der Bundesrepublik mit einer Feier in Köln begrüßt," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 September 1964.

[4] In 1990, the Federal Republic had a foreign population of 5,242,000. France had the next highest number of foreigners at 3,597,000. See Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 81.

FIGURE 1. Armando Rodrigues atop the motorcycle presented to him upon arrival at the Cologne-Dietz train station for being the one-millionth guest worker in the Federal Republic. Courtesy of dpa/Landov.

laborers who have come before him, but he also serves as an ideal type. He is mature, but still young enough to perform the hard work that will be required of him. Neatly yet humbly dressed, he looks like a man of modest means who will apply himself industriously to the job ahead. The fact that the pageant took place at a train station – as opposed to a factory or worker barracks – underscores his status as a transitional, mobile figure who is not permanently rooted in West German society. The motorbike serves as Rodrigues's metaphoric vehicle on the road to prosperity, a promise of the material benefits available to all hardworking recruits. This object simultaneously symbolizes the Federal Republic's phoenix-like recovery from wartime destruction and an emerging era of affluence. Above all, the scene suggests a mantra of mutual benefits: government leaders would maintain national prosperity, business leaders would obtain much-needed manpower, and guest workers would gain access to a higher standard of living.[5]

By its very nature, this public performance served to exclude any of the social and cultural issues that might have undermined the overwhelmingly positive representation. There is no indication here, for example, of the physical dislocation, separation from family, or fear of the unknown that Rodrigues had undoubtedly experienced on the way to Cologne. There is no sign of the strenuous labor, cramped living quarters, meager wages, and social isolation that await him after the ceremony. There is no explanation of Rodrigues's life before his arrival or what he hoped to gain by coming. There is no hint of potential workplace conflict, xenophobia, or public anxiety about the presence of hundreds of thousands of foreigners on West German soil. The media event at the train station, in short, offered a highly circumscribed view of the guest worker question. And the photograph itself reinforced the ideological frame constructed by German officials, quite literally cutting off Rodrigues's past and future. The most famous journalistic image of the guest worker program thus represented the recruitment as a mass-cultural moment of smiles, applause, gift giving, and optimism.

Reports of this remarkable event appeared in virtually every newspaper across West Germany, including regional papers such as *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and nationally distributed papers such as *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Der Tagesspiegel*, as well as the

[5] Gail Wise has offered an alternative reading of this photo that stresses the anonymity and exchangeability of the foreign worker. See Gail Wise, "Ali in Wunderland: German Representations of Foreign Workers" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1995), 12–13.

highly popular national tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*.[6] Rodrigues, in turn, quickly became the labor migration's first national icon. This transformation of labor policy into mass-cultural spectacle cut in two directions. On the one hand, the replication and distribution of the photo all over the country served to disseminate an official narrative of recruitment on a dramatic new scale. For the first time, Germans had a common image – and explanation – of the process that was reshaping the nation. On the other hand, mass circulation carried with it at least the possibility of further ideological complexity.[7] In stark contrast to the hundreds of thousands of nameless, faceless recruits who had come previously, here finally was a guest worker with a public persona – a human being rather than a statistic in a labor report. This process implicitly led to a much more specific set of questions: Who was Rodrigues? What motivated him to leave his homeland for Germany? How was he experiencing his new life as guest worker?

The event, in other words, marked the beginning of a truly public and increasingly multivocal dialogue on the guest worker question in Germany. This is not to suggest that there had been no public comments on the recruitment previously. As soon as the first labor treaty went into effect, the federal government's Press and Information Office issued regular bulletins about foreign workers, replete with statistics and figures that provided economic justification of the program.[8] Popular news magazines such as *Der Spiegel* also started to publish sporadic articles on the labor recruitment and guest workers.[9] Nor do I mean to suggest that ideological struggle and contest began only in the mid-1960s. Italian recruits, for instance, founded the newspaper *Corriere d'Italia* for their own guest worker community a decade earlier. And from the very start,

[6] Mörschbach, "Großer Bahnhof für Armando"; Kuballa, "Großer Bahnhof für Armando Sá Rodrigues"; n.a., "'Großer Bahnhof' für den millionsten Gastarbeiter," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 11 September 1964, 5; n.a., "Gastarbeiter Nr. 1000000," *Bild-Zeitung*, 11 September 1964, 1; n.a., "'Großer Bahnhof' erschreckte den Zimmermann aus Portugal," *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 September 1964, 3.

[7] I use the concept of ideology in the sense established by Stuart Hall, which includes the mental frameworks (especially the languages, concepts, categories, images of thought, and systems of representation) that different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of and define the way society works. See Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," in David Morely and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 25–27.

