

UC Berkeley

TRANSIT

Title

Memory Meetings: Semra Ertan's Ausländer and the Practice of the Migrant Archive

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8jp4268s>

Journal

TRANSIT, 13(2)

Author

Doughan, Sultan

Publication Date

2021

DOI

10.5070/T713258823

Copyright Information

Copyright 2021 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Memory Meetings: Semra Ertan's *Ausländer* and the Practice of the Migrant Archive

TRANSIT vol. 13, no. 2

Sultan Doughan

Ich möchte von einem Archiv erzählen. Es trägt keinen Namen und hat keinen festen Ort. Es liegt verteilt im Land. In den Städten. In den Wohnungen. In Zimmern. In alten, verstaubten, lange nicht mehr geöffneten Schränken in den Kellern. Unter Häusern und Straßen.¹

— Deniz Utlu, *Archiv der Migration*, 2011

On May 24, 1982, Semra Ertan,² a 25-year-old Turkish-born³ poet self-immolated in the early morning hours at a street junction in Hamburg. The evening prior, she had explained the motivation behind her planned suicide: to raise awareness about the humiliation, hatred, economic insecurity, and alienation in which Turkish communities lived in Germany, sanctioned by both the Turkish and the German governments. Her death raised extensive awareness at the time: within the week, there were protests co-organized by labor unions against racism and the radical right-wing *Hamburger Liste für Ausländerstopp*.⁴ Thousands attended, and many carried banners bearing Ertan's photo; in the closing address, Ertan's death received particular mention (Bilir-Meier 2017).

Ertan had joined her family in Germany in 1972, after having completed middle school in Turkey. She published only a handful of poems in Turkish and German translation during her lifetime, even though, plagued by unemployment and health issues, she had produced over 350 poems. In her last poem "*Mein Name ist Ausländer*" (My Name is Foreigner) she positions herself as an alienated stepchild, who was "sold by the Turkish government to Germany" to fulfill larger global economic needs.⁵ Consider these stanzas read out by Ertan before her suicide:

¹ "I would like to tell about an archive. It has no name and no fixed place. It is dispersed in the country. In the cities. In the houses. In rooms. In old dusty and long-time unopened basement closets. Underneath houses and streets." Translation mine.

² I thank Cana, Can-Peter and Zühal Bilir-Meier for sharing their experiences about reviving Ertan's poems as a posthumous poetic intervention. Special thanks to Cana for permitting the use of images and material from her own visual archive. Deniz Göktürk has kindly encouraged me to more explicitly articulate my take on this material. Lauren K. Wolfe has co-written several versions of this article with me. Her brilliant take on translation and lyrical subjectivity did not carry over into this version. I hope to see her work published in the right context and thank her for having accompanied me in this project. Special thanks to Patricia Piberger, who read an earlier version and provided helpful suggestions.

³ Please note my usage of "Turkish" refers to those emigrating from Turkey regardless of ethnicity.

⁴ Radical right-wing *Kleinpartei HLA* (Hamburg Electoral Slate for a Moratorium on Foreigners).

⁵ NB: the version published by Edition Assemblage/Cana Bilir-Meier and Zühal Bilir-Meier in 2020, with facing Turkish translations, is slightly different from the radio transcript published in *Semra Ertan. Her Own Voice* (Bilir-Meier & Bilir-Meier 2020), which is quoted here.

Türkei brauchte Devisen,
Deutschland uns, die Arbeitskräfte.
Mein Land hat uns ins Ausland verkauft,
Wie Stiefkinder
Stiefkinder dort, Stiefkinder hier, unbrauchbar.

Aber dennoch brauchen sie Devisen und Ruhe
von Unzufriedenen.
Mein Land hat mich nach Deutschland verkauft.
Mein Name ist Ausländer“ (Bilir-Meier 2017)

To deploy the category of *Ausländer* (foreigner, stranger, alien) as a personal name is to claim alienation as an identity. The term *Ausländer* designates a legal category and has been the appellation given to a variety of “others” over the course of recent German history. Historically, those deemed *Ausländer* have been relegated to physically challenging labor in service of national productivity, even though they are meant to remain outside of mainstream society (Bade; Herbert). Historian Rita Chin writes that during the postwar period, Holocaust survivors, who gathered in German displaced persons camps, were not seen as victims of the Nazi camps but as intrusive foreigners (Chin et al. 83). More recently, the term has come to designate a heterogeneous group of labor migrants from the Global South. Scholars have grappled with the latter incarnation in the figure of the guest-worker, the Turk, as foreigner, pointing to the absences of this multiplied figure (Chin, Fehrenbach, Eley & Grossmann; Chin). Ertan’s personalization of the term thus merits scrutiny, as both political and poetical provocation.

The term *Ausländer* is key for conceptualizing the workings of race in Germany beyond the color-line. Critical conceptualizations of race in Germany have focused on Blackness and Whiteness (El-Tayeb; Lane; Linke; Partridge). While phenotype plays a role in racial relations, the unequal distribution of work, access to rights, and upward social mobility further contributes to the creation of racial hierarchies. The ways in which certain groups persist as foreigners imprints a sense of alienation within these groups. I am mobilizing the term alienation as used by Frantz Fanon. Although Fanon focuses on the skin and specifically Blackness (Fanon 85), he accounts for skin-color and Blackness as symptomatic of a larger structure of inequality and dehumanization. He describes alienation as a relational experience of oneself – a relation that inscribes a dominant gaze that is both social and psychic, because it becomes a bodily reality through which one’s own self-image is shaped (Ibid.). Ertan’s self-identification as foreigner expresses this relation: an alienation experienced through distancing oneself from this internalized external gaze but remaining tethered to and defined by it.

The social devaluation of the labor, culture, knowledge production, and life of German-Turks can lead to alienation, vulnerability, and even “premature death” (Gilmore). And yet, scholarly literature on German-Turkish cultural production in Germany has emphasized that these works are hardly extrinsic to the German cultural landscape but have contributed to shaping it (Göktürk, Graemling, and Kaes). Similarly, Chin has argued, following national debates and a close reading of literary texts by Turkish writers, that Turkish guest-workers have long been part of the public sphere (20) and described Germany as already a multicultural society (191- 216), pointing to the authors Aras Ören

and Zafer Şenocak, who thematized guest-labor migration and published or were translated in(to) German during their lifetime. Yet, in Germany their works were initially categorized as *Ausländerliteratur*.

The writer of guest-worker descent does not become a writer but is categorized as a foreigner who writes. This is aided by the long-standing view of Turkish labor migrants as a temporary phenomenon within the German social and cultural landscape (Chin et al.). Chin deduces from this that the permanent presence of Turks, eventually as German citizens, shaped *racial* relations that were based on *cultural* difference (Chin et al.). I build on and deviate from this scholarship. Ertan, in contrast to Ören and Şenocak, wrote predominantly in Turkish and was not translated and acknowledged as a poet during her lifetime. She was not, in other words, a recognized participant in an *already* multicultural society. Her poems were only published in the past decade due to the efforts of her family members. Simply including German-Turks within a national frame in this case neither accounts for nor mitigates how fundamentally race has shaped and continues to shape social relations. Instead, reading Ertan's work in tandem with memory studies and the practice of the archive, I will explore how *alienation* leads us to the otherwise unaccounted-for *racial* structuration of migrant knowledge production.

