The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we’ve been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC). We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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"IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT FASCISM, YOU CANNOT RELY ON THE STATE"
SONJA ON NSU-WATCH AND AUTONOMOUS ANTI-FASCIST RESEARCH

THE FINAL STRAW RADIO - Aired On August 22, 2021
TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself with whatever name, gender pronouns, location, political or group affiliations that you’d like the audience to know?

Sonja: Well, hello, I’m Sonja and a part of NSU watch. I will tell you about the organization, and what we’re doing later. I’m doing antifascist politics and research since around about 15 years, and I’m located in a very small town in the middle of Germany, in the State of Hessen.

TFSR: Thanks a lot for being here. I really appreciate you taking the time to work with me on this conversation. So, first up for the international audience, would you lay out the known circumstances around the NSU that sparked the creation of NSU watch?

Sonja: Yeah, I will gladly. Thanks for inviting me, I want to say as well. So in November 2011, two men killed themselves after a bank robbery gone wrong in a small town in Eastern Germany. Their RV, they set it on fire after they shot themselves. And in this RV, a weapon was discovered a Ceska that was linked to a series of murders taking place between 2000 - 2006. And at the same time as the RV was set on fire, a flat in another Eastern German town was set on fire as well. It was the cover up flat of the third member of the core group called Beate Zschäpe was set on trial afterwards. And after she set the flat on fire, she got undercover and sent out a CD to different addresses all over Germany, before she turned herself into the police. And on the CD was a video with the famous cartoon figure of Pink Panther, making fun of all the victims and reading through the murder series.

And so this day, the 4th of November of 2011, was at the same time, it was a shock all over Germany, and especially for the victims families. And also it was a relief, because the families, they were told that they were wrong considering the murder of the family members were racist attacks. So at this day, we found out that there was a Neo-Nazi terror cell, killing nine migrants and one police woman for a series of 13 years or something... being active that time. It was a shock to all of us in the antifascist scene and the anti racist scene, seeing that what we feared always was right, and having the clarity about that this is possible in Germany.

TFSR: So NSU, or National Socialism Underground, kind of considered itself in some ways, continuing the trajectory of Nazi heritage, I guess? And the same sort of goals as far as we can tell.

Sonja: Yeah, they did. They were Nazi group that was founded in a big circle of people in East Germany in the 1990s. They were politically socialized in a very racist time. That was shortly after the German reunification. Yeah, it was a very racist time in Germany with a lot of attacks. And also, the State being very worried about the losers of the reunification and was putting in a lot of money at that time in youth clubs and youth work, which created a safe space for Nazis in Germany. Because there wasn't the thinking about institutional racism, structural racism, or racism at all in
of one of the members of the NSU case the attorneys name Seda Başay Yıldız and she got death threats by email. A lot of people did actually. The sender calls himself NSU 2.0 So directly relating to the NSU case. She found out that the police in Frankfurt looked up her address. She protect-ed it from public institutions giving it out to people. You can do that if you’re part of a threatened group. You can say “my address is secret” and only the police can look at that. And so she found out that the information in the email, which included her daughter’s kindergarten address, her personal address, and her daughter’s name and age, they were giving out by the police in Frankfurt. And so we have a lot of this connection that directly from the police to Neo-Nazi groups, or other cases of death threats there.

This is a huge problem where there is no actually dealing with that right now. Everyday we get a case where some police officers get together in telegram groups or WhatsApp groups sharing racist pictures or thinking there. And some of them are put on trial, but there’s always the saying that “first of all, it’s just a joke. Second of all, there’s not enough public to get a verdict for that.” Because in Germany, if you want to do hate speech, you need public for that. And if you just have five people in a WhatsApp group, that’s not public enough. You can hang a swastika flag in your living room, you can’t put it outside your window, because there’s public and if you do it in private, it’s fine. And so there’s not so much punishment for this kind of behavior. And also in Germany, we don’t have any outstanding force to investigate police stuff. The police investigates itself, I think it’s the same in the US maybe. And so they cover up each other’s asses for for doing so. We don’t have anything to handle with that actually.

TFSR: Well, thank you so much for having this conversation for all of the details that you’ve brought, and I really appreciate the work that you all are doing. How can listeners find out more about NSU Watch and support you in this work? And get involved even!

Sonja: So we were on social media. We do have an Instagram and Twitter account. I sent you the addresses so you can pull it up. We also have a very good English website where you can get information about the work we’re doing. Actually, one big help if somebody of you out there can speak German, is to help translate the texts antifascists put out. Especially... I mentioned the big research paper from Exif Recherche. It’s talking a lot about the US, because they all do it on in their free time and not paid, they didn’t have the power to translate it. So if you’re open to that: offering help for translation, that could be awesome. Yeah. And otherwise, just help us push. That’s a big help, actually.

TFSR: A lot of solidarity to you. And thanks for having this conversation. I really, really appreciate it. Yeah, thank you so much for being interested. You can find more about NSU-Watch’s work at NSU-Watch.info/en/ or follow them on Twitter (@NSUWatch) and Instagram (@NSUWatch)

Sonja: Well, in the eastern German States, they had like an antifascist understanding of the State itself. So fascism couldn't happen in that State. It was forbidden to happen. So it did not happen. And so of course, there was a lot of xenophobia, there was a lot of racist attacks. And there were a lot of groups of young people, not very organized, very spread out over the country. And we have a term for that. It’s called the baseball bat years. Because there was so much street violence in that years. And if we look to Western Germany, there were the organized groups of that time, there was a very structured far-right scene. And when the reunification was done, a lot of the Western German groups went over there and organized the very spread out with Neo-Nazi scene in Eastern Germany.

