

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: Germany

**Transcript of Tamara Multhaupt
Interviewer: Sławomira Walczewska**

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**University of Michigan
Institute for Research on Women and Gender
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

E-mail: um.gfp@umich.edu

Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem>

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Tamara Multhaupt grew up in Schwäbisch Gmünd, near Baden-Württemberg, Germany, and moved to Berlin in the early 1970s. She obtained her M.A. in Ethnology, Sociology and Native American Studies from the Freie Universität in Berlin (Free University of Berlin) in 1979. From 1980 to 1986 she was a lecturer in the Institute for Ethnology at the Freie Universität Berlin. In 1981-82, she carried out a research project about the Azande people in South Sudan, and in 1990 published "Hexerei und Antihexerei in Afrika," as well as academic articles also on witchcraft in Africa (such as Multhaupt, Tamara. "Sozialanthropologische Theorien über Hexerei und Zauberei in Afrika", *Anthropos*, n°82 (4/6), 1987, pp. 445-456). She was involved with the feminist organization, BEGiNE, when it first opened in 1986 and eventually actually worked there for 8 years, until about 1996; she particularly focused on the EU project about commemorative culture.

Sławomira Walczewska, born 1960, feminist activist and philosopher (PhD). In 1999, Walczewska published *Ladies, Knights and Feminists: Feminist Discourse in Poland*, the first Polish book about the history of women's emancipation in Poland from a cultural perspective. That book was nominated, as one of 20 books, for the most prestigious book award in Poland at that time, NIKE, in 2000. She is author of ca. 50 articles about feminism and history of the women's movement. She was teaching history of philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (1985-1990), history of feminist ideas at the Warsaw University (1997), at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (2000) and the feminist critics of history at the Viadrina University in Frankfurt a/O (2019).

In 1991 she co-founded the eFKa- Women's Foundation, one of the first feminist organizations in post-socialist Poland. She edited the feminist magazine "Pełnym Głosem" (*In Full Voice*, 1993-1997) and was member of the editorial board of *Zadra*, the feminist quarterly (1999 - 2018). She is director of the Feminist Institute for Research and Education (www.efka.org.pl/fibe).

Sławomira Walczewska: Today is December 3. Today I, Slawka Walczewska, am meeting Tamara Mulhaupt in Berlin; we're on [inaudible] Street. And I wanted to ask you about how your life came to intersect with feminism. Where were the points of introduction? How did it start and then develop further?

Tamara Mulhaupt: Yes, good question. My first encounter with feminism was rather sporadic. That is, I came to Berlin to study and was also very committed to my studies. But that course of studies still had to do with, let's say, social science in the broadest sense. There, one becomes interested in... and I had already always been interested in social issues, in societal issues, and also, above all else, in ideas. So I came from the provinces—from south Germany—and, I would say, I really went into exile.

Because there in the provinces, it was the early '70s, there were awakenings happening all over, and Berlin was a place where everyone who was pretty open and interested in societal processes came. I naturally sought it out as the place for my studies because I found the city to be the best for my field. By this I mean that I was interested in politics; I was interested in socio-politics. Not much was going on in 1973 with women's politics and feminism down south where I came from, Baden-Württemberg. It was really the sticks. I didn't come from a bigger city, but rather from Schwäbisch Gmünd.¹ I was in various schools there, *Aufbaugymnasien*,² and there was something like a movement of awakenings. Leftist protest movements had some influence, but there were absolutely no feminist movements there. There was, for example, absolutely no [women's] liberation movement or lesbian movement.

That has all changed a lot, I must say. According to what I hear from Baden-Württemberg, it's totally changed since then. It's also my generation, which I'll come to again, that changed all of this in Baden-Württemberg. But, in short, I came to Berlin, I met lots of other lesbians and women from Baden-Württemberg here, and we exchanged stories, and we all discovered that we had gone into exile in Berlin because life down south was so narrow, so confined, that one couldn't break free.