In what follows, I will discuss the constitution and creation of the “migrant archive” as a transversal and collective organizational form, already imbued with a certain affective pulse (Stoler) and requiring lived forms of knowledge engagement. Further, I attend to the social life of this archive in memorial practice. I build on the “migrant archives” as articulated by Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz (2011). In deviating, I claim that racial relations were already entrenched during the guest-worker era and can re-emerge in certain shifting moments and inscribe a sense of alienation in nominally German citizens. Hence, I claim that Semra Ertan's figuration of the *Ausländer* encapsulates a *transhistorical* feeling of alienation that makes the particular workings of race tangible. Irrespective of legal shifts in German citizenship, descendants of migrants remain differentiated as foreigners.

The closing section explores the social life of this migrant archive. Enabled by Ertan's poetic work, organized and made public by the Bilir-Meiers, intersectional activists give voice to updated forms of inequality and racism. I discuss how these activists meet, engage, and transfigure Ertan and connect her work with later organized killings of those deemed foreign. The activists reclaim Ertan and memorialize the figure of the *Ausländer*. These memorial acts function as what I am calling *memory meetings*. Walter Benjamin provides guidance here with this notion of a meeting, or *Verabredung*. The “true picture of the past *whizzes* by,” he writes in his 1940 “On the Concept of History,” caught and held fast only by those who are prepared to meet with and receive it. Ertan's words, images of her, and documents from her life prepare a space in which past labor-migrant alienation – displaced and delayed but persisting – meets with consonant and parallel experiences in the present. My point is to avoid any kind of linear account, whereby Ertan's death becomes a point of origin.

Memory meetings with the *Ausländer* – in the archive, poems, and the social practice of these forms – are at the forefront here. I base my discussion on Cana Bilir-Meier's assembling of documents from various archives – domestic and familial, as well as public, such as radio, television, and national newspaper. I refer to print and audiovisual materials she has published, including: a booklet titled *Semra Ertan: Her Own Voice*

(2017), the bilingual anthology *Mein Name ist Ausländer/ Benim Adım Yabancı* (2020), a short film *Semra Ertan* (2013), an essay “Contemplating the Archive” (2013), a podcast “Audiocollage zum Gedenken an Semra Ertan,” and Ertan’s official commemorative website.⁶

The Pulse of The Migrant Archive

Archives are usually regarded as lifeless depositories of factual documents. I challenge this idea by showing how documents, poems, and images are imbued with desires and dreams, or with an affective “pulse,” as anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has described. Stoler writes that even official archives are not merely fixed and factual historical documents, but materials engrained with anxieties and dreams of comforting futures (Stoler). The documents comprising an archive remain incomplete unless or until someone immerses themselves in the “pulse of the archive” in order to capture the unwritten affective elements within it (Stoler 3).

Semra Ertan’s archive pulses with the plea *to be heard*. Her experience however goes unheard – both in the narratives internal to the poems and in the lived world, not least because these poems were largely unpublished in her lifetime. The work of Cana Bilir-Meier makes palpable the pulse of Ertan’s archive, animating it and creating an environment in which Ertan can be heard, understood, and affirmed – and not just belatedly or after-the-fact; rather, it is as if Ertan is released from a lonely monologue in order to take part in an unfolding dialogue, in an encounter, a meeting with current issues such as racially motivated murders.⁷

The term “migrant archives” was introduced by Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz to point to its transnational character and the many sites that migrant knowledge transverses. In mobilizing this term as a form of practice, I emphasize how Ertan’s existence and writing have been transnationally dispersed, but also silenced, because they do not align with a national archive. Although her death was officially recorded and even received public attention, an active effort is still required to situate Ertan within a narrative that does justice to her own transnational biography. This effort has been made by visual artist and Ertan’s niece, Cana Bilir-Meier. Bilir-Meier has collected, organized, and exhibited on several occasions the visual and textual materials linked to Ertan. While this archive is based on Ertan, it extends beyond her individual life and work, pointing to the mechanisms of erasure of undesirable subjects in the archive, as I will discuss in this section.

The migrant archive tells a different story about the experience of migration altogether. Bilir-Meier gathers documentary traces and intervenes in the archival documents about Ertan by telling a different story about Ertan’s life than the narrative that was publicly disseminated at the time of her death. The traces consist of personal memorabilia, official documents, notebooks, poems in Turkish and German, news clippings from Turkish and German national news outlets, family photographs, radio/voice

⁶ <https://semraertaninitiative.wordpress.com/> and <https://soundcloud.com/user-147562306>.

⁷ The exhibition Dusler Ulkesi (Dreamland) in 2019 is exemplary for how Cana Bilir-Meier organizes Semra Ertan’s words creatively with other media and contemporary racist attacks where racist motivations are still denied: <https://www.kunstverein.de/en/projekte/cana-bilir-meier>

recordings, and documentary footage. The bulk of the material comes from the sideboard drawer of Semra Ertan's family home in Mersin, Turkey, where it had been stored privately for approximately thirty years before Bilir-Meier started to creatively reorganize this material into various documentary films, books, visual art installations, and a collection of poems (Bilir-Meier 2013; Bilir-Meier & Bilir-Meier 2020).

Migrant knowledge and experience have been typically found in literature, popular culture, and film, rather than in textbooks or national narratives (Chin; Göktürk). When discussions of the archive focus on national politics, migrant knowledge, always in excess of national organizing mechanisms, tends to get officially ignored or artificially siloed away. And yet, migrant archival practices can also enable the expression of political and historical subjectivities beyond national state-sanctioned or official narratives (Piberger 1). Rothberg and Yildiz hold that migrant archives point to a variety of texts and practices that are not collected in one single institutional location. They write:

migrant practices of memory are neither canonical nor comprehensively stored in official political or historical archives, but they do circulate widely even if they are not recognized by national memory cultures; access to 'migrant archives' thus requires a transversal approach that gathers together traces of memory work distributed across realms of culture and everyday life (45).

Rothberg and Yildiz make us aware that migrant archives, because they circulate widely, even eccentrically, to national memory cultures, have the potential to intervene in rigid national politics, by virtue of drawing from various transnational sites as well as from the commonplaces and interstices of everyday life.

Migrant archives expose the narrowness of national boundaries and narratives that do not offer equal space to those persons and experiences that borders, and national narratives construct as "outside." Nevertheless, Rothberg & Yildiz, focusing on Holocaust remembrance among migrant subjects, argue "that [migrant] performances of [Holocaust] memory can function as 'acts of citizenship'" (34). This argument is similar to Chin's, who argues that German-Turkish writers, by virtue of publishing in German, are able to be recognized as citizens intervening in the public sphere. Instead of making a normative argument, I want to approach and describe the migrant archive as a site of embodied knowledge production and social practice *in generative tension with* national and public archives. In other words, I do not seek to reconcile migrant archival practices with the national frame or citizenship. Rather, I want to contend with the fact that nominal citizens remain differentiated – more so, with the fact that their own experiences of alienation and knowledge about the workings of race remain obscured by and unintelligible within the national frame or citizenship. Here, I explore how the migrant archive is constituted vis-à-vis national archives.

The migrant archive provides a form of knowledge that transgresses disciplinary boundaries by way of practice. In an interview conducted by Ayşe Güleç with Bilir-Meier, Güleç describes Bilir-Meier's archival practice as a form of situated knowledge that counters dominant forms of representation:

[T]he works of Cana Bilir-Meier not only show a "willingness to redress particular things that have been suppressed," they are also oriented towards "migrant-situated

knowledge.” Situated knowledge can be understood as a form of knowledge that is generated by individual or collective associations, that is articulated from a specific, marginalized position. Situated knowledge is oppositional, since, as a marginalized body in the middle of a hegemonic sphere, it takes on a different position and names it as Ill. This knowledge is therefore not intended in an identitary [sic!] way, but is, instead, a perspective that is able to alter and shift our view, our perceptions, and courses of action, and that makes it possible to counter dominant practices of representation with other pictures and interpretations (Ayşe Güleç 141).