So it got together very well. And also in Western Germany, in the years after, a big wave of racism connected to the new nationalism rising up to the reunification. And the State reacted like it always does in Germany: it gives props to the far-right. The asylum laws get restricted. People who were affected by the Neo-Nazi violence didn’t get help. And they try to get the Lost Souls back in some way. Like they thought the reunification was very deep economical crisis for most people in Eastern Germany. So they put in their State for taking care of the Jews and stuff. It was kind of a pampering for the Neo-Nazi movement. That is the same reaction we had in 2015. The far-right, rises, it protests, it takes marches... and then the politicians they give props to that and take away rights from the asylum seekers, for example, or the migrants.

TFSR: What I understand is that, so with the reunification, at least East Germany, which was a satellite State of the Soviet Union, had an outward program of de-Nazification of the area that the Soviet allied government operated in, in the eastern part of the country. But I’ve also heard that there’s a lot of xenophobia in that part of the country and a lot of the Nazi movement maybe had a foothold there. Can you talk a little bit about maybe what the soil was like at that point, and why there was such a rise in Neo-Nazism if it was just international, like the Blood and Honor stuff from the UK or the Hammerskins which started in Texas in the USA. It seems like they couldn’t have sparked homegrown Neo-Nazi revival in Germany, right?

Sonja: Germany at that time. And so they put in a lot of money to create a very nice and comforting space for the Neo-Nazi youth groups. And that was a time the NSU founded itself. It was also based in the Blood and Honor Network, and also very deeply connected to the Hammerskin Network as we found out recently. They were racists who saw themselves in the tradition of other Neo-Nazi terror groups like the Order. They read a lot of the common texts in the Neo-Nazi scene like “The Turner Diaries”, or the novel, “The Hunter”. Yeah, being part of the music scene in Germany, the Nazi music scene in Germany, being very deeply based in a nationwide network of Nazi groups.
TFSR: So can you tell us a bit about NSU watch and what you all do what Apabiz is, and A.I.D.A? And why do you feel that an autonomous research and recording process without strings tying you to the government is necessary.

Sonja: A couple of weeks ago, a very famous German antifascist and communists Esther Bejarano died. She was a Holocaust survivor. She was a member of the music group in Auschwitz. And she put her life to fighting fascism in Germany. And she said "If you want to fight fascism in Germany, if you want to fight Neo-Nazis in Germany, you cannot rely on the State." And that is really something we take at heart. I said the fourth of November 2011, was a big shock to all of us, because we have these very old antifascist research structures in Germany, like I have colleagues doing that for 30 years, 35 years now, collecting every bits and pieces of the Neo-Nazi movement, trying to get as much information as possible to do background checks and to put attacks that happen in the background.

So when this happens when the when the NSU discovered itself, we have got to say, because nobody, not the police, not the authorities discovered them. So when they discovered themselves, it was a big shock for us, that's all we feared, was actually true. Like, if you read the antifascist newspapers we put out for decades now... there was always a warning about weapons and about Neo-Nazis, discussing theories, papers, and concepts. So it was a bitter pill to swallow that we were right all this time, and that we didn't see it happen, actually.

It was also a shock to see how racist we are as antifascists, because we didn't listen to the families, the families of the NSU murder cases. They always said it must be Neo-Nazis. There can't be any other explanation because the authorities there always said "Well, there's something about Turkish mafia or Kurdish Turkish conflicts or something, it must be in their culture." Actually, there was a quote in a police file that said "No one of Germans cultural heritage could do this kind of murder: shooting in the face, shooting in the head. This isn't like German at all. So it must be some foreign culture doing that." So, and the families that were talking about it, they put on rallies to get the public interest. And we didn't really listen to them. We didn't check the media. They wrote about it as Döner killer, Kebap killers. And we didn't realize how racist that was. We didn't listen to the families.

And so it was a big shock moment for us that changed a lot of our politics. Like really looking into our own racism, our own focus on looking at the Neo-Nazis and not looking at the victims that close. And so it did a big switch for us in our politics, like we have got to work together with the families, we have to listen to them! They have a lot of information, a lot of knowledge that we need to recognize, and that we need to consider. We just can't as white German antifascists look at other white Germans, the Neo-Nazi scene, without considering the racism we all grew up in that is all part of our society.

And so after the discovering of the NSU core trio. We said we need to change something. And that's why we founded NSU Watch as a network of old antifascist structures, of people doing the work for lots and...
we had a very weak left-wing movement there. And so they’re different perspective of marginalized life coming out of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. And so we always had this thinking of having this this one struggle and having to support each other.

But it’s also a very complicated history, because Germany itself, it made itself the world champion of remembering... like, getting rid of such a heritage and dealing with such a heritage was a very big political topic in Germany. And so there was always the telling of how Jewish life in Germany is, and the reality of Jewish life in Germany. And so this was also and always a very marginal perspective. And antisemitism is one of the basic foundations of right-wing thinking in Germany. It comes in such different shades. And also we have a huge problem with daily antisemitism, as well as daily racism in Germany. And we’re still debating here publicly, if we’re an immigrant country. No matter where the people are coming from we still have this very folkish thinking, like, there’s this group of people living here for 1000s of years and we’re the “real Germans.” And that’s really hard to get rid of.

Also in the laws, also to get a word like “Rasse’, which is the translation for race, but we don’t use it in the daily talking out of our Constitution, for example. It’s very hard to really get an emancipative perspective on German politics, because there’s so much shit going on, and very different variations. And the attack and Halle, it reminded us again, reminded all the society about the threat that Jewish people are facing in Germany. And of course, they are antisemitic attacks on a daily basis, like restaurants getting attacked, people getting attacked wearing openly Jewish clothing, for example. And it was always a topic for antifascists as well to deal with that. And yeah, like the attack from the perpetrator in Halle, who wanted to get into the synagogue to kill people, Jewish people doing their prayers there, you can switch to a different form of racism if that doesn’t work. And so right-wing ideological thinking is always inspired by racism and antisemitism in the same kind of way.