So I came to Berlin and there were many, many movements here. There were the anarchists, there were the Trotskyites, there were the Stalinists, there were this and that and the other thing... There was everything possible, and there were the very beginnings of the women's movement. At that time, I was still studying, I was open-minded, I was interested in social movements... During my studies, I also dealt with social movements, for example socio-religious movements, and not only in Europe. For example, Beguines, Waldensians, Cathars

¹ City in the eastern part of Baden-Württemberg (about 50km east of Stuttgart) with a pop. of around 60,000.

² Higher secondary school for students who have already graduated from a one of the lower-level German secondary school programs, providing the chance to complete the *Abitur* (German high school diploma/A-Level equivalent).

and social-religious movements from the Middle Ages, but also in the Third World, as we called it then. It's really all one world, but we called it the Third World at that time, and that was also my field of study.

My interests at the time were very general, and there were just a lot of activities in Berlin, including women's activities. Every year, for example, I participated in the demonstrations on May 8.³ I also went to the women's center, and I followed all these things. They all interested me. In the 70s, I don't know exactly when anymore, when the dates were, the first international exhibition made a huge impression on me. *Künstlerinnen International*,⁴ it was called, at the Charlottenburg Palace. I visited lots of events; more and more women's politics events, but also cultural events where [women's politics] weren't so pronounced yet.

As I mentioned, that artists' exhibition, *Künstlerinnen International*, was an initial spark for me, and then, above all, there was the Summer University for Women every year in the 70s. That is, female academics tried to establish a women's research at the university there. I was at those events every year, too. Otherwise, I was in the so-called "scene;" I went to parties, to lesbian... I believe that already existed then. That was all totally exciting and interesting.

It was like that during my studies in the '70s, until around 1979. I'm not one of those feminists who founded something, who were the spokeswomen of the movement. I watched a lot, I participated a lot, but I am no Alice Schwarzer, for example, that sort of notable personality from the women's movement. There naturally were some of those in Berlin. There were appearances by those people where I was there, too. I did a lot of following and absorbing. Ideologically, I must say, that was my entrance.

Feminism had always convinced me of its basic ideas, and, I have to say, my mother already... she was not explicitly a feminist, but she always lived a very self-determined and liberated life. I come from a... you really can't call it a family. My mother was a single parent. My mother was always indignant that she had had to fight for my custody. It was not self-explanatory in the '50s and '60s that a mother could keep her own biological child or have custody over it.

She had to fight a long time for that. People undervalue that nowadays, how it was in [West Germany] back then. She was always very indignant about that. She was also, for example,

³ Liberation Day: Anniversary of the end of World War II and the Nazi regime. The recognition of this date as a holiday was controversial 1970s and '80s West Germany (and to this day): Many felt that the word "liberation" and the celebration of this date inaccurately relieved Germans of national guilt, implying that injustice and tyranny in Germany ended with the fall of the Nazis.

⁴ [Female] Artists International

indignant that she was still called “Fräulein” as a woman over 40; that was the whole “Fräulein discussion.” She did not want to be called “Fräulein” when she was a mother and, what’s more, not that age anymore.

Those were two or three things that drove my mother to make sure that I did not grow up in a patriarchal family. That’s also another point: My mother herself characterized her own family circumstances that way, too. The father, she said, her father, so my grandfather—I didn’t know him—he was actually apparently a drill-sergeant type. He was very militaristic. My mother really rejected all of that, militarism and such.

As far as that goes, I was predisposed [to feminism], but my mother was no women’s-libber in the way that they used that as a slur back then. She just lived her own self-determined life, and she could not be dissuaded from doing it. She lived a certain way that, later, much later, came to be a model for me. Or that influenced me quite strongly. That is the story. I could also therefore always determine for myself how I wanted my life to be. My mother didn’t talk me into it. That’s how it happened that I made all of my important decisions for myself, and I have never been under the rule of some patriarch.

I think that’s the background to why I... In Berlin, it was also possible to affiliate yourself with political groups... I never did that. I never belonged to any political group, a party or anything, but I looked at everything, and there were things there that fascinated me, where I would have been glad to participate, and one of those things was, for example, the women’s movement. As I mentioned, that began with the *Künstlerinnen International* exhibition. What was special about Berlin was that there was a cultural awakening among women very early there. There were many female artists in Berlin who defined themselves as feminists.