The migrant archive emphasizes this situated knowledge, not just about the subjects therein, but also about its own constitution as a mobile form in the way it rearranges documentary material anew. As such, the migrant archive provides a different form of knowing altogether, one that questions national sites of knowledge production and its boundaries. Consider how Ertan’s documentary material, kept also most entirely private for decades in a sideboard drawer in her family’s domestic spaces, moved with Ertan’s parents from Germany to Turkey and then back to Germany with her niece. This material and content itself remain mobile and crosses national borders; moreover, it is transformed by contact with the persons and subject positions that encounter it as it moves through space and time. It exists necessarily in tension with homogenizing national norms of knowledge production and provides a transnational and transhistorical position onto an existing issue of migrant absence from the national archive.

Some of Ertan’s poems already themselves exceed the national frame, as her *Ausländer* reacts against its geopolitical instrumentalization, juxtaposing this dynamic with an intimate dialogue of desire and aversion within the space of the poem. Neither a single national narrative nor a single national archive can fully contain and organize this life and work. The fact that Ertan’s work was kept privately by the family for decades testifies to a desire to protect it from distorting national narratives, which were circulating widely in Turkish and German media in 1982.⁸ Keeping these materials privately, as Ertan’s parents did, bespeaks an affective attachment in an everyday setting of the private living room. Ertan’s memory is present, but hidden in the sideboard drawer, as if anxiously waiting to be redeemed.⁹

⁸ See for example, the issue of a weekly yellow press magazine that sensationalized Ertan’s death as the family drama of a Turkish girl in the diaspora. <https://www.nadirkitap.com/hayat-dergisi-1982-nr-32-kapak-semra-ertan-orta-sayfa-poster-yesilli-kadin-tablosu-ressam-ibrahim-calli-dergi10725486.html>; see also Cana Bilir-Meier’s 2013 film montage *Semra Ertan*, in which media coverage of a nameless “young Turkish girl in Germany” is spliced with photographs of Ertan, images of ship travel, and the voice of Ertan reading from her work, <https://vimeo.com/90241760>.

⁹ Ertan sought publication in her lifetime; shortly before her death, she became a member of the *Verband deutscher Schriftsteller*. I refer to this evidence of her own efforts to be heard as indication of this anxious waiting and contingently muted will to communicate.

Das Lichtbild muß mit dem Stempel des VS versehen sein.

This photo must bear the official seal of the VS.

La photo doit obligatoirement porter le timbre de l'Association.

На фотокартонке должна быть печать Союза писателей

Eigenhändige Unterschrift
Signature of holder
Signature du titulaire
Собственноручная подпись

Die Richtigkeit der Unterschrift wird bestätigt
This is to certify holder's signature
Il est certifié que la signature cidessus est la signature du titulaire
Правильность собственной подписи подтверждается

Stempel und Unterschrift der ausfertigenden Stelle
Seal and signature of issuing authority
Cachet et signature de l'autorité ayant certifié la signature du titulaire
Печать и подпись зав. отделом выдачи

Ort und Datum:
Place and date:
Lieu et date:
Место и число:
Kiel
31.3.82

Name, name, nom, фамилия, имя
Ertan * Semra

geboren am, born, né le, дата рождения
26.05.57

Wohnort, place of residence, domicilio, местожительство
Schmiedekoppel 5
2300 Kiel-Wik

Pseudonym, pseudonym, pseudonyme, псевдоним

ist Mitglied des Verbands deutscher Schriftsteller (VS)
in der Industriegewerkschaft Druck und Papier
Friedrichstraße 15, D-7000 Stuttgart 1

Der Verband ist die Berufsvertretung deutscher Schriftsteller, Übersetzer und Kritiker.

is a member of the VS; this association is the professional representation of German writers, translators and critics.

est membre du VS; cette association est chargée de représenter la profession des écrivains, traducteurs et critiques allemands.

является членом Союза немецких писателей.
Союз писателей — объединение немецких писателей, переводчиков и критиков.

Verband deutscher Schriftsteller (VS)

Der Vorsitzende
President
Le Président
Председатель

Geschäftsstelle
Gen. Manager
Secrétariat
Канцелярия

Fig.1 Ertan's official membership card in the *Association of German Writers*. Note the date of issuance, approximately 2 months before her death.

The privately kept material comprising Ertan's poetry, photographs, and documents, in combination with her story as it is known to her intimates, is reorganized and brings to life the experience of alienation already present and tangible in the archival materials themselves. In her essay, "Contemplating the Archive," Bilir-Meier describes how the material in her grandparents' drawer pointed to other media in the public domain.¹⁰ These media recorded Ertan's politically motivated suicide as merely "the death of a Turkish woman," (Bilir-Meier 2013:4), in so doing erasing Ertan's name, political purpose, her writing and experience as a worker and migrant, but keeping the national frame and locating Ertan as a Turkish woman outside of it. In other words, public official records embedded in national archives absented Ertan's *person*. This is telling, given that archival practice is fundamental to knowledge production and its limits.

Bilir-Meier details how she made use of all the silenced information, including Ertan's writings, by restaging it in her short documentary film *Semra Ertan* (2013) and by gathering traces of Ertan into an already existing Wikipedia entry, which she changed to highlight that Ertan was "a writer, a technical draftsman and translator" (4), a description that Ertan would have endorsed and that seems to imbue her writings and the

¹⁰ http://www.canabilirmeier.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cana-Bilir-Meier_SEMRA-ERTAN-english2.pdf

found material. Both the film and the Wikipedia entry indicate how Bilir-Meier is trying to change the media representation of Ertan from “death of an unknown person” to writer:

There is a Wikipedia-entry about Semra Ertan. I do not find any information about her being a writer. Again, another death of an unknown person. How can I protest the way the media talks about Semra Ertan? [...]. I change the Wikipedia-entry and rename Semra’s job description to writer, technical draftswoman and translator. I change the material from TV and radio reports. What belongs together? What fits together? [...] I put things in relation to each other and organize them in new ways. Creating and reading the story, without wanting to write it down in stone. It is my gaze on the matter. (Bilir-Meier 4)

Bilir-Meier organizes the archive as a protest that is poised in opposition to the available records, wherein Ertan’s death is mentioned, while her name is absent. As the quote above shows, she reorganizes this namelessness to make explicit how Ertan’s death has become a non-event in public media. Michel Foucault argued that an event is constituted within the archive, emphasizing a record in the archive as an event itself (1978). Yet it seems to us that Ertan’s nameless death is recorded in a manner that underscores the powerfully pre-organized limits of knowledge, as Jacques Derrida reminds us about the workings of archives (1995). Against this obscurity, Bilir-Meier produces more traces of Ertan as a writer. She also tells us that it is her *particular* gaze on the matter, and her creation, which can be changed again, as such leaving space for other particular perspectives. Her archival practice particularizes the other archives, revealing that Ertan’s nameless death record is a limiting decision based on the national frame.

Postcolonial discussions about the archive have been more explicit about productions of power and history, which have relevance for the condition of migrant subjects and their governance as foreigners. Michel-Rolph Trouillot demonstrated how crucial elements of a past can be silenced in the moment of its public display (1995). And by categorizing an event as being in “the past,” it becomes shielded off from the structuring political conditions of the present. Reporting of Ertan’s political suicide as the death of a nameless Turkish woman does the powerful work of silencing in the moment of its recording and display.