TFSR: Thanks for answering the question that I didn’t ask you about before. And also, you had made references, for instance, right at the beginning to the survivor of the Holocaust, who had been doing music in Auschwitz and spoke about not not relying on the State.

Sonja: And she’s actually a very great example for how the struggle can get together. Because she and her daughter, they found music group with some rappers of Turkish heritage. And one of these rappers was also living in Köln, which was attacked by the NSU with a nail bomb. I don’t remember the year actually. But yet, and they were founding this music group together doing rap songs and Yiddish songs together, talking in schools performing at rallies and stuff.

TFSR: That’s awesome.

Sonja: Yeah, that’s really awesome.

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lots of time, to put all the pieces together because the murders that took place all over Germany, mostly Western Germany. But there was murders in Munich, in Nürnberg, there was an attack in Köln, there was a murder in Hamburg, there was a murder in Dortmund, in Kassel, and so on.

And so we gathered all the groups, the local groups and founded the network so we can get the information together to kind of get to the bottom of all of this. Because that was pretty clear at the beginning that it couldn’t be just the three: the two dead men and the other who was put on trial, there must be a bigger network. And afterwards, there were five people on trial besides Beate Zschäpe, but there couldn’t be the network as well. Like, the biggest question of the families is “why did the murderers pick my father? My son? My relative?” And so in general, it’s very clear that it was for racist reasons. But in specific, like, who pointed out that internet cafe? That shop? That flower selling stand? And so it was very clear that then there was always a local helping structure for the Nazi terrorists.

And so, we came together to gather all the information we have, and we have very old research structures in Germany, and one of them is the Apabiz. It is an archive, an antifascist archive collecting all printings of Neo-Nazi scene in Germany. They have a very big collection of all fanzines, of all newspapers, articles, a lot of information gathered from the local groups. The antifascist movement, (of course) in Germany, organized in autonomous groups all over Germany collecting all their local informations. And we don’t have a central station for putting it somewhere. But in the archives, we have a couple of them like Apabiz in Berlin and A.I.D.A. Archive in Munich. And we have a have a couple of others. They are the antifascist structures to collect the knowledge of the generations of local people doing the research.

And so with NSU Watch, we try to gather all the forces and gather all the informations to deal with that kind of work. Because also, not only the murders took place all over Germany, also the investigations took place all over Germany. We had different parliamentary inquiries in all the different States. We had one in the Bundestag, we had the trial in Munich. And so with all this, these different locations of investigation, it was very hard to stay in focus and to get all the puzzle pieces. And for example, we found in the north there was a parliamentary inquiry and they look very deep into the Combat 18 structure there. But the Bundestag trial did not, and also the trial in Munich did not. So we had our people everywhere monitoring the inquiries, monitoring the trial to get all the puzzle pieces together. Because we didn’t know when something would make sense. Like where to put the puzzle pieces, we still have a bunch of them we can’t connect to anything.

And so for me, it’s also... there is no bottom line in the NSU complex. It’s a topic I will deal with... I think... my whole antifascist political life. Because we don’t know when somebody will talk, when somebody will give up information. And so we don’t even get close to the truth in that. And to deal with that kind of perspective in this kind of work, it was necessary to found a network that could get more connected with all the people all over Germany. And so this is what we did, NSU Watch.
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In 2018 we had the attack of the synagogue in Halle. It was a on a
Ye ah, it's also it's also a sign of our marginal perspective. Like, in
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TFSR: This is kind of a side ... to get good journalists 
to write the true stories. We get in contact with the families and try to 
support them there.

survived the concentration camps. And so after the Second World War,
concentration camps, as well. And we only got the Social Democrats who
attack. " We write that and try to support and try to get good journalists
from other parts of the world are the "wild and aggressive and hyper
kinds of racism, these different kinds of racist pictures, like the Jews being
thinking. It's always one of the motives. And we have like these different

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is. I'm so wondered why there's not more anger. But at the same time, we
have a great movement, and an understanding, and a language now for
doing that. And that keeps us going, I think.

TFSR: One thing I didn’t think to ask about, but it’s sort of occurring to me now is for
all the talk of like Neo-Nazis in Germany, we haven’t talked about antisemitic violence
very much. And I know that, yeah, it seems like NSU Watch came into existence with
the realization that like, these specific groups of like, Kurdish, Turkish, and the one
Greek gentleman, were being targeted, and so we focus on those specific populations,
but to talk about Neo-Nazism in Germany without talking about anti-semitism feels a
little strange. One of the people on the kill list I think, for Franco Albrecht is Jewish and
was being targeted I think for being Jewish. But I might be wrong about that. But can
you talk about it?

Sonja: Yeah, you're right. It's Anetta Kahane.

TFSR: Can you talk a little bit about antisemitism in the in the modern far-right in
Germany, as pertains to the conversation we've been having?

Sonja: In 2018 we had the attack of the synagogue in Halle. It was a on a
high Jewish holiday. And the perpetrator he couldn't get into the syna
gogue because they have a very good security system. Also, the Jewish
communities in Germany, they don't depend on the State as well. After
the attack in Halle, they had police protection for some time. And now on
higher holidays, but also they took care of themselves. Like they had a big
wooden door and very skilled security person at the entrance. And so the
perpetrator couldn't make his way into the synagogue. So he shot a queer
woman on the street. And then he went on people hunting in the city of
Halle, and he went into a Kebab shop, and killed the owner, and attacked
another person.

So antisemitism in Germany is always connected to the far-right thinking. It's always one of the motives. And we have like these different
kinds of racism, these different kinds of racist pictures, like the Jews being
the "superior, always in control kind of people" and the people coming from
other parts of the world are the “wild and aggressive and hyper
masculine” threat to the Germans. And so in Germany, the far-right is
still driven by the idea of the Volksgemeinschaft, which is the communi
ity in the Third Reich. And this is really based on Blood and the country
they're living in, still. And we still have this thinking of the Third Reich in
Germany, in so many different levels, like there was never true antifascist
movement.

