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The Plight of Turkish Women in a Foreign Land (May 1, 1980)

The fact that most Turkish women – four out of five – were illiterate meant that it was particularly difficult for them to adapt to their new environment. Moreover, their social situation made integration into German society all the more challenging: they remained at home in their apartments, devoted themselves to raising their children, and had little contact with Germans and German society.

They Live and Languish in a Foreign Land

Turkish Women Feel Rejected

About 300,000 Turkish women live in the Federal Republic. They feel like outsiders in our country. The reasons for this are explained in a study commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

It requires a lot of imagination to think of Mevlüde Baklan as a Turkish woman. She doesn't wear colorful harem pants underneath her dresses, nor does she hide her short haircut under the ubiquitous headscarf worn by most of her female compatriots.

The thirty-three-year-old Turkish woman has lived in the Federal Republic for seven years. That she appears to have adapted to Western conditions without any great difficulty is attributable to the favorable personal circumstances she enjoyed right from the start. Mevlüde Baklan was already a teacher in her home country.

Most Turkish women (80 percent) are illiterate. They haven't mastered their own native language, much less German. As long as these women and girls were living in Turkey, that wasn't a problem.

According to a study by the Federal Research Ministry, Turkish women in the Federal Republic feel like outsiders. Contact with people around them is nipped in the bud. They are either completely fixated on their households, where they live in total isolation and in unconditional dependence on their husbands, or they work in factories.

Above all, they feel strongly rejected by the German population on the basis of their different style of clothing, their reticent personalities, and their language problems.

These women suffer the most, however, from alienation from their children and husbands. This cluster of problems is causing a growing number of Turkish women to suffer from psychosomatic ailments.

Mevlûde Baklan knows how acutely most of her female compatriots suffer from being strangers in a strange land. That's why she devotes all of her energy to helping them. As a social worker at the Workers' Welfare Association (AWO) in Duisburg, she organized literacy courses so that these women can at least learn to read and write.

In the process, it became clear that these women are very eager to learn. "Most of them have a burning desire to change their situation. They want to learn, and they especially want to be respected," said the social worker. The husbands, on the other hand, turned out to be a major obstacle.

Continuing education is the only way to help these women.

Source: Rose-Marie Christ, "Sie leben und leiden in einem fremden Land" ["They Live and Languish in a Foreign Land"], *Welt der Arbeit* [*World of Work*], May 1, 1980.

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