There were filmmakers who wanted to capture the perspective of women. There were female academics. That was very unusual. Berlin was that sort of place: a microcosm for various facets of the women’s movement. It was, as I saw it, not ideologically unilateral. Ideologically, obstinately... that was there too, ideological obstinacy. But that was an experience for me... with political groups, too, as I mentioned. There were the Trotskyites, there were the anarchists, there were the Stalinists, there were the Marxists, and so on. There was simply everything.

If you didn’t want... if you didn’t participate in those, that could set you apart much more strongly. My interest was there, in the women’s movement, anyway, and I can confirm that a lot was going on. There was simply unbelievably much going on at that time. We’re talking about the ’70s and the early ’80s. That was until around the middle of the ’80s, and then the BEGiNE story started. That played a very large role for me because, in 1986... maybe it was ’87... in ’87, BEGiNE opened.

I was active in the scene and heard there that “a new women’s store,” as they said back then, “is opening there.” That term stayed common because these women’s centers were often in former business spaces. On Hornstraße, I think, it was either a large six-room apartment, the women’s center, or it was a sales space. That’s why people called it a “women’s store” in common speech. I heard “A new women’s store is opening there,” and, right away, I wanted to go to the opening.

When I stood in front of the door to BEGiNE, it was insanely crowded inside. No one else was going in. Then I thought, “Oh, okay, fine. Then another time. This must not be the opening, after all.” But I was told afterwards that the whole so-called scene had assembled. All the founders, the women’s-movement women in Berlin, the famous and the less-famous, they had all gathered there. The founder of BEGiNE, so one of the co-founders who got it off the ground, she was... I don’t know her name anymore. But Gerdien was the one I had to do with.

Days later, I went to BEGiNE, and Gerdien, she was from Holland, she was one of the co-founders of BEGiNE just like Manu, who is still at BEGiNE, so Manu built it too. I always went there then for the events, which I found very interesting. I also had very good contact with Gerdien and, by that, I want to say that a lot happened through personal contact. Something fascinated me, I went there, then I got involved.

At some point, Gerdien asked me, “What exactly are you doing? Do you want to get involved here, or what?” and that planted it in my head. I had enough inspiration for what one could do there, and, most of all, I was fascinated by the idea of the women’s movement as a cultural awakening... by scholarship, by literature, by music—that was very important for BEGiNE—, by art, and not so much by the political movement. That is, I think, really funny. I participated in all these things, but the cultural aspect of the women’s movement interested me more.

It was an ideal place, for example, with Gerdien, she did a series... the first series I remember was about female surrealists. That was in the late ’80s. Before that, people talked about male surrealists, people knew the names of male surrealists, but people didn’t know the female surrealists, most of all in educated art circles and such. She put together a beautiful event with a banquet about them. It was a new type of event: they didn’t just arrange an art exhibition or give a lecture about female surrealists, but rather implemented an idea that the female surrealists might have liked, like a campaign, like an art campaign.

It was so interesting and exciting, how she did that. When the chance arose, she asked me, “wouldn’t you like to do something on this, too?” Then it occurred to me: there was Maya Deren. Maya Deren is a surrealist filmmaker who is also an ethnologist. I was doing research on her then, and I was always looking for that connection to my field, since I was still very

academically inclined. So then I contributed the films of Maya Deren to the BEGiNE surrealist banquet and surrealist week.

What I mean to say is that that connection of ideas, realization of ideas, and that sort of activity appealed to me quite a lot. I was aligned with it, it interested me, I also found it politically important. Women in art and culture were not discussed among the public at that time. It was the women's movement and, especially, the women active in various industries—scholarship was one, technology was another—that thought about them. I can maybe name a few event series for you that we did, if we take a short break.

[Break]

TM: Exactly. Those were of course cultural topics. I did a series here very early on with Iranian women in exile and, in that event series, we presented dance and music and poetry... Persian dance and music and poetry; so not us, but rather Iranian women in exile. The autonomous Iranian women's movement, as they called it. There were, however, lots of activists in Berlin. It was 10 years after the founding of the so-called Islamic Republic, and that was interesting in that they emphasized the special aspect of Persian culture for women. They also presented a well-known Iranian poet named Forugh Farrochzād and recited her poems, and that was really quite impressive because it was the case here, too, that women's history was absolutely never represented, nowhere, and it was the women's-movement women from Iran who did that.

