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# The Society of Friends of Halit. Migrant-Situated Knowledge and Affirmative Sabotage\*

\*This is the translation of a reworked version of the text “Vermittlung von Realitäten” [Mediation of Realities], first published online in March 2018 by *Art Education Research*, no. 14, ed. by Nanna Lüth, [blog.zhdk.ch/iaejournal/files/2018/03/n%C2%B014\\_Ayse\\_Gulec\\_DE.pdf](http://blog.zhdk.ch/iaejournal/files/2018/03/n%C2%B014_Ayse_Gulec_DE.pdf)

*The Society of Friends of Halit*, a contribution to *documenta 14* in Kassel that thematized the National Socialist Underground (NSU) and the lateness of the group’s prosecution, attracted much public interest. However, it was often received as being something other than art. One part of the installation, a video by the group *Forensic Architecture* that deconstructs the witness testimony of a former employee of the German state of Hesse’s intelligence services, was almost approved for submission as evidence in court, before ultimately being rejected. Ayşe Güleç’s text interrogates these defensive reactions as practices of *silencing* and contrasts them with a form of knowledge production led by and in solidarity with those directly affected by the NSU, and which draws upon their own migrant-situated knowledge. She suggests the use of what Spivak calls “affirmative sabotage,” a tactic already employed by the relatives of the NSU’s murder victims in reaction to the *silencing* they faced from police and the majority society, as a resistant practice for art mediation and education. Finally, she also draws on the experiences of *documenta 14*’s art mediators/educators, known as the “Chorus.” How did they react in situations where they faced racialized attributions to themselves or the artworks by visitors to the exhibition?

Editorial by Ayşe Güleç & Nanna Lüth

## The Society of Friends of Halit. Migrant-Situated Knowledge and Affirmative Sabotage

The future belongs to those who are ready to take in a bit of the other, as well as being what they themselves are. After all, it is because their history and ours is so deeply and profoundly and inextricably intertwined that racism exists. For otherwise, how could they keep us apart?<sup>1</sup>

In May 2017, between the two *documenta 14* exhibitions that opened on April 8 in Athens first and then on June 10, 2017 in Kassel, the *Tribunal Unraveling the NSU Complex* was established in Cologne by a nationwide group of activists. Guided by the analyses of the family of Kassel citizen and National Socialist Underground (NSU) murder victim Halit Yozgat, various actors involved in the preparation of the *Tribunal Unraveling the NSU Complex* commissioned the research group *Forensic Architecture*<sup>2</sup> to investigate the testimony of Andreas Temme, a former employee of the intelligence services, about his presence at the place of the crime, a Kassel internet café, during the time of Yozgat's murder on April 6, 2006. For Kassel is not only the “documenta city,” but also the city in which Halit Yozgat was made the youngest and final victim of the National Socialist Underground's (NSU) series of racist murders. The press conference for the 14th edition of *documenta* in Athens fell on April 6 – the day of Halit's commemoration.

In March 2017, an activist-organized international conference was held at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt [House of World Cultures] under the title *The Apparatus of Racism*. Using a leaked police video, scenes from the murder were reenacted in a 1:1 scale model of the place of the crime, in order to test the plausibility of Andreas Temme's testimony. The video underlying the reconstruction of the murder – filmed in Halit's internet café – was intended by Temme to support his claim, as a former employee of Hessen's intelligence services, that he had failed to notice Halit Yozgat lying shot on the floor of the café when leaving; in other words, that he had neither heard nor seen anything of the murder despite his presence in the café's back rooms at the time of the murder being verified. This police video formed the basis of the “investigation of the investigation” or “reenactment of the reenactment” of the murder. *Forensic Architecture*'s meticulous and forensic examination, and the reconstruction of Temme's testimony within the microcosm of the recreated internet café, made it possible to substantiate arguments, long put forward by the victim's family, that problematized the role of those state institutions involved in the murder investigation. For many years, İsmail Yozgat, Halit's father, analyzed the inconsistencies in the testimony of the then employee of the intelligence services.<sup>3</sup>

Despite many attempts by the Yozgat family during the proceedings to bring up their experiences and the underlying structural dimensions of societal and institutional racism, their analyses were not taken into account – not even in the NSU trial in Munich, begun in 2013.<sup>4</sup> The trial ended after five years and two months with Beate Zschäpe receiving a life sentence for ten counts of murder, with shorter sentences given to four accomplices. Since further supporters and helpers of the NSU trio were not brought to trial, it is possible, on the basis of this judgement, for the false impression to arise that the NSU's crimes were the work of merely a handful of individuals. The organizational structure

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall: „Subjects in History. Making Diasporic Identities“, in: Wahneema Lubiano (Hg.): *The House That Race Built*, New York 1998, S. 289–299.