So the struggles were always connected. Also, the antifascist movement in Germany is deeply inspired and connected to the survi
vors of the Holocaust. And there was always this tie together. One of the
problems we faced in Germany is that all the leftists were killed in the
concentration camps, as well. And we only got the Social Democrats who
survived the concentration camps. And so after the Second World War,
“Well, there’s something about drugs.” Or in one case, the police made up a woman, the man who was killed had an affair with. The family of Enver Şişmek and the widow of Enver Şişmek. She was confronted with a picture of the blonde woman with two children and they said “Yeah, that’s the second wife of your husband, didn’t you know?” He was trading flowers, and so he went to the Netherlands a couple have time months to get the flowers. And they say “Well, he must be into drug smuggling and stuff like that.” So the families, they didn’t really have anything in their hands to protect themselves from this kind of institutional racism.

And also, they didn’t have any help, because the migrant community being threatened with so much racism all their life, they turned against the families, because they say “Well, if the police says it must be some kind of mafia stuff, maybe we keep away from the family.” So they were separated from their communities, and they have this second victimization, like, after the family member got shot, they get victimized by the structural racism of the police, of the media, and its effects on the on the society. And I think, from their perspective, they were kind of surprised. And a lot of them, they don’t live in Germany any longer. A lot of them went back to Turkey, because they couldn’t stand living here. Some of them, they picked up the fight, they are part of the movement, they’re part of the organization. But a lot of them they couldn’t bear the pain and left the country.

And so, what we learned in the last 10 years, and it’s quite unbelievable that it has been 10 years now, since the NSU discovered itself. We learned not to trust the State, in no case. The question, of course, is how to deal with that kind of threatening without the State because like, the antifascist movement, the anti-racist movement, we’re not that many people. And most of the German populations, they don’t give a shit. They don’t give a shit about the victims of right-wing violence because we are the others, we’re the communists, we’re the queer people, we’re the disabled people, we’re the homeless people, we’re the Black people, we’re the POCs. And so most of the of the German society... they just don’t give a shit. And this is really hard to realize.

But at the same time, we have this very big movement that’s a very forceful and strong movement. And also, we have a youth that has a language for what is happening to them, like the victims of the NSU. When they came to Germany, they said that to the children that they should assimilate. And now we have the third generation of, for example, Turkish or Kurdish people coming to Germany, who have a language for institutional racism, for pointing out that out for having this kind of conversations.

And also, the far-right, they are taking up like more and more space, like, for example, the murder of Walter Lübcke, he was a politician of the city, which is the Christian Democratic Party in Germany, who Angela Merkel is a member of as well. And he was shot on his terrace and his murderer, Stephan Ernst, he said he wanted to bring the terror to the people he thought were responsible for the politics that brought around migrants in the migrant crisis in 2015. So they shot one of them, and they don’t react to that. This is like really unbelievable. How much silence there

And also, we did all this monitoring work. We monitored every day of the five year trial in Munich and wrote a report about every day in the trial. We also translated that to Turkish and we did the same with some of the parliamentary inquiries. For example, here in the State of Hessen, where I live and my where my local NSU watch group is, we had this parliamentary inquiry where the family was invited last in the very last session of the inquiry. Which was quite offensive at that point. And to give them an opportunity to follow what’s happening there around the cases of their loved ones, we gather this information and put it out for the public, also translated in Turkish.

And so we see ourselves as one movement now. Which is different. Before, we had this division between antifascists and antiracism activists. There was always kind of an overlapping. But now we’re one movement. We see ourselves as one movement with all struggles, it gets with us. But we were very open to critique around racism to our own structures. I think that’s a very, very good thing coming out of that. We had these hard, really difficult, racist attacks in 2020. We had the murders in Hanau, which is very close to my hometown, where a racist shot nine people. And yet, there it was shown that this new understanding of what antifascist research is for, and what it’s about, really works great together. Because we could support the families in their struggle, and they get the grip on it. Like they don’t stop asking questions. They don’t stop putting public pressure on the politicians dealing with that case. And I think that was a hard learning process for us. Because before, of course, we thought we were the good ones because we’re fighting Nazis. But it was also a very clear process of seeing how much racism is deeply written into our society and what we have to get rid of and what what we have to unlearn to make a difference. And I think we’re on a good way to that now.

TFSR: That’s really good to hear. That’s definitely a critique that I hear in the US that seems pretty well founded. That a lot of like, people that aren’t directly or as directly affected by fascist violence jump in to be sort of saviors. But don’t listen to the people that are most directly affected or work with them to create victim informed ways of organizing. So that’s cool.

Sonja: Yeah. And also like as white antifascists in Germany, we are also victims of Neo-Nazi attacks. Like if it wasn’t personal... it was always friends of us. I talked about the baseball bat years. It was against punks and leftists as well as it was against POCs and Black people in Germany. And so we came to the conclusion that as victims of Neo-Nazi violence, we’re not all the same. We don’t live the same lives. We don’t have the same values. But we’re all on force put together in this victim group. And we got to deal with that. And we have to support each other in that.
Sonja: During the discovery, our investigations in the NSU complex, we came to the conclusion that the State plays a very big role in all of it. The Secret Service... how did you translate it?

TFSR: Federal Office of the Protection of the Constitution? What would you call it?

Sonja: The German word is Verfassungsschutz, which is quite a wordy translation for that. And yeah, it’s a Secret Service. Basically, it’s the Secret Service for inner affairs. So the Department of the Protection of the Constitution, which is called itself. I think it’s a very euphoric name they gave themselves. They had the idea that they could control the Neo-Nazi movement. And they did that with getting informants at the most high levels in these organizations. For example, a very high member of the Blood and Honor movement in Saxonia was an informant for the State. So their main resource for information about the Neo-Nazi scene comes from informants, Neo-Nazis, active Neo-Nazis. They were paid for giving up the information.