And BEGiNE was crowded. And it was exclusively for women. It was really very, very crowded. That was a magnificent encounter with women's-movement women from—it must be said—Muslim countries. The situation was much more flagrant at that time because women who did not dress according to the rules were literally beaten up. It was enforced with lots of violence back then. So that was possible.

Then, I can remember, we also had many women from the history of the women's movement. We posed the question, for example, of the French Revolution. The French Revolution lasted, I believe, 200 years, and we asked the question: What happened with the women? And then we did events with on that topic, women in the French Revolution, and that was always a very important discovery for me.

There were also pioneers who were doing already doing that back then. They were the radical Republicans, Olympe de Gouges, for example. They played a role in those events. And then, over the years, there were also events about the women's movement—the old German women's movement. The new one, not so much. Since we were right in the middle of that, we didn't need to address it. So we had our topics within the new women's movement, but we ourselves *were* the new women's movement.

My work was always... My understanding of feminism at that time was: This is also a cultural movement, and we have to strengthen—people say “empower” nowadays—women now by presenting them with their own history. And Berlin was, again, well-suited for this because lots of research took place here. There was women’s research at the FU.⁵ In fact, I think it was called a Central Institute or Central Establishment for Women’s Research.⁶ So that was in place there quite early. I could go there... I don’t know whether it is still there now, or whether you have ever been. Anyway, people could go there and specifically research women’s topics at the FU.

There was also already a position in the Senate Administration quite early on where people could apply for research funding. Infrastructure was always terrific in Berlin when I wanted to propose a topic. One time, for example. I did a series about female authors in Maghreb, in the near east and so on, and there were always women there who had something to say about that. Of course, you had to figure out who they were, and, often, they were in Berlin, and then they’d be invited, and then they spoke about female writers in, for example, Maghreb, in Lebanon, in Syria. And my interest was also, as it were, the international women’s movement. What was happening in Latin America, for example? What was happening then, before 1989, in Eastern Europe?

The “Iron Curtain,” as it was called, was very much not gone yet. That began in 1989, with the fall of the wall. In Poland, I know, a little earlier, with *Solidarność* and such. So, those sorts of questions. We thought about the situation in Eastern Europe, in Europe in general, and then also in the border countries, Mediterranean-bordering countries, and always looked to see: What is happening with the women’s movement? And, every once in a while, we got visitors; so it was just thrilling. That’s why I’m doing this now, because so incredibly much was available.

Then we got requests from the USA, for example, for lectures. So we were also known internationally. And the highlights of the events that we did back then... I would also say that we set a lot in motion with that cultural work—feminist cultural work, I’d call it—we set a lot in motion. We seized on ideas from the women’s movement: For example, female composers over the centuries. I had a contact, a professor at the HdK,⁷ who also strongly advocated for that topic.

And then we had conversations with her about events. But we also had musicians, for example Petra Krömer, who focused on that topic. She gave lecture concerts about female composers at the turn of the century. And these were very original events, very stimulating,

⁵ *Freie Universität zu Berlin*: Free University of Berlin

⁶ *Zentraleinrichtung zur Förderung von Frauenstudien und Frauenforschung an der Freien Universität Berlin*, founded 1981. Still active today, the center was renamed the *Margherita-von-Brentano-Zentrum* in 2016.

⁷ *Hochschule der Künste Berlin*, now called the *Universität der Künste* (UdK) since 2001.

inspiring events, that were produced there. And I would say, some of that is now... it is commonplace in academic contexts. It was established then. But I would say that we were also a motor for the continuation or, generally, for the focus that was placed on this topic, women in culture. That was my work in feminism. I was not, as I said, in a politically prominent position, was no great orator or anything, but was rather a part of the movement and, together with women, I achieved some things.

SW: How long have you worked at BEGiNE?