<sup>2</sup> *Forensic Architecture* is a research institute based at Goldsmiths College, University of London. See [www.forensic-architecture.org](http://www.forensic-architecture.org).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Initiative 6. April, online at: [www.initiative6april.wordpress.com](http://www.initiative6april.wordpress.com) [02.08.2018].

<sup>4</sup> Cf. NSU-Watch (ed.): *Gerichtsprotokolle des NSU-Verfahrens im Oberlandesgericht München* [Court Records of the NSU Trial in the Higher Regional Court of Munich], 2013, online at: [www.nsu-watch.info/2013/05/sitzungstermine/](http://www.nsu-watch.info/2013/05/sitzungstermine/) [02.08.2018].

of the NSU complex, and the role of the authorities and intelligence services, remained uninvestigated. Neither the Yozgat family's questions and analysis regarding Temme's role nor *Forensic Architecture's* research was taken into account. This would seem to fulfil the conditions of *silencing*, a practice whereby marginal groups are quieted and made mute on the basis of hegemonic power relations.<sup>5</sup>

Such a failure of understanding, as Nikita Dhawan points out, cannot be ascribed to a lack of articulation on the part of the marginalized. Instead, she argues, "[...] it is more crucial to scandalize the inability of the 'dominant' to listen or their 'selective hearing' and 'strategic deafness.'"<sup>6</sup> It is against such deafness on the part of the police and the majority society that the *documenta 14* contribution *The Society of Friends of Halit*, including the previously mentioned video of the reconstruction of the murder by the team of *Forensic Architecture*, positions itself. The aim of this artistic-activist intervention was to make visible on the formal, discursive, and political levels those processes that serve to silence and exclude through discrimination. I understand symbolic and actual processes of exclusionary discrimination as attempts to draw clear lines between certain fields, logics, and disciplines by declaring particular standpoints and forms of expertise to be worthless. The aim of this text is to counter these exclusionary acts of discrimination, as part of a practice of *silencing*, with a specific experiential and practical form of knowledge: a mode of knowledge production generated at the meeting point of activist anti-racism, migration, art, art mediation, and the "migrant-situated knowledge" of those directly affected by racism. It was from the "situated knowledge"<sup>7</sup> and years-long resistance of those affected by the NSU's violence, who spoke out against attempts by the police and the legal and political systems to silence them, that *The Society of Friends of Halit* emerged.

As a member of the *documenta 14* team, I worked in the role of "community liaison" for sociopolitical and sociocultural contacts in the department of the exhibition's artistic director, Adam Szymczyk. It was in this capacity that I also initiated *the Society of Friends of Halit*, as an alliance of anti-racist/anti-fascist activists and artists (including *Forensic Architecture*) that also supported formats within the public program. In the following, I will attempt to map out the activist, curatorial, and mediation strategies that became important in our work with *the Society of Friends of Halit*. From the participatory perspective of an inquiring activism/activist inquiry, I will first of all present the background of *the Society of Friends of Halit*, which as a collective took on an authorial and mediatory role by bringing together different audiovisual works, and then examine the public-media discourse around them. *The Society of Friends of Halit* operated at the point where artistic positions, politics of memory, discursive interventions, legal research, local activisms, and transnational solidarities meet. Against this background, I will ask what role educational processes and the production of publics can play within such a large-scale exhibition. Moreover, I will reflect upon the methods employed to delegitimize the artwork "77SQM\_9:26MIN" – *Forensic Architecture's* contribution to the installation *The Society of Friends of Halit* – in the media as well as in political, legal, and artistic discourses. Finally, I will draw on the experiences of the group of art mediators and educators<sup>A</sup> known as the "Chorus,"<sup>8</sup> who encountered racist reactions during their presentation of *The Society of Friends of Halit*. I'm particularly interested, here, in whether

<sup>5</sup> See for example Kristie Dotson: "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," in: *hypatia*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2011), pp. 236–57.