And there’s different ways of the Neo-Nazi scene in Germany to deal with that. Some do it in secret. Some do it openly to their comrades and say “Well, we get the money from the State, and we can put it back in the movement.” And there were lots and lots of informants undiscovered in the NSU complex. And there were informants very close to the core trio. There were informants involved in getting papers for them to live underground. And we came to the conclusion that the State knew a lot about the weapons in the Nazi scene. A lot about their goals. A lot about how we’re involved like that. But what’s happening is there’s more surveillance, there’s more budget for the Secret Service, the Hessen secret service here, about the weapons in the Nazi scene. A lot about their goals. A lot about what they’re doing. So it wasn’t a problem of a lack of information. It is the problem of the State knowing a lot about it.

And the difference is the Neo-Nazi scene in Germany, they rather don’t want to attack the State itself. They’re feeling very close to the State. They want to take over the State. They want to make it more authoritarian. They don’t want to abolish the State. So the working process of the Secret Service doesn’t really get to the victims of the Nazi scene, because the victims are the others, the migrants, the POC’s, the black people in lose their position, and their right to do. We are on the move, we’re doing what we can.

What I think is very hard to do is to get lost of the wider perspective. Like “What does capitalism do to these problems we’re facing?” Like “What are the struggles that make us all the same, no matter where we live in the world?” And I think talks like that, like we’re having right now, being interested in the struggles of each other like to learn from each other is very important. And also not to rely on the State, or academia, to find the similarities. Because there’s capitalism all over. Like in Germany, the research is so much driven from where to get funded, and where to get the next project funded, that it’s not about, like finding truth or something like that.

So I think it’s a very important thing to stay connected, to read Twitter news from all over the world, to stay on the pulse of what’s going on around the world, and where it’s a little bit like the struggle we have as fascists in Germany. Where’s our role in all that suffering? And what can we do to create solidarity with each other?

Sonja: Yet, the German State declared that right-wing terrorism is the biggest threat now. But they’re not doing anything differently in the structure. They want to get the police forces more diverse, but they don’t want to talk about structural racism. There’s so much going on. Like every day, we get news about a new police chat group sharing Hitler pictures, or jokes about migrants or queer people, about Black people, or Jews. We have a deep problem with institutional racism in Germany, and there’s not one step I can see that makes that any different. Like we have those parlimental inquiries and the State is doing its thing, but nothing actually changes. And also, you have this shocking news about the Secret Service being involved like that. But what’s happening is there’s more surveillance, there’s more budget for the Secret Service, the Hessen secret service here, it doubled its budget from 2011. With Andreas Temme, sitting at the murde...
to get connected. We have these big heroes, they would say, like Anders Breivik, who published his manifesto on the internet. Which was an inspiration for an attack in Munich three years ago. On the same day, recalling to Anders Breivik, it was the inspiration for the Christchurch attack in New Zealand. It was the inspiration for the attack at the synagogue in Halle two years ago. And so we have this opportunity for groups to organize internationally, and also to find background organizations online for that. You don't have to have the comrades right at your door. You don't have to meet the people in person, you can connect with them via the internet and exchange about that stuff.

But of course, there's also the meeting in person, the the important role of worldwide networks and organizations, you mentioned the KKK. We have KKK groups in Germany as well. We always had contacts to the US like two weeks ago, an antifascist network called Exif Recherche. They published a very detailed paper on the Hammerskins in Germany and their connections to the US. Like Wade Page, the murderer of the people in the Sikh temple in Wisconsin. He was visiting Germany a couple of times, and also playing with his band. There's the role of music and concerts, Nazi Nazi rock concerts and organization for that, like there was a lot of exchange of context about that music scene and bands visiting. This is also a great connection for Australia and Germany, for example. Or for Eastern Europe, like Hungary, or the Ukraine, or Russia. People are coming to Germany with their bands, or to see a band, or to visit a concert and in this context of the concert, there are always meetings taking place.

The Hammerskin structure, the Hammerskin Nation is a very big example for that. And also with the example of the Hammerskin nation, when the attack in Wisconsin happened, the German Hammerskins went over there right away to meet with the people of the Hammerskin Nation groups in the US to make a plan how to deal with the situation. And also when the Hammerskins in Portugal were banned, they got help from the other chapters worldwide. So there's always this supporting structure if you have to live underground. If you need weapons, if you need money, there's this big worldwide organization providing that for you. And also getting experiences you can't get in Germany. Like in Germany, it's legal to shoot a weapon and to own a weapon, but only if you're in a certain kind of organization, and you have to put in a big amount of paperwork for shooting your gun. And so every time German Neo-Nazis go to the US, shooting in the wild is a big part of the experience there. And also like being violent against other people. It's always a big part of that.

And I think these two things, like this highly professional, organized, worldwide networks we're seeing and also the fear of the so called "lone wolf" who can sit in front of his computer in Germany and gets connected with other people and get printings for 3D printed weapons and stuff like that. It's a it's a very harsh challenge, I think. But also, what I see is it's a backlash. It's a reaction to emancipative movements all over the world. Like, if we look on queer rights, if you look on the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement all over the world, if we see how decolonization fights are supported from all over the world. They are in fear to Germany, the leftits, the communists, the disabled people, homeless people, queer people... definitely queer people. And so the Secret Service in Germany is not there to protect the people, but to protect the State.

The Germany Neo-Nazi scene which is very driven forward by this Day X ideology, we will talk about later, I think. So they never get to the point where they want to attack or abolish the State, they get to the point where they kill all of the people that don't fit in their view of the world. And so, we came to the conclusion that there is a very deep problem in the understanding of right-wing terrorism, because right-wing terrorism doesn't want to abolish the State, it wants to create a Civil war. It wants to create gaps and widen gaps that are already there in the society. And because there's no collective memory, no collective understanding of right-wing terrorism in Germany.