TM: I worked there eight years in total full time, so not always full time, but... I want to say, those were exciting years that changed me, too. Personally changed me, perhaps also... how should I say... resistance against impositions... above all, the firm ascription of roles, that was what always disturbed me very much in my old life in the provinces, in my old life in general... to be allowed to undergo a metamorphosis, a transformation. And we also did an event like that with Maria Sibylla Merian, and still with Reinhard Jäckel at that time. So we also dealt with that topic, with the question of identity, of course. Differently from how that is today, because we started from an identity, as women. But, of course, we also noticed our differences. But the interesting thing today is that differences are frightening. We fought for those who were different, we wanted to bring out and show difference, and today it seems as if difference frightens us. And, as I see it, that has gone somewhat backwards.

Xenophobia, that's the fear of difference. So, I can't accept that someone is different from me. While our otherness... we wanted... we start from a fixed assignment of identity—you're a woman and therefore have to fulfill this role in society—and we wanted to break that open. And people naturally all started from the concept of woman. Back then, it was mostly about antagonism between male and female, and this internal differentiation within femaleness wasn't our focus yet, although it later became a focus. And we were always confronted with it. It was such a lively place, such a microcosm of all the discussions, debates, claims, demands, dreams, desires... everything was there.

Now I can't think of anything else.

SW: How did it happen that you did something else after those eight years? What was it? Was it also something feminist?

TM: I wanted to do something else, that's right. I didn't have enough ideas anymore. I already had a lot of—Barbara came and she had new ideas in the literary field. That was also very important, and she ran beautiful events. And we also did events together. We combined music and literature and such. And then my departure was... it was 1996, '97. I had no more new ideas, and my feeling was simply: I want to do something else now.

And then the place changed. It changed hands. There were new concepts for the place. The topics still kept me busy, though. I don't write about those topics at all anymore. I don't specialize in that academic field, but I have always followed how one might bring the topic into academic work. I mostly mean, for example, social science. And, of course, this also plays a role in natural science and technology. That is clear. For example, women are underrepresented in technical professions. We also dealt with those questions. So, profession and work, women in profession and work, and "How do women handle money?"; and "Where are the differences?"; "What do they do differently?"; "What could be improved?"; "How can women be promoted in the economy?"

And we put together quite a few events on that subject. Or, for example, we considered the question of tourism: How is tourism organized? Are female tourists different from male tourists? And that sort of question. And, of course, political issues always continued to play a major role. For example: Wages for housework. Women in the world of work also worried us very much. Human trafficking and sex tourism. That's how things with tourism came about. Sex tourism in Africa, which does not, of course, apply to women... well, with exceptions.

It was mostly about male sex tourism. And also in East- and South Asia, as is well-known. Thailand, for example. And then, for example, we spent some time considering the question: women and money. And microfinancing and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and what roles women play there. Really very academic topics, nowadays in any case. But, at that time, those weren't issues in the academic field yet.

Gender and identity always also played a very significant role in our events. So, there were also political events. We often didn't initiate those ourselves, though, and that was very important, too.

As a location we were, as I said, like a microcosm, and women came to us and said, "I want to talk about this topic from a woman's perspective," or, "I want to show a film," or, "I want to produce a series of events here." And then there were also countless women's groups. Women for Peace. And then, in the time following German reunification, we also had Women in the Church. That was very important, too, that the women's movement and the lesbians organized in the church in East Germany, and we did lots of events there. Or, for example, during the storming of the Stasi central headquarters in Erfurt.⁸ We had a group from Erfurt in Berlin then who wanted to prevent the Stasi files from being destroyed, so to

⁸ The "Sturm auf die Stasi-Zentrale" took place on Normannenstraße in Erfurt, Germany, on January 15, 1990. Thousands of East German citizens stormed the Stasi headquarters to prevent crucial documents from being destroyed when the Stasi was dissolved.

speak. Everything getting pushed aside and not being able to be traced anymore. That was the idea, to destroy those documents.

And, also during that time, we held events about that, and the women, insofar as they could travel out—it was already easier at that time—participated in our events and told us what was happening at the moment in the GDR,⁹ which still existed then. So, those were the political aspects of the work that we did. All in all, an unbelievably full time that also, of course, shaped me significantly. And also stabilized me. Stabilized, in that I would not describe myself nowadays as a trailblazer, a political trailblazer, but one got this confidence in one's own power and the realization of one's own wishes and dreams and how one could do it. There were lots of examples that were plain to see. Women who assert themselves, and how they do it and fight, and such. So political struggles were of course quite formative, too.

