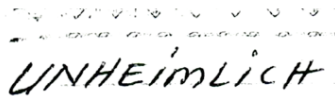


At The Beginning The Word 'Homeless-ly/Unbelievable Happy'<sup>1</sup> Stands



UNHEIMLICH

This hand-written word floats on a white background in the center of the film screen. It is the author Semra Ertan's handwriting from the year 1979. One word follows the next, a whole poem.

We read:

,Homeless-ly/Unbelievable Happy

When she says,  
She is homeless-ly/unbelievable happy,  
It means that she is secretly/believable unhappy.  
When she says,  
She is homeless-ly/ unbelievable happy,  
It means she is unhappy  
Because she has no home.  
(...)'

*Semra Ertan, 1977*

Semra Ertan was born in 1956 in Turkey, in 1972 she moved to her parents, living in the Federal Republic of Germany. She worked as an architectural draftswoman and translator and wrote over 350 poems. In 1982, Semra Ertan set herself on fire in Hamburg as a sign of protest against racism in Germany.

---

<sup>1</sup> The exact translation of 'unheimlich' would be 'uncanny'. I suggest two translations, one can be 'homeless-ly' to strengthen her discussion about home. Another word for the translation can be 'unbelievable' to illustrate the wordplay within the poem.

The movie *Semra Ertan* was produced by an alternating viewing and archiving process. Ertan's pictures and documents were collected in a personal "memory archive" — and are made visible in the film in the context of this archive, in a box for example, or in a binder.

*I read through the archive and document my research with my camera phone. I am at the beginning of my work-process and at the beginning of my research. I personally never knew Semra Ertan. My family on my mother's side comes from Turkey and my grandparents were so-called "guest workers". Semra Ertan is my aunt.*

My family collected Semra Ertan's notes, poems, letters, certificates, photos, newspaper articles, a personal archive of memory. Next to the marriage certificates one finds a medical certificate, next to the poems one finds German-language exercises.

Semra Ertan published some of her poems in books but mostly her work rests unpublished in her notebooks.

*In my further research, outside of the personal memory archive of my family, I find a radio broadcast from the 1990s, a piece of music and a televised report, both from the 1980s, referring to Semra Ertan.*

In the Bavarian radio broadcast, so-called experts from the 1990s comment on the subject of migration. Semra Ertan's poems are read aloud in German and in Turkish. The broadcast is more than an hour long and accompanied by folk music. The music forces the listener into a melancholic state and transports them far away from Germany and to another place. At the end of the program we do not learn the name of the Turkish speaker, she is not mentioned in the credits either.

In the radio broadcast report, a recording from the North German Radio from 1982 plays: Semra Ertan recites her poem "My Name is Foreigner" in a phone call to the radio station and announces her death.

It does not sound like a poem but more like a manifesto or an angry statement.

In 1982, Enjott Schneider composes the musical piece *Semra Ertan*.

In 2007, I find his e-mail address and I write to him. He sends me the piece of music as a CD via mail and writes:

*,Dear Cana, (...) I am very happy to hear from you.  
I had the music on an analog sound storage medium and had to have it digitized.'*

He gives me the usage rights to the music piece free of charge and for my disposal. The only condition is, that I name his name. The music becomes part of the film and I see it, for what it is: a document, a part of the archive, an adagio and a scherzo for the octet.

*The TV-report from the West German Radio from the year 1984 has the title "The Death of a Turkish Woman". Again, no name.*

I read:

*,My name is foreigner*

*I work here*

*I know how hard I work*

*The German know that too?*

*My work is hard*

*My work is dirty*

*If you don't like it*

*Go back to your home, they say.*

*But he Germans are not to*

*Blame fort his,*

*Neither are the Turks.*

*Turkey needs forgeign currencies,*

*Germany needs workers*

*My country sold me abroad*

*Like stepchildren*

*Useless*

*My name is foreigner'*

*Semra Ertan, 1981*

I write to the TV-channel to get a copy of the report. I wait for five weeks because the program has to be digitized and I pay 40 Euros just for the copy. The receipt comes with the DVD. I see the report and hear Semra Ertan's voice. There are interviews. We see her grave and people mourning in Turkey. Then cut to working people in some factory in Germany. The report takes 10 minutes, then it is over again. We see the reporter, he introduces the next topic of breaking news.