[8] See, for example, "Ausländische Arbeitnehmer in der Bundesrepublik," *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesrepublik*, 30 March 1965.

[9] See, for example, n.a., "Fremdarbeiter," *Der Spiegel*, 24 August 1955, 17; n.a., "Italien – Saisonarbeiter – Musterung in Mailand," *Der Spiegel*, 4 April 1956, 34–35; n.a., "Arbeitsmarkt – Fremdarbeiter – Export aus Südtirol," *Der Spiegel*, 2 May, 24–25.

workers from multiple backgrounds commented on their day-to-day experiences in letters home, in diaries, and within their ethnic enclaves. A 1998 exhibition on the history of Turkish emigration held at the Ruhrland Museum in Essen included pages from the journal of a Metin Çaglar, documenting his arrival in Germany in December 1963.[10] By the end of the 1960s, small numbers of minority writers who had come to the Federal Republic as migrants began to question the specific terms of public debate, self-consciously re-presenting the guest worker as something more than a beneficiary of the postwar economic boom or a victim of industrial capitalist exploitation. In the photograph of the one-millionth guest worker, then, we can begin to see the intersection of the three major trajectories that comprise the central themes of this book: the labor migration itself, the public discourse and debate surrounding the migration, and the emergence of a primarily Turkish minority intelligentsia dedicated (at least initially) to critiquing what could be said about guest workers.

Guest Workers in West German History

The national debate about the postwar labor migration has often treated the presence of guest workers as tangential (an issue of manpower and labor markets) rather than central to the primary concerns of the Federal Republic. In this respect, the media event around the 1964 arrival of Rodrigues served as part of a larger containment strategy to limit public discussion of guest workers to the issue of mutually beneficial economics. For precisely this reason, it has been difficult to recognize just how crucial the migration has been to the definition and disposition of West German society. Despite such efforts to contain the impacts of guest workers, I argue that the foreign labor recruitment program ultimately produced the opposite effect, a broader and much more consequential debate about the parameters of German identity and the prospect of a new multiethnic nation. Guest workers, in other words, were never marginal to the core concerns of German society. Rather, these migrants occupied a central place in the most important and enduring question of the postwar period: How would West German national identity be reconstituted after the Third Reich?

[10] Aytaç Eryilmaz and Mathilde Jamin, eds., *Fremde Heimat-Yaban Silban Olur: Eine Geschichte der Einwanderung aus der Türkei* (Essen: Klartext, 1998). This is the catalogue from the exhibition at the Ruhrland Museum in Essen, which was held from 15 February to 2 August 1998.

In this sense, the postwar labor migration served as the Federal Republic's primary route into the more heterogeneous demographic and cultural landscape we now often describe as the New Europe. In France and Great Britain, such heterogeneity was inextricably linked to the collapse of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century empires, which fed the movement of long-standing colonial subjects into the metropole. West Germany's late twentieth-century diversity, however, did not result from its abbreviated colonial experience. Instead, it grew out of a federal response to economic crisis that targeted foreign populations with which Germans were mostly unfamiliar. The migration of guest workers after 1945 ultimately created the conditions for a major and largely unexpected social-historical transformation – a multinational, multiethnic German society.

It is important to be clear here that the practice of employing foreign labor in Germany was by no means new. Between 1880 and 1914, the eastern agricultural regions and coal mines of the Ruhr valley relied on Poles from Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire to supplement the native workforce.[11] And during both world wars, Germany exploited tens of thousands of foreigners as forced labor (*Fremdarbeiter*) to keep industrial production going while its own men fought at the front.[12] Nevertheless, there are crucial distinctions between these earlier uses of foreign labor and the post-1945 guest worker recruitment. Poles entering Germany as seasonal workers during the 1880s, for instance, had specific historical and cultural ties to Prussian Poles, who possessed German citizenship as a result of the Polish partitions at the end of the eighteenth century.[13] By contrast, no group of guest workers in the Federal Republic

[11] For more on Polish workers during the Wilhelmine period, see Christoph Kleßmann, *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet, 1870–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978); Richard C. Murphy, *Gastarbeiter im Deutschen Reich. Polen in Bottrop, 1891–1933* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1982); Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerbeschäftigung in Deutschland, 1880 bis 1980* (Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz, 1986), trans. by William Templer as *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880–1980: Seasonal Workers/Forced Laborers/Guest Workers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), especially Chapter 1; John J. Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement: Xenophobia and Solidarity in the Coal Fields of the Ruhr, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); John J. Kulczycki, *The Polish Coal Miners' Union and the German Labor Movement in the Ruhr, 1902–1934: National and Social Solidarity* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

[12] Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerbeschäftigung*, especially Chapters 2 and 4. See also Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin: J. H. W. Dietz, 1999).