<sup>6</sup> Nikita Dhawan: "Hegemonic Listening and Subversive Silences. Ethical-political Imperatives," in: Alice Lagaay/Michael Lorber (eds.): *Destruction in the Performative*, Amsterdam/New York 2012, pp. 47–60, here pp. 52–53.

<sup>7</sup> Donna Haraway: "Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in: *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988), pp. 575–99, here p. 583.

<sup>A</sup> Translator's Note: The term "art mediation" is increasingly adopted in English discourse and translations from the German as the closest possible equivalent of *Kunstvermittlung*, a term used in German to signal a somewhat critical and (self-) reflexive understanding of gallery education/museum education/visitor service/docents.

<sup>8</sup> Eva Nenninger: "Documenta 14 – Spaziergänge mit dem Chor in Kassel," 2017, online at: [www.documenta-kassel.com/tag/chor/](http://www.documenta-kassel.com/tag/chor/) [02.08.2018].

*silencing* attempts to suppress migrant knowledge were repeated within the exhibition space in the perception and epistemic processing of the artworks, and how the art mediators describe their own reactions to these situations.

## I. The Context of the Murders, of the *Silencing*, and of the Struggles for Clarification and Remembrance

In the years 2000 to 2006, nine men between of 20 and 40 years of age were shot using the same weapon in a number of different German cities, namely Nuremberg, Munich, Hamburg, Rostock, Dortmund, Kassel, and Heilbronn. All had Turkish (Kurdish) or Greek names: Enver Şimşek, Abdurrahim Özüdoğru, Süleyman Taşköprü, Habil Kılıç, Mehmet Turgut, İsmail Yaşar, Theodoros Boulgarides, Mehmet Kubaşık, and Halit Yozgat. All operated as small-scale entrepreneurs in charge of their own businesses. The scenes of the crimes were a kiosk, a locksmith's, a tailor's, a vegetable shop, an internet café – all everyday places, mostly situated on busy streets, some of them even in the direct proximity of a police station. All were located in neighborhoods that were and remain heavily shaped by immigration. These attacks on migrant life also included at least three bomb attacks perpetrated by the NSU: in June 2004, for example, a nail bomb containing 700 nails was placed in front of the Yildirim brothers' hairdressing shop in Cologne's bustling Keupstraße before being detonated – with the intention of murdering as many people as possible.

After each murder, the relatives of the victims and those affected by the bombings were themselves made the focus of racist investigations. The special investigative teams chose names such as “Crescent” or “Bosporus.” This was followed by racist articles in the press, which gave the series of murders the name the “Kebab Murders.”<sup>9</sup> Although relatives of the victims repeatedly pointed out that the killings must have been the work of Nazis, they were not listened to at these moments, but instead repeatedly silenced and themselves brought under suspicion over many years, with both the murder victims' relatives and the survivors of the bombings treated like perpetrators, observed and pursued by the authorities: “[...] when we drove to see our relatives in in Holland, they would follow us; when we went to Austria to see relatives, they would follow us. And they even followed us when we travelled to Turkey.”<sup>10</sup>

From the beginning, there was an intuitive understanding among those directly affected of who the perpetrators must have been, and that the authorities were directing their efforts in the wrong direction. This knowledge was articulated both individually and collectively: just a month after Halit Yozgat's murder, his relatives organized a memorial demonstration along with the families of Enver Şimşek and Mehmet Kubaşık under the banner “No 10th Victim.” [figs. 1 & 2] Until that point, the three families had not known each other. In Kassel, almost 4,000 people – mostly from migrant communities – took part. This demonstration represented a thorough articulation of their situated knowledge of the racist background to the murders, as clearly expressed on banners and in speeches. However, they were comprehensively ignored by the general public. After this demonstration, the series of racist murders stopped, and a year later the police officer

<sup>9</sup> Andreas Fuchs: “Diskriminierende Bezeichnung. Wie der Begriff ‘Döner-Morde’ entstand,” *Spiegel-Online*, July 4, 2012, online at: [www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/doener-mord-wie-das-unwort-des-jahres-entstand-a-841734.html](http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/doener-mord-wie-das-unwort-des-jahres-entstand-a-841734.html) [02.08.2018].