I think about usage and how I could use the found footage. I cut the cuts in the report and incorporate them into my film. Before and after, I place a black image. In the film *Semra Ertan*, we see each time two seconds of found footage material, in total six cuts of the report.

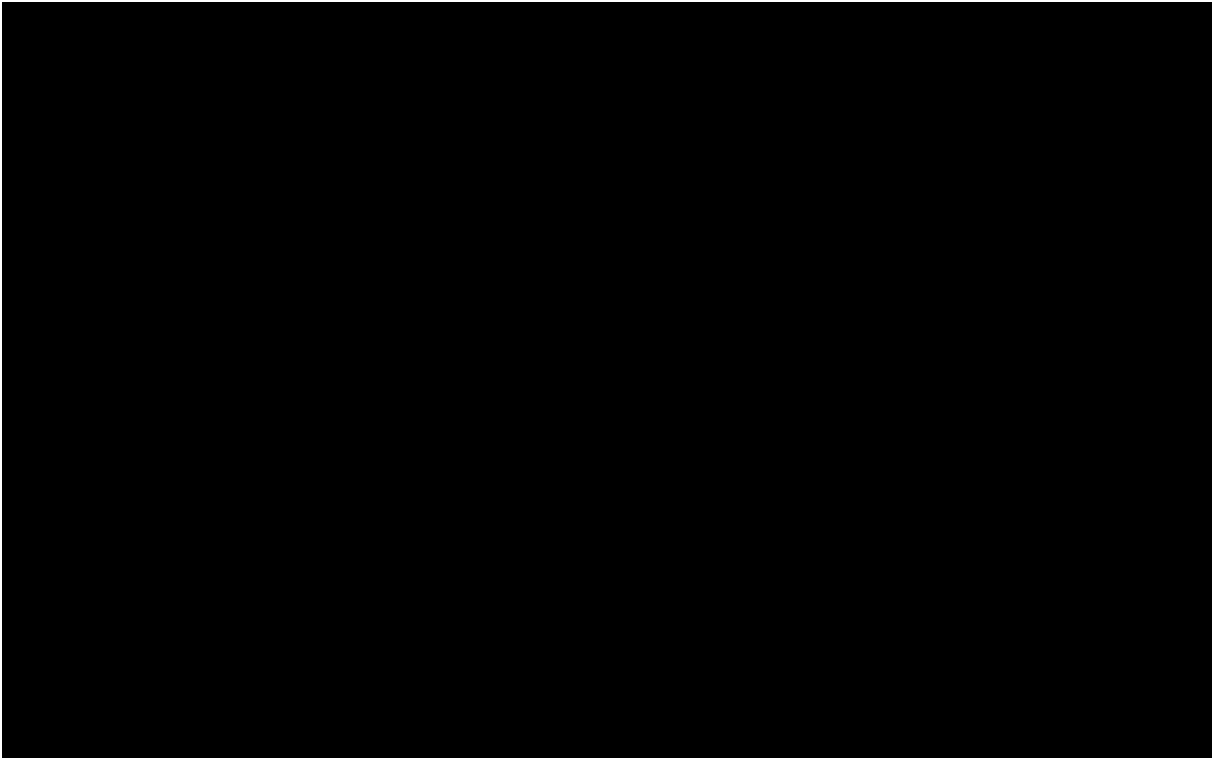
At the end of the film *Semra Ertan*, it seems we have seen the report, even though we only saw a tiny fragment.

*A cut in a cut.*

I try to dissolve "the production of truth" of the report through cuts.

In the beginning, it was not clear to me that I would make a film. Only after a certain amount of research, I collected the objects in a film.

*In the process, the film has become to me its own personal archive.  
An archive in the format of a film.*



When I ask the TV-channel about the rights to use the report, they respond:  
*,We are pleased to hear about your interest in the production: Recording, "The Death of a Turkish Woman".*

*§ 2 Time of License: 1 Year. Territory of License: Austria. For educational and research purposes, including public reproduction in closed user circles - university (licensing fee: 130 Euro). Total sum: 130 Euro. 130 Euro deductible. Sales tax. In the required legal amount.'*

I acquire information from a lawyer, he looks at how I used the material. For a quote in an artistic production the law does not foresee payment. I do not pay. At the end of my movie it says: "The movie quotes experts from the West German Radio recording June 22nd 1982".