SW: How did BEGiNE look at that time? Did you have multiple events per week?

TM: We had a monthly program, as we still do today. There were thematic emphases on a monthly basis. Like I mentioned, I cited *Iranian Women in Exile* and the culture of Iranian women in poetry, literature, and dance. We also presented female-specific dances then. Those were still connected at that time; that has changed a lot. At that time, the cultural administration opened up “[funding] pots,” as they were called, for the advancement of women. It had slowly become apparent that women in music, for example, should still be promoted through special programs. Women in films, for instance, also fought to get money to be able to finance themselves. Overall, we had noticed that women were underrepresented in cultural work. And all the more so when they had women-specific subjects.

They simply could not get their hands on the money. And that's when the politicians in Berlin created “pots” specifically for the “advancement of women,” which is what they called it at the time. And I don't think we have that in our culture anymore. At least, not with an across-the-board approach. I know, for example, that one of the first “cultural projects”—in quotation marks—was *Das verborgene Museum*.¹⁰ Maybe even based on this exhibition. *Das verborgene Museum* had institutional funding—was funded as an institution—and showed [works by] female painters, artists, who were important, but who were absolutely never recognized, that is, simply not shown. Not in public exhibitions, not in museums, and nowhere.

That was a kind of cultural group, a group of activists who wanted to work in that field and then fought for the funding to do so. And it was the same way in other fields, too; in film. It

⁹ German Democratic Republic, also known as East Germany

¹⁰ The Hidden Museum

doesn't always have anything to do with our institution. It would be presumptuous to say that we gave everyone the idea. But politics switched, one might say, to supporting women. And we benefited from that for several years. And then the feeling was: "This isn't innovative enough anymore. Let's stop now," and I don't know how things went from there. For instance, we also applied to do music series in the field of art music, female artists, series on female composers.

Then jazz. For us, that was more about presenting the musicians, the female jazz musicians who lived in the city, showing that they are there, they make this music. And then we also had Burundanga, for example; a Latin American big band. They were with us from time to time. And then we had lots of other entertainment events. They were offered to us, we took a look, "could we do that?" So, for example, Greta and Kim also did important cultural work for a while by repeatedly presenting the songs of Claire Waldoff. We had a lot of those concerts over the years, with Greta and Kim and Claire Waldoff and the Berlin Women's Choir.

So there were also choirs, women's choirs, that performed with us in one style or another, sometimes under new names: I remember the "Makeup Pearls" and the "Miss-Notes." They had really great names, too. And they came to us on their own because artists, musicians have to market themselves. So most of them came directly to us and said: "Could we perform with you all?" And actresses, too, of course. They developed programs about female authors. I remember Blanche Kommerell; Barbara can say much more about this. Blanche Kommerell presented correspondences between women authors. So actresses performed often, as well. Cabaret artists, too, of course, women in the cabaret.

Everything you see on television nowadays didn't exist at all back then, but it was already there in its infancy in this really unique place. Of course, our means were always limited. It was hard work, so to speak, putting a stage there at all. We were not a club. We were not a theater. We were not a movie theater. And, despite all that, something always took place, but it had to be very, very extemporaneous, and it was also hard work. I still remember hanging pictures [standing] on ladders, wobbling around on the ladders and so on. With a lot of improvisation and passion, we managed it. But, as I said, the place also changed. For me, the place played a large role, and that radiated outwards. So you were part of a movement. And the movement had many facets and wasn't just focused on politics, I'd say. Nothing would have happened without the politics, that's true, but we also had different interests.

[Video cuts forwards]

TM: So, does that work?

SW: Yes.