We have this theory, what the politics in extremism are based on, we call it the Horseshoe theory. It's like you imagine a horseshoe, and you have the left end and the right ends, and they're kind of the same... and they're kind of the same danger. And in the middle of the horseshoe you have the good middle of the people. And the idea is that the democracy is threatened by the Left and the right-wing extremists, and they have to protect the good middle. This is a theory which comes from the Weimar Republic before, before the National Socialist State. The idea was not that the conservatives or the bourgeoisie put the Nazis into power, but to have this conflict between Right and Left. And that put the democracy into danger. And this is a theory which also continues until today.

So there wasn't a particular understanding of how right-wing terrorism works. There was always a comparison to Leftwing terrorism. Like they said "Oh, we couldn't know that was terrorist attack, because there weren't any letters." No communiques about it. And so they said, "Oh, well, we couldn't see that it was terrorism." And so there was always this necessity for us as antifascists to point out "what are the basic structures of right-wing terrorism? How does it work? What are its goals? What are its methods?" Because we could never rely on that. And so when the NSU discovered itself in 2011, the first thing the Secret Service did was destroy files with information about informants in the direct surrounding of the trio.

And it continued, like the parliamentary inquiries, they had problems getting the files from Secret Service. The trial in Munich, they didn't want to ask questions about the network. They didn't want to know about involvements around. And so it was basically us and a few Parliamentments from the Leftwing parties who had interest in getting into it. And it goes further. Like the informants in the Neo-Nazi scene, they can commit crimes in a certain way, and don't get punished in a trial. Because they are informants, they get protection from the State. So they can do like propaganda verdicts, or in cases of assault, they can do it to stay in their role as Neo-Nazis. So the the thinking is to be an informant, you still have to be involved in the movement. And so you have to do what the movement does. And you get protection for doing that if you're an informant.

So there was always the knowledge about it, but we didn't know...
how many people there were working in the Neo-Nazi scene for the
government and also not that they were so high level Neo-Nazis, like they
tried to get all the high level Neo-Nazis working for the State to control
the organizations from the top. That was the thinking of the State, or is
the thinking of the State. Until now. Only the State of Thuringia, they cut
all this information system. But the rest gets more budget for it gets more
people doing the jobs. And so, the structure, it wasn’t really broken. Also,
now after 10 years, it just works further.

And the top story of that all is the one you mentioned about And-
reas Temme. He is and he was an employee of the Secret Service. He was
not police, he was an employee of the Secret Service. And he was in the
internet cafe of Halit Yozgat in Kassel when he was shot. He claims that
he wasn’t there. That he didn’t see the body lying behind the counter, that
he didn’t hear the shots. And because it was so unbelievable. There was an
English Institute, forensic architecture, who rebuilt the internet cafe and
try to get an idea of what he must have been seeing, hearing, and smell-
ing. Because also like if you fire a gun in such a small space, you can also
smell the gunpowder. And so they did a recreation of that. But that was
considered an art piece, not an academic investigation. I put you the link
of the investigation in the link list. They made a video on the 5th.

And yeah, Andreas Temme. He was in the internet cafe he claims
to be there for personal reasons for sexting from an anonymous comput-
er. Because his wife shouldn’t know. But it’s very unlikely. And he had two
phone calls with this Nazi informant that day. One before, and one shortly
after. And one was especially long. And he didn’t tell the truth. Neither in
the in the court trial, nor in the parliamentary inquiry in Hessen. And so
the truth was never found why he was there. If he was there on duty, if the
Secret Service got any information, if he was involved with the murders,
if he knew someone from possible local helping structure for the trio or
something. He just lied, he just didn’t tell the truth. The politicians, they
stood behind him at that point. And when Halit was shot, he just left the
internet cafe and he didn’t respond to the call from the police to get peo-
ple who saw something or might know something about it. And so the
police got to him. It was because he got locked in with his phone there on
the computer. He left his work phone number there. And so they found
him and they arrested him but he was released shortly after because the
governor of the State of Hessen said he needs to be protected because he’s
part of the State.

And so there’s a lot of silence. There’s a lot of lies in there, and we
didn’t get to the truth. After the trial, after the five years of trial and three
years of parliamentary inquiry. We still don’t know what drove him there.
What was his role in the murder of Halit Yozgat.

TFSR: None of the surviving members of the NSU have gotten any prison time?

Sonja: No, Beate Zschäpe. She’s in prison lifelong. Yeah, the others, they
got really light sentences. They were five years on trial. They were released
day the verdict came out, because you get the investigation jail time

Now we don’t have the attacks on the refugee homes here, because we
don’t have that many big refugee homes any longer here. Because now
people are dying in the Mediterranean instead. But the government tried
to stop people from coming to Germany itself, as giving the right-wing
movement props to stop the worrying about it. And it worked. We don’t
have that many attacks here, because we don’t have that many refugees
here. But people are still dying in the Mediterranean. And we have this
big mass grave now on Europe’s borders. So given the power, right, that
kind of props at that point, they lost their momentum for the racist mobi-
lization. And they turned it into the anti vaccination demonstrations.

Now they found a new topic where the government wants to con-
tral wants to defeat the German people in their thinking. So we have the
same forces, the same people who were pushing forward the racist mobi-
lization, doing now the anti vaccination protests, but also with a different
note. There are a lot of people who think of themselves as alternatives, like
people who are into alternative medicine, or esoteric, or late hippies, for
example, who joined now the right-wing organizations. And that’s a very,
very dangerous mixture we got there now. And so the Day X movement
move from this great replacement topic, to the pandemic topic now. But
it’s the same people, the same groups doing the mobilization there.