I continue to search the internet. 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.*

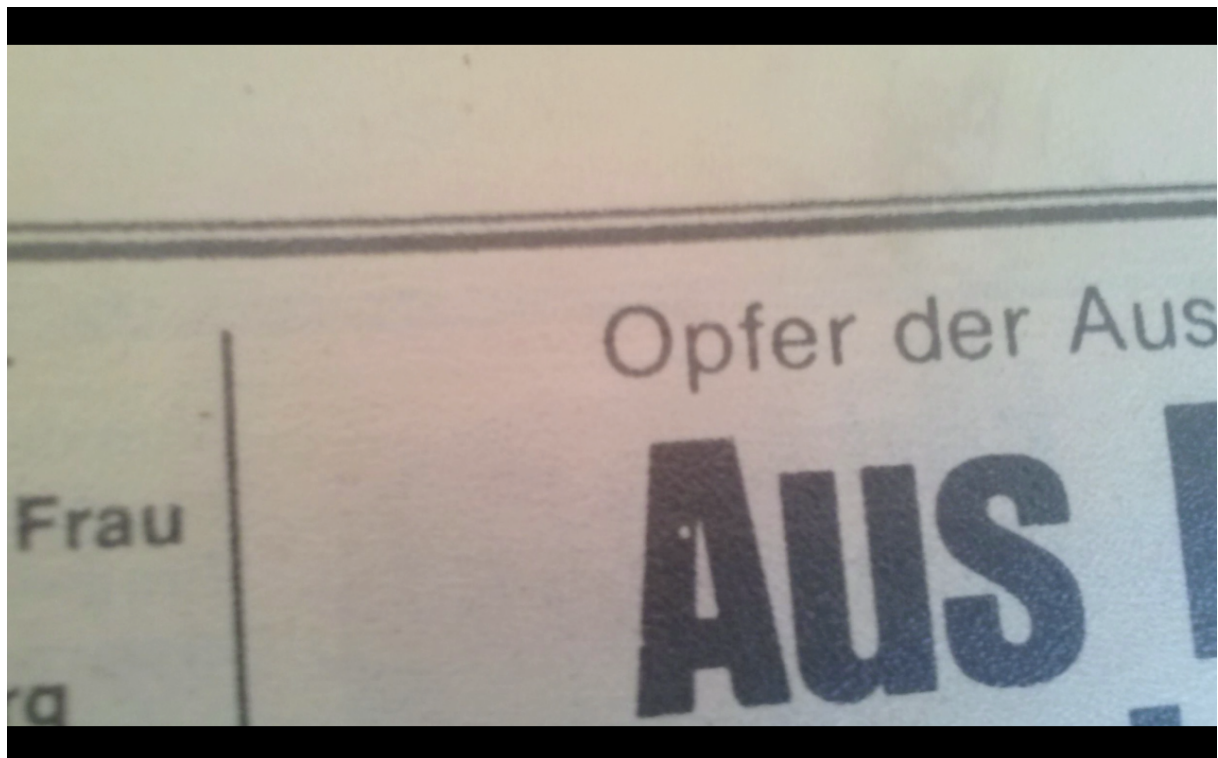
How can I protest the way the media talks about Semra Ertan? What can the film do if it turns into poetry?

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 decide against continuing to film new footage. No interviews. No talking heads.

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.

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.*

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.

I do not want to make a film as a migrant about migration. I do not wish to assign blame. I do not wish to tell a complete story "about migration". It is about a respectful handling of her-story. It is about a responsibility for what I show.

I do not wish to film the biography of Semra Ertan. A Biography is a construction. There are thousands of ways of reading a biography and each way is only a possible design added later.

I decide to make a film out of Semra Ertan's poems and my images.

*The film is an encounter.*

„(...)
Who knows,
I could get lost under the earth like a river,
If you didn't find me and if I wasn't writing this poem.'
Semra Ertan, 1979

A poem in a filmic format.