TM: We also did lots of international events. And, among those, some with artists, foreign artists who lived in Berlin. A highlight of these was, for example, Manana Menabde. Manana Menabde comes from a very old Georgian family of singers. Her mother and, even, her grandmother sang old Georgian songs, and the three women were very well-known in Georgia. And she, the granddaughter, the daughter, followed them. And, fortunately, Manana... she a multidisciplinary artist, too: paints and makes ceramics and such and also, most notably, makes music. You can also hear her beautiful, gorgeous Georgian romances on YouTube now. And Georgian songs. And that was such a highlight.

So we did programs with female artists, internationally, female musicians, as much as possible, from Latin America. As I mentioned, Burundanga. That was always predominantly musicians from Latin America; or Mfa Kera, for example, came from Madagascar; or Nouri¹¹ made Kurdish music. So we also presented lots of international artists who lived in Berlin. We also showed [art by] female painters who were based in Berlin and lived here. I wanted to add that in; it was important.

So, we were seen as an international event space specializing in women. Alternately, we also—in contrast with many places that primarily presented [light] entertainment—did a lot of art music, art music concerts. And we just had the series with the female composers. That was in the making, in Düsseldorf, it was, I think, or Dortmund. I think it was Düsseldorf. There was a musician there who researched the topic of women in music, and she came, with her harpsichord, in a car with her harpsichord, to Berlin to do a performance here. So things like that happened. Now, she didn't have to rent a big furniture van or anything, no, she packed her harpsichord into her panel van. And those are just really nice memories that have remained—of the verve and the enthusiasm and the passion that the women had because they wanted to make them known.

Which female musicians? They were musicians... Today you hear about Anna Amalia of Prussia from time to time. You get to hear the music sometimes today, especially when you're up there in Potsdam in the castle. There, there is Anna Amalia from Prussia once in a while. But there were also countless other musicians, Italian musicians as well, from the Baroque period who were not published. Or, in the one concert we had about female composers in Romanticism... Fanny Hensel is a famous example. Fanny Hensel, the sister of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, who herself composed. And we were told about all of this in these lecture concerts. So Fanny Hensel herself composed, but she could not publish her music under her name.

She had to ask her brother Felix, or rather her brother Felix was happy to do it, because he already believed in his sister's talent. And such stories were of course incredibly important,

¹¹ Name not certain; 00:50:19

discovering them. And that was ultimately the researchers of women's issues, in this case musicologists, who did that research and who then also presented the music. A selection of female composers through the centuries.

SW: Would you like to say if it was possible to connect your feminist interests with your academic interests?

TM: Yes, the academic and the feminist. That was already over for me. I later had the idea of returning to academia, but it was too late. I was away from that enterprise for practically eight years, and that is a death sentence in Germany. So it unfortunately doesn't work permeably like that; then you're not even noticed in academia anymore. So I hadn't done any academic research especially on women's issues. They only came up later, after I had completed my academic research, so to speak. That's when everything got rolling. Then there was the Women's Research Center, where you could apply for grants in that field, so it generally got more attention.

But that wasn't originally my topic. My topic was—although it does have a certain relatedness—I have always been interested in foreign culture, for example. What is considered “foreign,” or what is different. What's excluded in academia or with ways of thinking. I'm interested in ideas. For example, the idea of feminism. What does it involve from an academic perspective? I dealt with ideas. Social movements often have an idea behind them: The idea is liberation, emancipation, justice, and so on. And those kinds of ideas, socio-religious and, actually, also socio-philosophical ideas, have always fascinated me, and they would have been something like a connection to feminism, which was more practical for me. That was a theory of praxis, I'd say. My approach didn't come from theory, but from practice. And then you looked at the world differently. Women's communities, for example, what are they? Have they ever existed before? Where do they exist in other places? Everywhere in the world.

And it is inspiring to have lived it like that. It was also inspiring for any academic research people were still doing. I didn't have the opportunity to do that anymore. And, after I finished that cultural work at the women's center, I went back to my roots, so to speak, and worked in education. German as a second language, German as a foreign language. So I have always sought these encounters with others, with people from other cultures, because everything was always way too narrow for me, too small-minded, too provincial—the way I grew up, it was just such a limited horizon, and then Berlin came and was already international, so to speak, and then everything opened up. It was like an “open sesame.” Like entry into a fairy land, and it just frees the spirit.