TFSR: So I guess looking at this Day X plots from the context of the US, there are
many comparisons and parallels that could be made between the development
of the different far-right movements here. And the scene from which the NSU and their
contemporaries came out in Germany. In fact, historically, there was a cross pollina-
ion that NSU Watch notes, such as visits to Germany. I mean, you already mentioned *The
Turner Diaries* and *The Hunter* being read or Blood and Honor or Combat 18 from the
UK going over, but there’s also a member of the US based White Aryan Resistance and
the KKK groups from the US that came to visit and and showed up during the devel-
oment in the scene with the three core NSU members. Contemporary examples for
groups from the US that parallel developments in Germany might be the Oath-keeper
movement, could be compared with the Day X plot members of law enforcement
and military, or former, stating that the current government that they serve is in decay
and must be reformed to a more traditional and radically conservative style. As well
as other groups from white nationalist movements like the NSU, with the now defunct
Atomwaffen Division, or the Base.

Do you have any thoughts on the international nature of Neo fascist orga-
nizing? And what roles those common myths such as the Great Replacement, which
you mentioned, which I think it came out of the you said the European new Right, but
like, Nouvelle Droite, the the new far-right coming out of France in the 70s? Can you
talk about how this cross pollination happens, some of the common myths? And what
follows from it for international antifascist organizing? What do we need to be looking
at, and where are some good directions to point energy? Or how do we coordinate with
each other against some of these common enemies?

Sonja: Well, the internet, of course, is a big factor. In that it’s helping us
to get connected like we do right now. But it also helps Neo-Nazi groups
They both have this telling that the State falls, and the brave German man has to protect the country and its women. And this is also part of the of the Day X - German men have to redefine their manhood and get in the role of the protector again.

TFSR: Yeah, that's a pretty common narrative. And there's so much that without taking away to talk about US context, so much of what you're talking about just reflects things that I've seen happen in the US over the last couple of decades too. So I guess, going back to Germany, though, like how does how does the Day X plot fit into the ecosystem of the far-right in Germany today, like with anti vaccine and COVID conspiracy myths, intermingling with members of AfD and anti immigration rallies?

Sonja: Well, the Day X telling is a very old one in Germany, like after we are a nation of defeated. After the Second World War, we had this this period of occupation. And since the bat was founded, so the Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany, there's always the telling in the far-right, that this kind of State is not the real representative of the Germans. And so there was always the story of how to get Germany back. There's different colorings of that telling like this, zionist occupied governments, like because parts of Germany were occupied by the Americans, you have a lot of anti American thinking in the Germans far-right. That doesn't change the fact that they're very deeply connected and do a lot of work together. But there's always been this telling about the Germans don't own their own State anymore since the Second World War.

So, in 2015 when Angela Merkel welcomed the refugees, there was this myth that she's opening the borders for them. The truth was, there was never breaking a law in that point. There was always the Right asylum laws taking place there. So there was this idea of Angela Merkel letting all these refugees in, and we had this the telling of the Day X movement, I think you would call it more intellectual, new-right movement, that was called the Great Replacement. So there's a plan for exchanging the people in Germany with refugees. And so there was one moment where a lot of right-wing groups got their mobilization momentum, because they could tell the people "now you see how the government wants to destroy Germans."

So there's always the thinking that not the right people are in charge, and that's the State doesn't represent the real Germans. And there was a new moment for the for the whole movement. And so the telling of the Day X of getting to the point of civil war, where the possibility is to take over the State. It was very common, always in the far-right storytelling in Germany, but there it got a new momentum. And so a lot of groups, a lot of people, got on the streets got organized in this kind of way. We had like motorcycle Brotherhood's or motorcycle-like Brotherhood's coming together, making... they call it neighborhood watches. And so there was always this thinking about "we have to protect our people from the government, which is in that multicultural great replacement thinking." So that was the big topic bringing it all together.

After 2015, the politicians cut a lot of asylum laws. They stopped the people from coming to Germany itself and reinforcing the border.

TFSR: I really started hearing about this case, because the New York Times podcast called Day X started telling the story of the case of Franco Albrecht or Franco A, relating to the NSU and government connections, and finally discussing about a wider conspiracy with members of the German military and police to prepare for, or likely to bring about the overthrow of Germany's parliamentary democracy, which would be replaced with a military right-wing junta. What's known about the Day X plot and the case of Franco A? And you're covering it right as in as NSU Watch?

Sonja: Yeah, we do. We sit there in on every day of the trial. And it's quite interesting, because when I listened to the Day X podcast, it's such a wide picture of the of the whole case. The trial is right now about what kind of money Franco Albrecht got from the from the government when he was living his secret life as a fake refugee. This is what the trial is about. For weeks now sitting in the trial every day, you don't get a sense of what's actually discussed there. Boring, very detailed stuff about Franco Albrecht taking money from the German government. And it's hard to stay on focus, not to get bored by all these details. It's very hard.

So Franco Albrecht was a very strange discovery, actually. The State didn't want to put it on trial. They wanted to do it two years ago, I think, and they just disposed it. They said "No, there's no case here." And now we have the pressure from the higher court, the State-wide court, to put it on trial. And so they did it in Frankfurt.

We have these chat groups all over Germany, called the cross groups. Like Nordkreuz, Südkreuz... The Northern Cross, the Southern Cross, the Eastern Cross, Western cross. This division, these chat groups, which are a quite new phenomenon. But like always when there's new technology available, you take it for organization. It's not such a surprise actually. The connection between the military and the far-right are very known, especially to the antifascists public in Germany. Like we wrote about it that often, like, years and years, and that in a lot of military bases there are Nazi networks, so it wasn't quite news for us. The news was how far they got along with their planning. And also the question "what does the Secret Service do if they don't look into that kind of stuff?" because this is an area of society where we as antifascists, we don't get any information from there. Like if they want to do it in secret, we are not the people going to the military, especially now if you didn't have to in Germany.