Bilir-Meier, in contrast and in protest, exhumes and organizes documents and materials in order to unsilence and collectivize Ertan’s experience. In her film *Semra Ertan* (2013), she gathers family photographs, handwritten budgets, the intimate ephemera of lived experience, and sets these images moving, cut with television news coverage from the early 1980s: images of people boarding a ship, a blue factory sign that says “I hire” in German, coupled with voiceover narration speaking fragments about Ertan’s father’s migration to Germany; footage of a coffin carried by Turkish military, spliced with quickly passing images of women expressing both grief and anger at authorities who remain out of frame. These sequences combine visual representations of Turkish speaking people with audio narration in German, notably the authoritative voice of reportage.

Datum		Guthaben
25.2.1981	1. Einz. 370,-	370,-
27.2.81	H -300,-	-670,-
27.2.81	S 70,-	-600,-
23.81	S 150,-	-450,-
10.03.81	S 445,-	-5,-
21.7.81	H 300,-	-305,-
		-105,-

Fig.2 The dated and handwritten transactions of the bank account point to possible savings and spendings

Bilir-Meier does not reveal that she is presenting her aunt's story. In the accompanying essay to the film "Contemplating the Archive," she writes: "In the movie it is not apparent that we are related, that would be a different movie with a different focus. I don't want this frame" (Bilir-Meier 2013). And although the film is animated by the particularities of Ertan's unique life, Bilir-Meier aims to tell a collective story, as she explains in the interview with Güleç:

The family materials from archives are then frequently a gateway to a collective memory: What is naturally concerned is the personal, but I do not want to tell individual stories. What interests me instead is how it is possible to tell a collective story that is nevertheless personal and intimate (Güleç 34).

The effect is a disorienting instability with respect to geopolitical space and historical time. As the footage moves from Germany to Turkey, from a German school court to a funeral scene in Turkey, from movement aboard a ship and long stares into the camera, a postcard from Mersin and a lease document in German, it builds an intimate trace of transnational, public and private migrant-life based on Ertan, even though Ertan is not to be seen in most images.

The different scenes and snippets of larger reports are purposefully combined to create blurred moments, empty shots, and a fragmented narrative. As if the film prompts a viewer to ask questions that it does not pose explicitly, nor attempt to answer. Bilir-Meier explains:

I do not want completeness or a stringent narration, empty images and pauses remain. I don't tell everything, questions arise and do not get answered. Not everything is visible in a film. An incompleteness remains. I actually like that quite a lot (Bilir-Meier 2013:5).

It is almost as if the fragments of the film both trigger and seize upon a latent anxiety, pointing once again to the pulse and affective layers with which these materials are already imbued. One wonders about the funeral procession—what happened, who is mourning and why, is it Ertan's funeral? One also wonders about the many documents shown, folders opened to handwritten budgets for rent and utilities—was this the cost of Ertan's home? And about the people on the boat—where are they going, are they in Hamburg where Ertan lived? Bilir-Meier creates a space for an encounter that *stands still* (Benjamin 1974) in the present.

The migrant archive urges the building of relations rather than simply representing a harvesting of information. This relation-building is not for the sake of making claims, whether to an identity, a history, or a heritage. Rather, a willingness to engage with the migrant archive opens onto a possibility of co-creating a story against national erasure. Consider again Güleç's words about migrant-situated knowledge: "this [...] perspective is able to alter and shift our view, our perceptions, and courses of action, and that makes it possible to counter dominant practices of representation with other pictures and interpretations" (Güleç 141). These other practices of representation are intrinsic to the transnational pulse of the migrant archive. The migrant archive as I have shown here is not only dispersed in various transnational sites but draws on particular biographies that require transdisciplinary organizational skills and storytelling in order to collectivize, but not to nationalize, the story of migration. The migrant archive, then I argue, is more than a missing supplement to the larger national memory or a proof of citizenship. It provides an engaged and lived form of knowing and relating to events as they are constituted, by enabling a meeting with an experience that traverses borders and disciplines and remains ongoing, incomplete, and unshielded from the present.

Meeting Ertan's *Ausländer*

Cana Bilir-Meier stages the meeting with Ertan in a number of ways. She describes her 2013 film *Semra Ertan* as "an archive in a cinematic format" of the encounter between Ertan's poems and her own images (Bilir-Meier 2017:7). In the accompanying essay, she writes that this is not a biography, but that "the film is an encounter" (Bilir-Meier 2013:5). I take this encounter to conceptualize the specific kind of meeting introduced within Benjamin's term *Verabredung*. Benjamin describes in Thesis II of "On the Concept of History" that happiness (Glück) is connected to being in the present without harboring any feelings of envy. Envy arises when we know that we are connected with others but have missed meeting them, such as the missed meeting "with people we could have spoken with" (Benjamin 1974). The notion of happiness, as Benjamin writes "resonates irremediably with that of resurrection [Erlösung; transfiguration, redemption]" (Ibid.). To meet, to have an encounter is to have a present in which a possibility is resurrected, redeemed, and

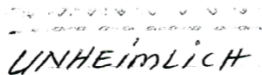
transfigured. According to Benjamin, this resurrection is similarly present in the *Verabredung* “between generations of the past and that of our own” (Ibid.).

Ertan’s poems speak of missed meetings, of the desire to meet, and to find a home. The film opens with a slow-moving sequence of still images of single handwritten words and lines taken from Ertan’s manuscripts. The poem that moves across the screen here is “Unheimlich glücklich,” (Unbelievably Happy) a poem I presume was composed in German originally, given the play on the German words “Heim” and “Glück” that occasions it. The first two minutes of the seven-minute film are silent, while just these words, one by one, flash slowly across the screen, as if disjointed and singled out, another reminder of how her voice was met in her lifetime.

[...]

Sie sei unheimlich glücklich,
 Heißt das,
 Dass sie unglücklich ist,
 Weil sie kein Heim hat.
 Wenn er sagt,
 Er sei unheimlich glücklich,
 Ist es einfacher,
 Das heißt,
 Dass er glücklich ist,
 Aber
 Nicht in seinem Heim,
 Also heimlich (Bilir-Meier & Bilir-Meier 2020: 98).

The poem reports the encounter between lovers, who are happy, just not at home, but in hiding (heimlich). Given that these words are not voiced in the film, but just shown, the film asks you to read or watch something hidden in plain sight, as if it does not have a place yet to be spoken. The poem also foregrounds a sense of foreignness. Even in utmost moments of happiness and redemption, a sense of foreignness and fragmentation remains, because one is not at home.



UNHEIMLICH

Fig.3 Film depicts one word at a time from Ertan’s above quoted poem “Unbelievably Happy”

The first image we see of Ertan herself is nearly midway through the film – a photograph of her in motion, walking toward the camera, smiling; but significantly, the photograph is fixed behind the laminated page of a photo album – a strong visual reminder of a life arrested. While Ertan’s arrested image remains on screen, we hear Ertan’s voice reading her poem, “Mein Name ist Ausländer,” a painfully self-aware expression of a perfectly visible erasure. According to Bilir-Meier, the recording is based on Ertan’s phone call to the radio station where she announced her death. Bilir-Meier writes that Ertan’s reading “does not sound like a poem but more like a manifesto or an angry statement” (Bilir-Meier 2013:5). Indeed, Ertan’s voice sounds upset, again affectively charged, tangible to the listener.