<sup>10</sup> Ayşe Yozgat on November 27, 2017 in the parliamentary enquiry in Hessen, quoted from: Fritz Lazlo Weber/Natascha Sadr Haghghian/Ayşe Güleç: “Ayşe und İsmail Yozgat vor dem hessischen NSU-Untersuchungsausschuss,” December 14, 2007, online at: [www.migazin.de/2017/12/14/bewegend-ayse-ismail-yozgat-nsu/](http://www.migazin.de/2017/12/14/bewegend-ayse-ismail-yozgat-nsu/) [02.08.2018].

Michèle Kiesewetter was murdered. The practice, both during years-long investigations as well as in the NSU trial in Munich, of unjustly placing the murder victims' relatives under suspicion and "not wanting to hear" displays a further, additional violence enacted by state institutions. In order to counter this ignorance, it is necessary to develop new paths that redirect societal attention to the stories and experiences of those affected.

### **Emotional-Cognitive and Aesthetic-Political Reorientation as "Affirmative Sabotage"**

The demonstrations held in Kassel on May 6, 2006 and sometime later in Dortmund are accepted today as testifying to the existence of a migrant knowledge that understood that the murderers would go uncaptured, that there was no political will to name the perpetrators, and that there was no empathy for the relatives of the victims. Banners for the demonstration were designed with a uniform aesthetic: white text on black fabric. The relatives carried large pictures of the then nine victims, holding them close to their bodies and literally walking behind them. Only one of the banners was written in Turkish: "Yalnız değilsiniz" (We won't abandon you).

With the *Tribunal Unraveling the NSU Complex* in early 2017, migrant-situated knowledge was brought into the spotlight of public attention as a category for the analysis of structural racism in the everyday and in institutions. Contained within this knowledge, too, are concepts for how racism can be fought against. After the so-called self-uncovering of the NSU core trio in November 2011, those who had lost their relatives at the hands of Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt, and Beate Zschäpe attempted, within the NSU trial and ceremonies of commemoration, to expand the narrow institutional space allocated to them. With specific speech acts and forms of action and representation, they named and indicted the racism made unspeakable in hegemonic spaces. "They use politics of image, space, and body and ways of speaking in order to introduce their own knowledge and position themselves within empowering narratives that offer political, aesthetic, societal, and emotional orientations and perspectives."<sup>11</sup>

In formulating their statements before the committees or during the NSU trials, the Yozgat family and others affected were always friendly and extremely precise in their descriptions of their own position and the lines of conflict involved. Yet these affirmative and polite speech acts by the Yozgat family always contained within them a clearly formulated "No." On October 1, 2014, in the course of the NSU trial, the judge asked İsmail Yozgat how he had found his son. As if wanting to reassure the judge, the father responded, "I'll tell you." What followed, though, was an extensive and insistent account of the family's treatment at the hands of investigating officials: how they themselves were treated as offenders, and which defamations and accusations they were made subject to over a long period of time. Only then did he describe his own experience – how he found his son, the drops of blood on the table, how the police and ambulances came, how his son died in his arms, how he himself was then led away by police and not allowed to inform his family. In response to the judge's repeated questions about the position in which he had found his son, İsmail Yozgat stood up, before walking over and lying down

<sup>11</sup> Ayşe Güleç/Johanna Schaffer: "Empathie, Ignoranz und migrantisch situiertes Wissen," in: Juliane Karakayali/Cagri Kahveci/Doris Liebscher/Carl Melchers (eds.): *NSU-Komplex analysieren*, Bielefeld 2016, pp. 57-80, here p. 62. German: "Sie nutzen Bild-, Raum- und Körperpolitiken und Sprechweisen, um ihr Wissen einzubringen und positionierten sich mit ermächtigenden Narrativen, die politische, ästhetische, gesellschaftliche, emotionale Orientierungen und Perspektiven."