It was always clear for us that something like this could happen. And it was also clear for us that there's high skilled trained people in the police and the military forces joining right-wing movements, sharing the ideological backgrounds. No surprise so far at that point. But we were quite shocked about how the State didn't inform the people who were on the lists, with how the State dealt with that kind of danger, actually. And how and useless all the all the different stations of Secret Service are in Germany. We have a special Secret Service for the military. And it was quite clear that they're not doing their job for years. Because like we know you put on your normal jail time.
very high level Neo-Nazis in Germany who were part of this Secret Service, of the army Secret Service. They served there, and afterwards, after they quit their jobs, they held speeches at Neo-Nazi rallies and gatherings. So it was always clear that there's a deep connection in there.

And so it's interesting now that the State kind of wants to bar out the public in the case of Franco A. And it works, it works. It's a very hard struggle to stay on focus there. And also because the same with the NSU case, there's not the one institution to get to the bottom of it. Like you have the court trial, but the court trial is just there to find the guilt of Franco Albrecht himself, it's not about the network. If you get a parliamentary inquiry, they don't have the authority to punish somebody. So we don't have this one institution which can take care of it all. I don't think that this will happen. But the information is very spread out widely. And there's not the one to finally make a call and say “Okay, this is what happened. This is the network. This is what we're doing.” So right now they have Franco Albrecht on trial but only him for planning assaults on different people on his list, for violating weapon laws, and for getting money from the State living a life as a fake refugee. So this is just his skills at that point. And now there's different members of the Cross Groups all over Germany, but it's unclear if they ever get to trial, if they lose their jobs, how their career continues, for example.

TFSR: I don’t think we have said... since you just mentioned what Albrecht had been planning. Generally, the story is fucking crazy. Like, some German man? I guess... one of his parents, I think were not German.

Sonja: Yes, French... No Italian. His father is Italian.

TFSR: Yeah. Like he joins the military. He’s been writing about a right-wing push in the German State as being a good thing for a lot of years. I guess like through his high school, he had written a paper that kind of concerned some people. And so at one point during the “refugee crisis.” He ends up darkening his skin and wearing tattered clothing and going into a refugee resettlement office and getting his fingerprints taken, and passing off part of his life (when he's not on an on the military base living in an apartment under this assumed name) so that his fingerprints are then in the system as the Syrian refugees fingerprints.

A few years later, or a year later, this janitor in an airport – I think in Frankfurt? I might be wrong. Oh, in Vienna – finds a pistol hidden behind a toilet. And it’s got his fingerprints, and they just the police just lay in wait for whoever to come back and grab the pistol and they arrest him. But they noticed that the fingerprints match the Syrian refugee and he’s like “No, no, no, that must be a mistake. I'm a German military person.” The apparent false flag that this person is building is, like, kind of ingenious. And also, it’s it's crazy to think of what could have happened considering the way that people around the German speaking world where some people were brought out into the streets and just fully angered against what they consider to be the migrant crisis with word going around about assaults on German women. You know, because we are filled with immigrants who have come from other places, and I don't know, and the rise of the AFD around the same time, like it just seems like it's a big story. Right?

Sonja: Yeah, it's a big story. And it's, it's a perverted perspective on what happened in 2015, 2016. In Germany like this so called “refugee crisis.” People mostly coming from Syria, fleeing the Civil War, they’re fleeing ISIS attacking people. It was a big mobilization moment for the far-right in Germany. Like around the 2000-2010 years. The German far-right had an organizational crisis. They didn't get the success they wanted. And so when 2015 came, they formed a very widespread racist mobilization. We have the AFD in the Parliament at that point or at most Parliaments.

AFD is “Alternative for Germany.” It started out as an anti Euro right-wing Populist Party and got on a really racist way, in a very short time, in two years or something. The AFD was founded in 2013, and in 2015 it was the most racist, openly racist party in the State. They didn't really see the danger in that. So we had a lot of Nazis who weren't organized at that point, because we had this organization crisis where a lot of organizations just fell apart. Some of them just got closer together, like we had a Combat 18 reunion in Germany in 2012, 2013. So some of the groups they got closer together, some of them just fall apart. And most of the Neo-Nazis who were organized into organizations falling apart, they were re-mobilized by this racist mobilizations. We had rallies all over Germany, we had attacks of refugees, or POCs, in general, Black people in general. It doesn't depend on their on their status, it depends on their race.

So we have this big wave of attacks, this big wave of hate, and at the same time, the AFD, and the parliaments and also a lot of the television shows, talking or setting a frame for a new kind of racism, open racism in Germany. And so we, at that point, in 2015, we saw the rallies, we saw the danger of the rallies, and we saw the attacks, but we didn’t know what went on behind the scenes like in this chat groups, in the military. And so the story of Franco Albrecht is a very, very perverted lens of looking at what happened at that time. And if you look at what does the Secret Service say to the rallies at that point, they say “Oh, it’s just concerned people, and some Neo-Nazis trying to undermine them.” But actually, it was racism was new material to get all the different spectrums of Neo-Nazism in Germany, getting together again.

Also, the network of racism and sexism at that point, like you said, one of the main topics of the mobilization was the safety of white women of white German women. And the AFD took a big part of that they put a lot of money in media campaigns. Every time a refugee, or POC, or Black man attacked a white woman, they would push it in the public, and widely over Facebook. They put a lot of money in Facebook campaigning. So there was a misunderstanding. We have a big problem with violence against women in Germany, like a big problem, like all over the world, all over the world. There are femicides. But the idea was to just put the cases in the center of attention where a POC or Black man was the attacker.

And that worked out pretty great. And also like with Franco Albrecht... and also Stephan Ernst, who was the murderer of a politician here in Hessen, in Kassel as well, Walter Lübcke, he was shot in 2019.