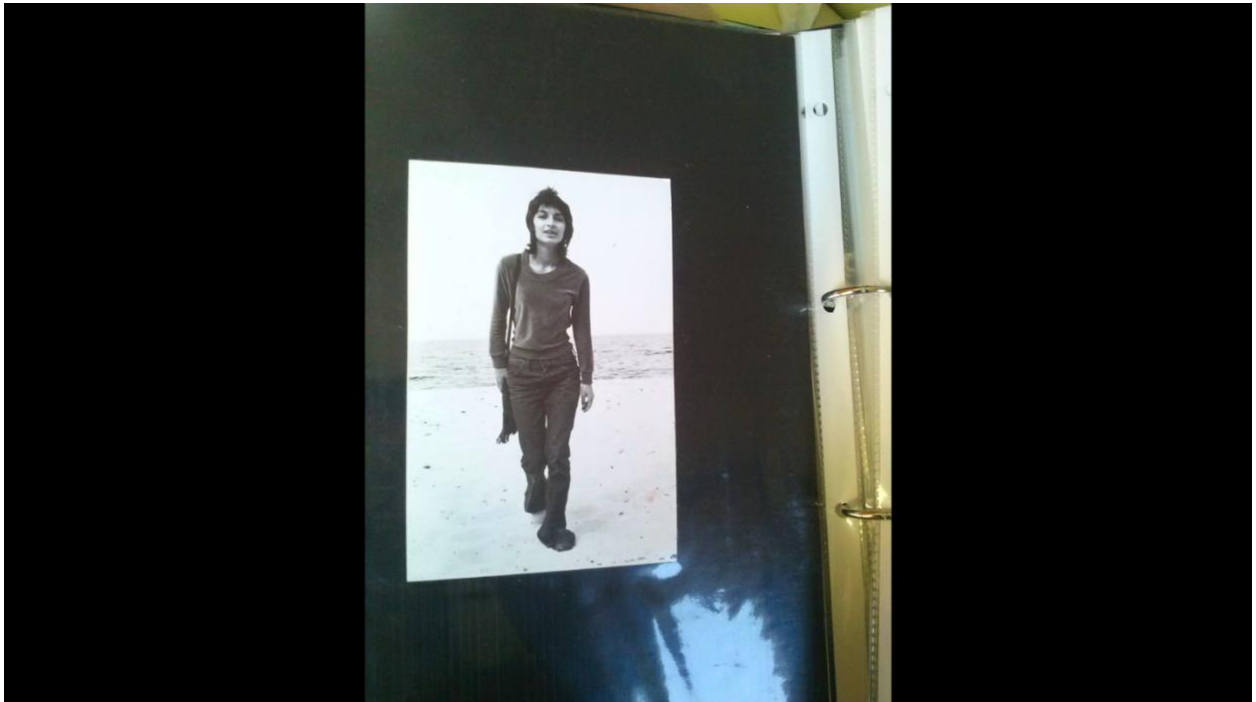


Fig. 4 Ertan’s appearance in the film is sudden and fixed in a picture organized in a larger folder.

But then, the film pivots to another poem, titled “Begegnung” (Encounter). For nearly the entirety of the second half of the film, I hear the calm voice of Bilir-Meier reading Ertan’s poem aloud, the effect of which is to resignify the isolation of “Mein Name ist Ausländer.” In “Begegnung,” the message, from a lover to a beloved, is bracketed by the subjunctive mood, opening with: *How could I know that you love me, had your eyes not spoken to me? And if your hand had not touched mine? How then could I long for you so?* Two-thirds of the way through the poem, the lover’s questioning of the beloved’s existence turns to praise and thanks, expressed in the indicative: *Yesterday I began to live / What I am I have only just come to realize / What’s wonderful is that your mouth has spoken what I am called / What’s wonderful is that I am no longer so far away.*¹¹

¹¹ Translation provided by Lauren K. Wolfe.

With Bilir-Meier's voice speaking Ertan's words, a connection is drawn between Ertan's arrested and Bilir-Meier's continued existence, as if Bilir-Meier repeating these words is in effect an answer to the hypothetical questions with which Ertan closes her poem, again in the subjunctive mood: *Who knows what would be, had you not found me, had I not written this poem?* Bilir-Meier here reaches out to Ertan, overwriting the isolation of the earlier poem by announcing herself implicitly as the anxiously awaited interlocutor of the second poem, the mouth that has now spoken "what I am called" as if Ertan expected Bilir-Meier or as if Bilir-Meier accepted Ertan's words as the addressee and made the meeting possible. And yet, it is Bilir-Meier, who addresses a wider audience with Ertan's words.

The figure of the "Ausländer" of the earlier poem is not thereby overwritten, but is transfigured, redeemed, resurrected into the person Semra Ertan with an intelligible message. Bilir-Meier's performance positions her as a carrier of *both* affects: anxiety as to the reality of being heard and known, as well as pleasure and gratitude for having been spoken into existence and thus brought near, brought into the present world. This way, I can read the axis of alienation as reciprocal: spoken from Ertan's historical moment to the indeterminate future and spoken in the present as confirmation and avowal of a now affectively inhabitable past in the moment of the meeting. I am again taking up Benjamin's meditation, who wrote that "[t]he past carries a secret index with it, by which it is referred to its resurrection (*Erlösung*)."¹² Benjamin's politico-theological excursions point to a mystical residue of past experiences. By taking Benjamin's ideas into the space of the migrant archive I argue that Bilir-Meier both finds and arranged the images of and words by Ertan to prepare a meeting (*Verabredung*) of past labor migrant alienation, displaced and delayed but persisting, with such experiences in the present.

The longed-for meeting appears in several moments in Ertan's writing and the archival material that Bilir-Meier films and overlays with a reading of Ertan's poem. In her poem "Zerrissen!..." (original: "Bunalım!..."), written in 1977 and published in the bilingual anthology, Ertan thematizes her own incomprehensibility to her contemporaries:

Viele um mich herum
 Sie hören, ja, sie hören zu,
 Doch keiner unter ihnen
 Stimmt meinen Gedanken zu
 Sie bleiben alle Zuschauende
 Da verstehe ich
 Alles, was ich erzählt habe,
 Gleicht für sie einen Thema
 Eines fremden Films.
 Ich bin einsam...
 [...]
 So, wie es war und immer sein wird,
 Vergrabe ich mich

¹² The original German: "Die Vergangenheit führt einen heimlichen Index mit, durch den sie auf die Erlösung verwiesen wird" (Benjamin 1980:693).

In meinen nicht endenden Gedanken (Bilir-Meier & Bilir-Meier 2020: 30).¹³

I take Ertan's words to be a lament about the spectatorship (*Zuschauende*) as a missed meeting because her words are not arriving. Thus, it seems to me that she experiences this moment as another instance in which she is alienated, foreign, the *Ausländer* who longs to be met, to connect and to be transfigured into a rightful person by way of a relationship.

The Social Life of the *Ausländer*

The *Ausländer* has a social life where it meets and intermingle with others' experiences of alienations. Others, who recognize themselves "in the [...] picture of the past that whizzes by," this picture is based on Ertan's life and poetry (Benjamin). Benjamin writes that "only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognizability, is the past to be held fast." Indeed, the reception of Ertan's words and specifically the figure of the *Ausländer* leads to a recognition, redemption, and resurrection of an older past shared as an experience in the present. Yet Ertan and the *Ausländer* are transfigured in terms particular to the present.

In this section, I discuss how a community of intersectional activists and writers recognize something of Ertan's past to be true, not only of the past, but of their own present. This community consists of survivors of right-wing extremist attacks and surviving families of NSU-victims, all German citizens or legal residents. Ertan's work and life is met through the figure of the *Ausländer* and further reclaimed and naturalized as kin in a larger community. Further, by virtue of this practice, contemporary activists and writers contribute to the migrant archive in ways that turns their own situated-knowledge into a troubling counter-position. Basing my discussion on Ertan's reception in press and the podcast "Audiocollage zum Gedenken an Semra Ertan," I discuss how Ertan's *Ausländer* remains central to the migrant archive as animating memorial practices against nationalist and racializing forces.