[13] Germany, in fact, had a sizable Polish population due to the partitions of the Kingdom of Poland in 1772, 1794, and 1795 by Prussia, Austria, and Russia. The Poles

had long-standing connections to Germany. And at least one major group was perceived as a qualitatively different population: Turks came from a country outside of Europe, practiced a non-Christian religion, and possessed a non-European ethnicity. As far back as the early modern period, in fact, Turks had been understood as the primary social and cultural Other that served to define and consolidate Europe as a historical whole.[14] Furthermore, unlike *Fremdarbeiter*, culled from foreigners already in Germany such as Polish seasonal laborers (in the case of World War I) or enemies and prisoners of war (in the case of World War II) and compelled against their will to work, postwar *Gastarbeiter* (guest

who had been acquired as a result of these annexations were citizens of the German *Reich*, whereas those who came as temporary workers during the 1880s were not. The fact that these two legally distinct groups could not be easily distinguished from one another physically or culturally, however, did create major anxiety about the Polish population as a whole. See William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Richard Blanke, *Prussian Poland in the German Empire, 1871–1900* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981); Klaus J. Bade, ed., *Auswanderer, Wanderarbeiter, Gastarbeiter: Bevölkerung, Arbeitsmarkt und Wanderung in Deutschland seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern: Scripta Mercaturae Verlag, 1984). The situation of the seasonal Polish workers, in fact, was quite complicated vis-à-vis their Polish-German brothers. Moreover, during the period of highest demand for foreign labor, Otto von Bismarck was in the process of waging the *Kulturkampf*. One effect of this policy was an attempt to Germanize the *Reich*'s Polish population. For more on the *Kulturkampf* specifically, see Margaret L. Anderson, *Windthorst: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), and Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1871–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[14] In the Middle Ages, it is important to note, Islam's otherness was seen primarily in terms of religion, but it also presented a military threat (most of Christendom fell into Muslim hands in the seventh and eighth centuries) and an intellectual challenge (Muslim science and philosophy were heavily influenced by Greek, Persian, and Hindu learning inaccessible to the Latin West until the twelfth century). For a useful discussion of the perceptions of Islam during the medieval period, see John Victor Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1996). The classic statement on the perception of Ottomans by Europeans in the early modern period is Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk, 1453–1517* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1967). More recent scholarship in this area includes: David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds., *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Aslı Çırakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe": European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: P. Lang, 2002); Almut Höfert, *Den Feind beschreiben: "Türkengefahr" und europäisches Wissen über das Osmanische Reich, 1450–1600* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2003). For a specific examination of the Habsburg view of Islam and the Turks, see Charles Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For a broader discussion of the place of the Near Eastern Orient in the imagination of the West, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

workers) came to the Federal Republic voluntarily, with employment and residence permits, under the protection of bilateral recruitment treaties.[15] These crucial differences, along with the fact that the post-1945 importation of guest workers took place in a country where the preceding regime had attempted to eradicate its minorities, produced a unique situation in which the development of a multiethnic society seemed particularly improbable.

This book explores the postwar labor migration and its consequences over a thirty-five-year period, concluding with German reunification in 1990. It is a history that includes a number of crucial milestones. The first and most obvious came in 1955, when the Federal Republic formalized its program of importing foreign workers by signing a labor recruitment treaty with Italy. This agreement set out the legal parameters and procedures for West German employers hiring Italians and became the model for subsequent treaties with other southern European nations. It initially offered work permits for one year, establishing an expectation that foreign laborers would be sojourners. At this point, the central concern of government and business leaders was to keep the economic miracle going, which led them, in turn, to advocate recruitment unequivocally, emphasizing labor statistics and productivity levels in their public presentation of the program.

Another important turning point was the 1973 oil crisis and the economic recession it provoked. In response to rising unemployment, the Federal Republic halted the labor recruitment program and encouraged guest workers to go back to their countries of origin. Efforts to reduce the numbers of foreigners, however, inadvertently produced a net increase in alien residents. Faced with the prospect of restricted access to Germany, many foreign laborers – especially Turks – applied for visas so their families could join them. During the same period, migrant intellectuals, such as the Turkish-German poet Aras Ören, began to enter the national debate about guest workers, publishing texts in German that challenged the predominant stereotypes and assumptions about foreign laborers.

A third pivotal moment occurred in the late 1970s. It was at this time that West Germany first acknowledged the continuing presence of over two million foreigners and initiated a formal policy of "integration." This new era of self-conscious integration witnessed a number of important

[15] Historian Ulrich Herbert has written a useful study of Germany's long pattern of employing foreign labor, but a more specific analysis of the similarities and differences across these periods remains to be done. See Herbert, *History of Foreign Labor*.