in the narrow space between the dock and the judge's bench. With this bodily form of showing, he invoked the presence of his murdered son's body in the courtroom.<sup>12</sup>

I propose that these actions be understood as acts of “affirmative sabotage,” as defined by Gayatri Spivak. About this, she writes:

I used the term sabotage because it referred to the deliberate ruining of the master's machine from the inside. The idea is of entering the discourse that you are criticising fully, so that you can turn it around from inside because the only way you can sabotage something is when you are working intimately with it [...].<sup>13</sup>

It was in this spirit that the *Tribunal Unraveling the NSU Complex* was also realized. Making the work of *the Society of Friends of Halit* available to a wider public within the framework of *documenta 14* constituted a further step.

## II. The Society of Friends of Halit – The Exhibition Space as Space for Negotiation

The place of presentation for the multidimensional and collaborative installation of *The Society of Friends of Halit* was located in the Neue Hauptpost [new main post office], which, renamed as the Neue Galerie, served as one of *documenta 14*'s main venues. The installation brought together different elements that each proceeded from the micro level to offer deeper insight into various facets of the NSU complex. [fig.3] We designed the entrance to *The Society of Friends of Halit*'s exhibition space to be extremely narrow: to the left, a wall was erected in order to create a spatial separation from Ahlam Shibli's photo series. Located opposite this was the work of Beatrice Gonzales. Three steps to the left of the entrance to the installation, a screen mounted on the wall showed a 10-minute film documenting the “No 10th Victim” memorial demonstration from 2006 – including a moving political speech by İsmail Yozgat. A still frame taken from this film and reproduced as wallpaper filled the rest of the wall. In front of a curtain were shown three interviews conducted by the artistic collective *spot\_the\_silence*, including one with Osman Tasköprü – brother of the victim of the NSU's Hamburg murder. To the right of this was screened a selection of the so-called “SPOTS NSU Complex.” Over 20 filmmakers contributed spots – short films that made audiovisual interventions with reference to aspects of the NSU complex – to the Tribunal.<sup>14</sup> Viewed from the perspective of the narrow entrance situation, the space gave the impression of opening up at its rear. Behind the curtain, which allowed for only a third of the space behind it to be seen, were displayed the results of *Forensic Architecture*'s research, projected across three screens under the title “77SQM\_9:26MIN.”<sup>15</sup> In front of this stood a bench with three sets of headphones (with audio in English and Turkish). Beyond this, we decided against making any further interventions in the design of the space, in order that its garage-like appearance be maintained.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Gayatri Spivak in interview with Nazish Brohi, undated, online at: [www.dawn.com/news/print/1152482](http://www.dawn.com/news/print/1152482) [02.08.2018]. See also *idem*: “Feminism and Human Rights,” in: Nermeen Shaikh (ed.): *The Present as History. Critical Perspectives on Power*, New York 2007, pp. 172–201 and Spivak: *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Cambridge/Mass 2013.

<sup>14</sup> See [tribunal-spots.net](http://tribunal-spots.net) [02.08.2018].

<sup>15</sup> See [www.forensic-architecture.org/case/77sqm\\_926min/](http://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/77sqm_926min/) [02.08.2018].

## Transformation of the Exhibition Space

The demonstration that took place a month after Halit's murder passed directly by the Neue Hauptpost; its presence as a video in an exhibition housed in that very building therefore lent the exhibition space a further meaning through its connection with the outside. One art mediator I spoke to described the situation as follows: "When speaking in front of the video and wallpaper of the demonstration, we were first of all speaking about the pictured location, one that many visitors recognized immediately."<sup>16</sup> To begin the spatial narrative of *The Society of Friends of Halit* with the "No 10th Victim" demonstration was a central strategic decision by the collective, made in order to draw attention to the fact that situated knowledge was present from a very early stage and had been extensively displayed in Kassel, but was nevertheless barely acknowledged or listened to by the majority society. The decision by the Society Friends of Halit to install a video excerpt and the wallpaper immediately next to the entrance to the installation was crucial, since this confrontation made visitors witnesses to a migrant knowledge that is otherwise often actively ignored. This experience was intended to spatially and discursively steer visitors toward a shift in their perceptions, and an engagement with a largely ignored issue. All further elements of the exhibition – such as the three interviews and the "SPOTS," as audiovisual interventions in the subject of the NSU complex – were installed immediately after the wallpaper, in the transitional area at the entrance to *Forensic Architecture's* film work "77SQM\_9:26MIN." In this way, the space became one of negotiation, in which realities could be considered anew by making negotiable that which was generally concealed and denied. At the same time, as recipients or viewers of *Forensic Architecture's* work and of the "No 10th Victim" demonstration, visitors were also made witnesses to a *silencing*, ignoring, and marginalization of migrant knowledge. Thus, the spheres of art and of politics were here superimposed over one another: the exhibition space became a political one, where marginalized forms of knowledge as counter-knowledge were made visible and audible through their placement at the center of one of the most important international art shows.