The bilingual anthology *Mein Name ist Ausländer/Benim Adim Yabancı* (2020) was designed and published by Edition Assemblage, a leftist collective of feminist political activists in the German publishing sphere. The editors Zühal and Cana Bilir-Meier write in the anthology that the book itself is a way of taking up Ertan's last plea addressed to the media right before her death, which Ertan formulated as follows:

Ich möchte, dass Ausländer nicht nur das Recht haben, wie Menschen zu leben, sondern auch das Recht haben, wie Menschen behandelt zu werden. Das ist alles. Ich will, dass die Menschen sich lieben und akzeptieren. Und ich will, dass sie über meinen Tod nachdenken (Bilir-Meier & Bilir-Meier 2020:10).

Ertan clearly makes a case for the dignity of the foreigner. She wishes to have the right to be treated and to live like a human, implying that being from a foreign country is not the

¹³ "The many around me, they hear, yes, they listen, but none among them agrees with my thoughts, they all remain spectators, and so I grasp that everything I've spoken of is like the subject of a foreign film. I am lonely... [...] Thus it was and will always be, I bury myself in my never-ending thoughts" (Lauren K. Wolfe's translation; nb: "agrees with" (zustimmen) may be translated also as "acknowledges," "assents," "concur").

issue, but to be made foreign. The anthology then does more than simply publish Ertan's poems in bilingual translation, it also becomes an occasion in which her words as a writer about the experience of racism and racialization specifically frame the book.

The publication was accompanied by a commemorative podcast, building on previous on-site commemorations of Ertan's politically motivated death at precisely the same street junction in Hamburg.¹⁴ The recitation of "Bunalim..." by Ertan introduces the commemorative podcast put together to launch the 2020 publication of Ertan's poetry, *Mein Name ist Ausländer*.¹⁵ Her words are turned into a rightfully addressed grievance that has a place in the printed anthology and podcast. Ertan's poems are met by a community; her "never-ending thoughts" are *unburied* for this occasion and through other voices. Intersectional feminists such as writer Fatma Aydemir,¹⁶ researcher Saboura Naqshband and rap artist Reyhan Şahin speak in the podcasts and express how they identify with Ertan's experience of and fight against sexism and racism.¹⁷

The activists' terminology of intersectional justice to speak of racism against people of color reconfigures Ertan anew. The language of being "a woman of color" is not present in Ertan's poems. In fact, Ertan does not even refer to herself as *Ausländerin*, choosing instead the male/gender neutral/plural designation of the category, as if her alienation included the loss of her gender, or, alternatively, as if she were claiming a collective subject position for herself and her experience. Ertan's *Ausländer*, although ungendered, provides a way to engage with the issue of racism from an intersectional feminist position. Naqshband and Şahin center the care for-oneself and community explicitly to counter-act forces of alienation. This move is similar to how Black queer feminists have coupled the experience of racism with the gender experience (Ayim; Lorde). Naqshband and Şahin acknowledge that class, ethnic, and sexual differences matter in the collective figuration of the *Ausländer*, because these differences are held against migrant communities to foreignize them. Yet these differences, when lived freely and collectively, also hold the key to experience "wholesomeness" and heal (Naqshband et al. 73).

Alienation is expressed in ways that brings out an unspoken racial reality, present in social interaction, the labor market, and the justice system. The term *migranticized* mentioned by several speakers in the podcast reveals how descendants in the second-, third- and fourth- generation of labor migrants are often reduced to their parents' country of origin and related to as foreigners. Naqshband articulates how Ertan's experience is living on in the experience of women of color, who are "migranticized," downgraded and devalued in their labor. As several activists from Germany and Austria explain, they are constantly migranticized, that is, reminded that they are not ethnically German, as if they had only recently moved to their countries of birth. Public reviews of the anthology emphasize how the fight against racism has an early beginning with Ertan's poetics

¹⁴ <https://semraertaninitiative.wordpress.com/category/anma-gedenken/2019/>

¹⁵ Cf. Cana Bilir-Meier, "Audiocollage zum Gedenken an Semra Ertan 2020," <https://soundcloud.com/user-147562306/audiocollage-zum-gedenken-an-semra-ertan-2020>, accessed 17 Dec 2021.

¹⁶ Fatma Aydemir is the co-editor of *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, Ullstein Buchverlage, Berlin, 2019. This short story collection intervened in the debates on migration by challenging some of its terms.

¹⁷ The commemoration coincided with the Covid-lockdown and was moved into a soundcloud. https://soundcloud.com/user-147562306/audiocollage-zum-gedenken-an-semra-ertan-2020-neue-version?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

activism, stylizing her into an unacknowledged icon of anti-racism (Aydemir; Doğtaş; Gürsoy; Yaghoobifarah).¹⁸

Aydemir explains specifically how she discovered Ertan while writing an essay on labor. The poem “Mein Name ist *Ausländer*” seemed to express everything Aydemir was sensing about the unspoken condition of labor in relation to class, gender, and race. Her discovery troubled her, because Ertan had been completely forgotten, and remained unheard in public, when in fact she spoke of things Aydemir and others were still experiencing and struggling with. This eclipsed knowledge also points to the situated migrant knowledge that is not recorded in any national textbook or archive, but is rather experienced, embodied, and remains present to be rediscovered.¹⁹

Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah’s edited short story collection *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum* intervened in a tightening nationalist atmosphere. In her contribution “Labor,” she reports how racism causes mass burn-out along with labor exploitation of migrants and their descendants but remains unspoken. Aydemir points out how Ertan’s perceptive poetry about guest worker exploitation has been hidden knowledge since the 1980s. She cites Semra Ertan’s poem “Mein Name ist *Ausländer*” and shows the paradoxes of how descendants of labor migrants are still expected to work harder and are also accused of taking away jobs. Even when they succeed in higher education and strive towards middle-class positions, they are accused of not having really achieved something, but as rather having a “migrant bonus” that can lend itself to become a token (Aydemir 28). Aydemir points out her parents’ drive to prove their worthiness through tireless and self-exploiting labor, explaining how physical labor legitimates remaining in Germany without troubling Germans.

Alienation seems particularly painful for those who have tried to escape it by mastering language, education, and cultural habits. Fanon describes the attempts to escape from the inferiorizing image as in fact confirming the external view onto oneself and relating to one’s own community of origin from a state of alienation. Relatedly, Aydemir, Naqshband and Şahin are reminded that their parents or grandparents come from the Global South and need to work harder for the basic minimum of equal treatment. The alienation that is intertwined with job performance shows that striving for social equality means to undergo constant forms of degrading and being foreignized. According to Aydemir, migrants and their children do not compete with Germans as equals. Rather, they are socialized to work much harder to arrive at a basic minimum economically and socially. Her chapter ends with “Rest in power, Semra Ertan” as if Ertan was intimately known to her and shared the same sociality (Aydemir 27-37).

The experience of the *Ausländer* reverberates most strongly in the commemoration of death cases. The Semra Ertan Initiative founded in 2018, spearheaded by Zühal and Cana Bilir-Meier, has tried to rename the street junction as ‘Semra-Ertan Square’ to honor her plea to remember her death. The event that takes place every year on May 26 includes

¹⁸ See these public reviews: <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/es-ging-ihr-um-alles>; <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2020-12/semra-ertan-schriftstellerin-namen-suizid>; <https://missy-magazine.de/blog/2021/01/11/literaturezis-01-21/>; <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/semra-ertan-mein-name-ist-auslaender-politische-poesie-und-100.html>.

¹⁹ Consider Deniz Utlu’s words on how the missing archive of migration triggers the impulse to re-invent the wheel--a wheel that Utlu’s likens to a hamster’s wheel with a never-ending arrival, that is, an official archive of guest worker history: <http://denizutlu.de/essays/das-archiv-der-migration/>

individuals and groups that are engaged in the fight against racism, such as survivors of right-wing terrorist attacks. Ibrahim Arslan, one of the few survivors of the arson attack in Moelln in 1992,²⁰ states in the podcast that he became acquainted with Semra through her poems, her struggle, and her biography. He goes on to say that his and Ertan's family are deeply connected as they share a central message and claim: "we have been fighting for years for the commemoration of our families" (Arslan 9.55-10.00). He addresses Ertan directly:

Semra Ertan we are with you, and we stand with you. And whenever we have a commemoration, Semra is with us with her poems and her art, but also with her existence and her struggle. We are glad to be part of this commemoration. We demand together with the Ertan family, and with the Bilir-Meiers a site of memory, a memorial stone, and a plaque for Semra Ertan. This in order to have her visually in front of our eyes and not just in our memories (Arslan 10.01-12.20).²¹

Similar to how Bilir-Meier reached out and co-produced with Ertan an archive that can be given over to others to engage in a *Verabredung*, Ibrahim Arslan reaches out to Ertan and her family like kin, who are related in the experience of deadly racism in 1982 and 1992. His shared sense of alienation, however, is more specifically based on the indifference and denial of these murders as racist acts by German institutions. Further, the lack of initiative by the respective cities to allow for a commemorative space that speaks to the survivors' wishes shows that a lasting presence of these memories is not tolerated in public.²²

In a recent interview, Ibrahim Arslan explains how the city of Moelln has withheld thousands of letters sent to him and his father. The letters written in the early 1990s come from all over Germany, Europe, Turkey and even the US. But the letters never arrived; instead, they were kept in the city archive as part of "case documentation" for 27 years, until a researcher discovered them in the archive. Here, indeed a migrant story was included in the archive, yet in a way that enacted archival violence as if they wanted to produce a past shielded off from its ongoing present. By storing away and declaring the letters "archival material," the city of Moelln stopped them from reaching Arslan in a specific moment in the past. The delayed arrival of the letters, nevertheless, creates a present past meeting. Arslan describes how he became emotional reading through all the letters, some of them signed by several hundred people declaring their heartfelt solidarity with the family. Consider the statement below, where Holocaust survivors from the former concentration camp Ravensbrück offered to meet in 1992:

²⁰ The arson attack in 1992 killed 3 members of Ibrahim Arslan's family: his sister Yeliz (10) grandmother Bahide Arslan (51) and his cousin Ayşe Yılmaz (14).

²¹ Original: Semra wir sind mit dir, wir sind bei dir. Und immer wenn wir ein Gedenken haben, ist Semra Ertan mit uns. Mit ihren Gedichten, mit ihrer Kunst, aber auch mit ihrem Dasein und mit ihrem Kampf, des Igen freuen wir uns immer ein Teil des Gedenkens zu sein. Wir fordern gemeinsam mit der Familie Ertan, mit der Familie Bilir-Meier ein Gedenkort, ein Gedenkstein und auch ein [sic!] Gedenktafel fuer Semra Ertan, so dass wir sie nicht nur im Gedächtnis haben, sondern auch bildlich vors [sic!] Augen. Translated by Sultan Doughan.

²² Consider the latest case of the Hanau Memorial commemorating the 9 persons killed by a right-wing extremist in 2020. Though the family members of the killed agree and wish for a public memorial, the city refuses to build it on a central square: <https://www.zeit.de/2022/21/mahnmal-hanau-anschlag-Wettbewerb>.

Some letters have made me extremely emotional, a letter from the concentration camp community Ravensbrück for instance. [...] This camp community still exists; they declared their solidarity and indirectly formulated the desire to connect with us. We would have liked to connect with victims of the Holocaust and their dependents. However, this was not possible, because many survivors of the Holocaust are not alive anymore (Arslan).²³

Arslan expresses how close and present these letters feel, but that he would have needed this kind of solidarity when he felt abandoned by the city and national institutions.²⁴ Arslan's engagement with the archived letters and Ertan specifically shows that the experience of racism, as alienating as it is, allows for community building, kinship, and solidarity alliances, transcending racial hierarchies and historical differences and turning to care and experience-sharing.

The figure of the *Ausländer* is not limited to the guest worker, the experience of Turks and their descendants but lends itself to understanding a broader social reality of racially motivated premature death. Two women present in the commemoration podcast exemplify this connection through their statements: Candan Özer, the widow of Atilla Özer, who was killed by the National Socialist Underground (NSU) and Sister Oloruntoyin of the Black Community for Social Justice & Self-Defence. Özer describes how she will not forget Ertan along with all the victims of the NSU attacks, as such forging a connection between Ertan's self-chosen death and the targeted NSU murders (Özer 2021:16-17). In the podcast, Oloruntoyin likens Ertan's struggle to Afro-German activist May Ayim's, stating that "May Ayim was also a fighter" (Oloruntoyin 2019). May Ayim, the Afro-German anti-racist activist, feminist poet, tried to bring awareness to the lives and existence of Afro-Germans suffering from burn-out, institutional denial and psychosis until she committed suicide in 1996. Oloruntoyin further points out how the killing of Black people and people of color continues to be ignored in Germany, leaving entire communities, not just Turks, vulnerable and unfree, because of institutional racism (Oloruntoyin 2019: 17.53-20). In meeting Ertan, activists shared their knowledge about alienation ranging from structural racism to abandonment and even death, and as such, adumbrated the unspoken workings of racialization.

Memory Meetings: A Conclusion

Memory meetings enable the articulation of a longer standing experience, shifted, disrupted, delayed and yet persistent in the present. The meetings animated by images, poems, letters, everyday documents, and the site of Ertan's death during the commemoration enabled the articulation of alienation specifically for present day activists. Although engaged from a present point of view, the activists and the visual artist Cana

²³ Einige Briefe haben mich extrem emotional mitgenommen, beispielsweise ein Brief von der Lagergemeinschaft Ravensbrück. [...] Diese Lagergemeinschaft Ravensbrück gibt es ja heute noch, die haben ihre Solidarität erklärt und haben indirekt auch einen Vernetzungswunsch mit dem Brief formuliert. Eine Vernetzung mit Opfern vom Holocaust und ihren Angehörigen ist etwas, was wir uns bis heute wünschen. Allerdings wurde uns das nicht ermöglicht, weil viele Holocaustüberlebende leider nicht mehr leben

²⁴ <https://www.nsu-watch.info/2020/12/die-solidaritaet-wurde-uns-verheimlicht-indem-man-sie-27-jahre-lang-archiviert-hat-interview-mit-ibrahim-arslan/>

Bilir-Meier encountered and received Ertan's words and archival documents produced in the past and created a lived archival engagement that does not neatly fit into a national archive or a national narrative, but is enacted in practice.

I have built on Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz's notion of migrant archives. Instead of following their normative gesture, I have described and conceptualized the migrant archive as a form for situated knowledge and practice. The migrant archive is embodied, socially dynamic and counterposed to national archives. Similarly, instead of making an argument for the national inclusion or acknowledgment of these memorial practices as already contributing to the public sphere, as Chin argued, I have attempted to hold space in this counter-archive on the terms that Cana Bilir-Meier, her family, and the many activists brought, in engaging closely and directly with Ertan. And although the activists introduced new terms and reconfigured Ertan, in ways that was perhaps not present in Ertan's own time, they met and received Ertan's ways of knowing and experiencing alienation in a world organized by homogenizing forces of the nation-state from within their own position.