## Neither Art nor Non-Art?

Following the opening weekend of *documenta 14* in Kassel, one element of *The Society of Friends of Halit* was highlighted and discussed in various parts of the media. Coverage by both international sources such as artnet and many German-language newspapers, from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Welt* to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, consistently singled out the work "77SQM\_9:26MIN," with all of them drawing from it a very similar conclusion: it was "the best work on display at *documenta*, but not art"; rather, they argued, it was judicial evidence.<sup>17</sup> It's remarkable that this inference manages both to praise the presentation as "the best work on display at *documenta*," while in the same breath rejecting its location within the field of art. Simultaneously, the art world is deemed to be an improper context for the presentation of such an important contribution to the establishment of truth. For me, this raises the question of why such a practice of exclusory classification and separation is something one encounters so frequently.

<sup>16</sup> E-mail interview with S.Va., 01.28.2018, conducted by Ayşe Güleş.

<sup>17</sup> Hili Perlson: "The Most Important Piece at *documenta 14* in Kassel Is Not an Artwork. It's Evidence," *artnet*, June 8, 2017, online at: <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/documenta-14-kassel-forensic-nsu-trial-984701> [02.08.2018].

*Forensic Architecture* operates as a multidisciplinary research team comprised of architects and academics, with audio specialists and sound artists also brought in for consultation. Eyal Weizman, leader of the institute, emphasizes that *Forensic Architecture* uses artistic strategies in order to “confront doubt, and [use] aesthetic techniques in order to interrogate” – in contrast to contemporary art’s tendency to “[problematize] the notion of truth.”<sup>18</sup> Federal prosecutors in the Munich NSU trial initially expressed an interest in using the results of *Forensic Architecture*’s investigations, but later withdrew their invitation to the London-based group. By contrast, representatives of Hesse’s state parliament proposed showing parts of “77SQM\_9:26MIN” relating to sensorial perception in their parliamentary enquiry into the NSU affair. However, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union, who together with the Greens form Hesse’s coalition government) attempted to exclude the work from the political field and from the parliamentary enquiry, and to discredit it with the argument that the video was “just art” – that is, non-scientific and therefore “not evidence.” Nevertheless, following a parliamentary debate, on August 25, 2017 the former intelligence services employee Andreas Temme was eventually confronted with excerpts of “77SQM\_9:26MIN” and questioned about the findings presented in the video.<sup>19</sup>

### III. Experiences of the Art Mediators

Participants of the so-called *Walks*, as *documenta 14*’s guided tours through the exhibition were termed, also often focused on the ordering principle of “art” versus “non-art,” and the question of “why this is being shown at *documenta*.”<sup>20</sup> The installation of *The Society of Friends of Halit* was one of the best-visited rooms in the exhibition, also receiving wide coverage in the press. Despite the strong interest, many visitors reacted disapprovingly and/or defensively to the works. These reactions were possibly a result of the association of the exhibition space with its exterior social realities, or “the blurring of the boundaries between art and activism,” as one art mediator put it. Furthermore, they recounted,

“there were some visitors who felt the need to correct me with regard to the facts. They then discussed trivialities, diverting the conversation entirely from the real issues: Silencing. Racism. An imbalance in our society.”<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, there were also moments during the tours, when members of the Chorus were themselves made the focus of racist categorizations. One mediator described their experience as follows:

Looking back, I remember numerous stimulating discussions that arose from the work *The Society of Friends of Halit*, but I can’t escape the impression that my own hair color, heritage, and supposed ethnic categorization were especially registered by people during my *Walks* when dealing with this particular work.<sup>22</sup>

Discussions of other works informed by queer- or migrant politics or postcolonialism also led to situations of conflict. Reactions to Ahlam Sibli’s work “Heimat” were described by one Chorus member as follows: “I was repeatedly amazed by discussions around this work. There was really everything you could imagine. One tour participant even said,

<sup>18</sup> Schattenblick: “documenta, Fragen und Kritik – Untiefen rechts,” in: *BERICHT/055 ...* (2) (July 27, 2017), online at: [www.schattenblick.de/infopool/kunst/report/kurb0055.html](http://www.schattenblick.de/infopool/kunst/report/kurb0055.html) [02.08.2018]. Quote taken from Hili Perlson: “The Most Important Piece at *documenta 14* in Kassel Is Not an Artwork. It’s Evidence” [see note 17].

<sup>19</sup> Joachim F. Tornau: “NSU-Untersuchungsausschuss. Temmes Aussagen nicht nachvollziehbar,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* (online), August 24, 2017, online at: [www.fr.de/rhein-main/nsu-untersuchungsausschuss-temmes-aussagen-nicht-nachvollziehbar-a-1338183](http://www.fr.de/rhein-main/nsu-untersuchungsausschuss-temmes-aussagen-nicht-nachvollziehbar-a-1338183) [02.08.2018].

<sup>20</sup> E-mail interview with S.Va., 01.28.2018, conducted by Ayşe Güleç.

<sup>21</sup> E-mail interview with S.Gü., 01.28.2018, conducted by Ayşe Güleç. German: “Es gab einige Besucher\*innen, die das Bedürfnis hatten, mich zu korrigieren, in Bezug auf die Fakten. Es wurde dann über Kleinigkeiten diskutiert und total davon abgelenkt, um was es eigentlich geht: Silencing. Rassismus. Eine Schieflage in unserer Gesellschaft.”

<sup>22</sup> E-mail interview S.Va., 01.28.2018, conducted by Ayşe Güleç. German: “[R]ückblickend erinnere ich zahlreiche angeregte Gespräche infolge der Arbeit der Society of Friends of Halit, aber zugleich werde ich bis zuletzt den Eindruck nicht los, dass meine eigene Haarfarbe, Herkunft und die vermeintliche Ethnienzuordnung bei dieser Arbeit von den Menschen in meinen *Walks* besonders registriert wurde.”



‘You can see by their faces that they don’t belong here.’”<sup>23</sup> The interviews I have cited make it clear that questions and constellations of inclusion and exclusion, structural ignorance, and lack of empathy in the social realm are also mirrored and repeated in the exhibition space. And so a common theme within the weekly consultation with the Chorus members was the great difficulty they experienced in dealing with racist attributions to themselves or the artworks.

I’ve been interested for some time in the question of how art mediators react in such situations. In particular, I ask myself how mediators, and especially those who are perceived as being of a different ethnic origin and who then stand as cultural representatives at the center of racializing gazes and actions, can act to combat racism. During *documenta 12* (2007), for example, the art mediator Hansel Sato used “performing essentialism” as a strategic means of rejecting certain cultural categorizations, by utilizing one particular facet of his identity in such situations to resistant ends.<sup>24</sup> Ten years later, in the framework of the research project *The Art Educator’s Walk*, participant observations and interviews were conducted that addressed the actions and attitudes of *documenta 14*’s art mediators. Strategies were also brought up in these interviews with some Chorus members – for example, that of thanking visitors for the conflict, or of vocalizing the conflict in a friendly way. I therefore propose that these actions on the part of the art mediators in situations of conflict be understood as a conscious or unconscious picking up and continuation within the exhibition space of those strategies of “affirmative sabotage” developed by those affected by the NSU terror.