The migrant archive is not based on a shielded off past, but lives through the relations that are forged in the present moment of encounter. This gesture of forging a commonality between the experience of Ertan's *Ausländer* and the foreignized activists brought the relational workings of race to the fore. Indeed, the memory meetings prompted ongoing social and embodied engagements with the nature of racialization and racial relations in Germany based on the sense of being made foreign, as the activists stated through the term *migrantized*. The various moments in which their gender, religious, ethnic, class differences were foreignized, the activists took to connect with Ertan to build a community of care, to initiate a healing process, to articulate a longer standing unspoken racial inequality and to remember Ertan as kin and a female writer with her own name and political purpose. Beyond coming to terms with racist and deadly right-wing attacks, the activists shared a sense of alienation with Ertan based on an ongoing experience of being cut off or denied the treatment of equality in social life and public services, including public commemoration and the labor market, despite historical shifts and access to legal citizenship.

The meetings with Ertan collectivized the figure of the *Ausländer* and showed that the migrant archive remains in generative tension with official narratives about migration and race. The practice of the migrant archive is based on embodied forms of remembering, layered with multiple historical moments and in transnational movement. Ertan's transfiguration in these memorial practices range from kin to anti-racist feminist icon, fighter, and rebel, as if Ertan laid a groundwork in articulating and practicing a common cause, even though there are crucial differences between the 1980s and the 2020s. Ertan's sister Zühal Bilir-Meier addresses her directly in the podcast: "My dear sister, you were a lone fighter, racism has not lessened since your passing, but you would not be alone anymore."²⁵ (Bilir-Meier 30). Indeed, the participants of this archive engaged in memory meetings with Ertan. By doing so, they transcended the different historical moments of racialization to bring it to bear on an ongoing and ever-shifting experience of the *Ausländer*.

²⁵ Translation provided by Sultan Doughan

Works Cited

- Arslan, Ibrahim. „Die Solidarität wurde uns verheimlicht, indem man sie 27 Jahre lang archiviert hat.“ – Interview mit İbrahim Arslan. *NSU Watch*. December 9, 2012. <https://www.nsu-watch.info/2020/12/die-solidaritaet-wurde-uns-verheimlicht-indem-man-sie-27-jahre-lang-archiviert-hat-interview-mit-ibrahim-arslan/>.
- Aydemir, Fatma. “Arbeit” in Aydemir, Fatma & Henghameh Yaghoobifarah. *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*. Ullstein, Berlin 2019.
- Aydemir, Fatma & Timo Grampes. “Politische Poesie und Selbstverbrennung.“ *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*. February 1, 2021. <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/semra-ertan-mein-name-ist-auslaender-politische-poesie-und-100.html>.
- Ayim, May. *Blues in schwarz-weiß*. Berlin Orlanda Verlag, 2005 [1995].
- Bade, Klaus J. *Deutsche im Ausland-Fremde in Deutschland: Migration in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Beck, 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter. “On the Concept of History.” *Gesammelte Schriften I:2*. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt am Main, 1974.
- Benjamin, Walter. “Über den Begriff der Geschichte“ *Gesammelte Schriften I:2*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1980, pp.691-704.
- Bilir-Meier, Cana & Bilir-Meier Zühal. *Mein Name ist Ausländer/Benim Adım Yabancı*. Edition Assemblage, Münster, 2020.
- Bilir-Meier, Cana. *Semra Ertan'ı Anma İnisiyatifi*. <https://semraertaninitiative.wordpress.com/>.
- Bilir-Meier, Cana. *Semra Ertan. Her own voice/Kendi Sesi/ Ihre Eigene Stimme*. 2017. http://kunstradio.at/PROJECTS/AB2007/p/docu/text/SemraErtan_Book.pdf
- Bilir-Meier, Cana. *Semra Ertan*. 2013. <https://vimeo.com/90241760>.
- Bilir-Meier, Cana. *Contemplating the Archive – Notes on Semra Ertan*. 2013. http://www.canabilirmeier.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cana-Bilir-Meier_SEMRA-ERTAN-english2.pdf
- Chin, Rita. *The guest worker question in postwar Germany*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

- Chin, Rita, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley & Atina Grossmann. *After the Nazi Racial State. Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*. The University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Archive Fever: a freudian impression." Translated by Eric Prenowitz. *Diacritics*. Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 9-63.
- Doğtaş, Gürsoy. "Es ging ihr um alles." *Der Freitag*. Dezember 2020, <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/es-ging-ihr-um-alles>.
- El-Tayeb, Fatima. *Undeutsch. Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft*. Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2016.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, Pluto Press, 1986 [1952].
- Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated from the French by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. "Fatal couplings of power and difference: Notes on racism and geography." *The professional geographer* 54.1 (2002): 15-24.
- Gleisner, Leyla Sophie. Schreiben ohne Namen. *Zeit Online*. December 29, 2020. <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2020-12/semra-ertan-schriftstellerin-namen-suizid>.
- Göktürk, Deniz, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes, eds. *Germany in transit: Nation and migration, 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Göktürk, Deniz. "Intermedial Solidarity: Drawing Inspiration from the 1970s." *Monatshefte* 112.4 (2021): 606-631.
- Güleç, Ayşe. "Cana Bilir-Meier: Begegnungen zwischen Archiven–Dekolonisierung von Disziplinen." *Camera Austria* 141 (2018): 33-44.
- Herbert, Ulrich. *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland. Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge*. C.H. Beck, 2001.
- Lane, Priscilla. *White rebels in Black: German appropriation of Black popular culture*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2018.
- Linke, Uli. *German bodies: race and representation after Hitler*. New York, Routledge, 1999.
- Lorde, Audre. *Your silence will not protect you*. Silver Press, 2017.

Naqshband, Saboura; Gromova, Alina; Zami, Layla & Ismahan Wayah (2018): “Körper (ver)Stimmen Räume.” In: Keskinç, Ozan Zakariya; Langer, Ármin. *Fremdgemacht & Reorientiert - jüdisch-muslimische Verflechtungen*. Verlag Yılmaz-Günay, 71-90.

Partridge, Damani. *Hypersexuality and headscarves: race, sex, and citizenship in the new Germany*. Bloomington Indiana University Press, 2012.

Piberger, Patricia. “Verwobene Poesien und Sonnenblumen aus Stein. Eine Kunstperformance von Adi Liraz.“ in: East of Elsewhere (Hrsg.), Map of Reflections. “Wie baut man Brücken über unruhiges Wasser?” 2022. <https://eastofelsewhere.org/verwobene-poesie-und-sonnenblumen-aus-stein>.

Rothberg, Michael & Yasemin Yildiz. “Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany.” *Parallax*, 17:4, (2011): pp. 32-48.

Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

Utlu, Deniz. “Das Archiv der Migration“ *Der Freitag*. October 31st, 2011. <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/das-archiv-der-migration> can be found here as well: <http://denizutlu.de/essays/das-archiv-der-migration/>.

Yaghoobifarah, Hengameh. “Mein Name ist Ausländer.“ *Missy Magazin*. January 11, 2021. <https://missy-magazine.de/blog/2021/01/11/literaturrezis-01-21/>.

Zu Eppendorf, Katharina Meyer und Cathrin Schmiegel. “Mahnmal in Hanau. Dieses Kunstwerk soll an die Morde von Hanau erinnern.“ May 22, 2022. <https://www.zeit.de/2022/21/mahnmal-hanau-anschlag-Wettbewerb>.