## Conclusion

The racializing “constellation of powers that [...] allowed murders to be committed over a period of years”<sup>26</sup> is based upon a structural ignorance and failure to empathize. These failures did not constitute an oversight on behalf of the authorities; rather, they were active processes of not wanting to see or to hear, and as such are highly political, since the field of visibility is closely connected with the conditions imposed and the attention given by society at large. Against this sociopolitical background, curating and art mediation should be seen not as merely neutral acts whereby artworks are arranged in physical spaces and then discussed, but as active processes of positioning oneself within certain themes, contexts, histories, and narratives. In this sense, the inclusion of *The Society of Friends of Halit* in *documenta 14* should be understood as an active curatorial and artistic intervention in structures of political power; one that mediates between the fields of art and politics in order to expose racist practices of *silencing* on various societal levels and combat these by making unignorable migrant-situated knowledge in the form of “affirmative sabotage.”

<sup>23</sup> E-mail interview S. Gü., 01.28.2018, conducted by Ayşe Güleç. German: “Die Diskussionen bei dieser Arbeit haben mich immer wieder ins Staunen versetzt. Da war wirklich alles mit dabei. Einer der Tour Teilnehmenden hat sogar gesagt: ‘Man sieht ihnen in den Gesichtern an, dass sie nicht hierher gehören.’”

<sup>24</sup> Hansel Sato: “Performing Essentialismus auf der *documenta 12*,” in: Carmen Mörsch/Forschungsteam der *documenta 12* Vermittlung (eds.): *Kunstvermittlung 2. Zwischen kritischer Praxis und Dienstleistung auf der documenta 12*, Zürich 2009, pp. 67–78.

<sup>25</sup> *The Art Educator’s Walk -Handeln und Haltung von KunstvermittlerInnen zeitgenössischer Kunst am Beispiel der Grossausstellung documenta 14 in Kassel* at the HKB Bern, organized by Gila Kolb, Carina Herring, and Mara Ryser. Further information online at: [www.intermedialitaet.com/2017/10/16/the-art-educators-walk/](http://www.intermedialitaet.com/2017/10/16/the-art-educators-walk/) [02.18.2018].

<sup>26</sup> Lee Hielscher: “Das Staatsgeheimnis ist Rassismus. Migrantisch-situiertes Wissen um die Bedeutungsebenen des NSU-Terrors,” in: *movements*, no. 3 (2016), pp. 167–176, here p. 168. *documenta 12* (2007), she developed the advisory committee *documenta 12* Beirat, subsequently becoming the group’s spokesperson. In 2012 she worked to educate art mediators as part of *DOCUMENTA (13)*’s “Maybe Education” program.

**Ayşe Güleç** is an educationalist, researcher, and activist who works at the interface of anti-racism, art, art mediation, and migration. From 2016 to 2017 she was head of *documenta 14*'s community liaison, creating connections between artists, artworks, and sociopolitical contexts. She is active in the collective movement *Unraveling the NSU Complex* and was involved in the coordination and implementation of the *Tribunal Unraveling the NSU Complex*. From 1998 to 2016 she worked at the sociocultural center Schlachthof Kassel, where she was responsible for migration as well as local, regional, and European activist networking. For *documenta 12* (2007), she developed the advisory committee *documenta 12 Beirat*, subsequently becoming the group's spokesperson. In 2012 she worked to educate art mediators as part of *dOCUMENTA (13)*'s "Maybe Education" program.

documenta studies #01  
October 2018

AYŞE GÜLEÇ:  
The Society of Friends  
of Halit. Migrant-Situated  
Knowledge and  
Affirmative Sabotage

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documenta and  
Exhibition studies

KUNSTHOCHSCHULE  
KASSEL



**Fig. 1:**  
“No 10th Victim”  
demonstration in Kassel,  
2006, still from the video  
“No 10th Victim”  
by Sefa Defterli, <https://pad.ma/CTC/editor/00:00:00,00:05:43.321#embed>



**Fig. 2:**  
Demonstration  
“No Next Victim,”  
installation view,  
Neue Neue Galerie,  
documenta 14, Kassel, 2017,  
Photo: Archiv der Initiative  
6. April, Kassel



**Fig. 3:**  
The Society of Friends of  
Halit, installation view,  
Neue Neue Galerie,  
documenta 14, Kassel, 2017,  
Photo: Mathias Völzke