And that would have kept me busy in the academic world as well. But I was always very interested in ways of thinking there and, for example, my dissertation was about African

witchcraft. Of course, women also play a role in that, but it's just not the case that it only concerns women. But it's interesting to see how the pattern of witchcraft accusations, denunciations, and so on... whether there are cultural variations there. So there are bridges to that topic, but I haven't done that sort of explicit feminist research. I would certainly have written about or researched one thing or another, but because I got that inspiration from practice... but in the end it didn't come to that anymore.

[Video cuts forward]

It's the question, or it's always been the question: we only let women into the center. That was our strict "door policy," I'd say. Men can't come in. And there were some critical situations, including threats of violence at our doorstep. I can remember one time, there was a party going on, I was at the door and I took the entrance fee, so I took the entrance fee from the women, and a man came in, quite aggressive, sat down at the counter and walked around the party room. So the party was going on.

He moved over and he pulled out a gun, but it was a really big gun. And then he said, he kind of shouted, "I'm gonna shoot you all, you lesbian cunts." This kind of thing is rare. But it did happen.

Or, for example, you can react quite differently as a man. So once, an Englishman came in with a huge beard, and you could tell that he didn't even know where he was. Yes, he didn't even realize that this was a women's bar, and then I went up to him and said: "Women only," and he said, "I try hard." I thought it was so great, that reaction. Then he grinned and left. Then he understood. But that's how you can react. With humor like that, and people respect that. And then you leave the place.

SW: And this pistol? How did...

TM: The man with the pistol? Yeah, he wanted to scare us. But the women were partying. They just didn't let it influence them. They totally didn't realize, I'd say, even though it was really dodgy. We talked about it later in a team meeting, and I said, "Yeah, so a guy with a pistol came into BEGiNE." There were just so many women there, that he was simply not noticed. He wasn't serious. Then he went out again, and that was supposed to be a threat, but everyone missed it.

No one noticed it. So [it's as though] it didn't happen. Or at that time—before, we had no emails and such. In the early '80s, it didn't exist. This was before the '90s. I can remember, I was interested in new media then and did a course at BEGiNE on how to write e-mails. So, we didn't do it before 1990, and the communication wasn't how it is today, such that you got hate mail. That's what happens nowadays. Now you get hate mail.

It says, “you discriminate against men because they’re not allowed inside.” By the way, they are also allowed in, but not into the public space. Not in public, since then you don't need to do [inaudible] later. So they can rent, or women can rent non-public spaces, and then men can be there. If it's privately rented, so to speak, then other rules apply. But you have to ask Barbara about this, for example, because now... that's how that's handled. But on Facebook and in emails, it can of course happen that the hostility is much more clearly apparent. In the past, a man never called us and said, “what are you doing there, anyway?” We would have hung up immediately. Nobody would have talked to him at all.

But emails can be sent, and I have encountered it before. A calm and factual explanation was given that we are doing the right thing, and that this is a public space for women. Then that's enough. And if you want to open a men's center—those are already a dime a dozen, you don't need to open something extra—then do it. We have nothing against it. I don't go there, but there are plenty of tea rooms where only men sit. So what are you talking about? You could do that too.

[Video cuts forwards]

...talked about that a lot, because it has become a political issue now, sexual diversity. And I remembered it like that, we didn't exactly look there. If now—well, it wasn't so manifest then—people who came to BEGiNE with a full beard and claimed they were women. That didn't happen in my time, but it has apparently happened more often nowadays. Today more is possible. So, hormone treatment, for example, obviously makes more possible. There was no such thing back then. But I can definitely remember transsexual people. They were also at BEGiNE. They weren't those... “transgender people,” is what you say today.

So, of course, they were the ones who saw themselves as women. They could come in then, too. The women who transformed themselves into men did not come to BEGiNE anymore. That's hugely criticized nowadays, and people say that BEGiNE isn't a diverse place at all. But that was a political decision, and, if other people want to make other centers, then they should do so, I'd say. I still don't think that the category “woman” should be abandoned just like that, since there is still a great deal of discrimination and a great many differences which must be named and recognized as such.

That is why I think it is still right that there should be institutions where women have exclusive access, and that that can't be called discrimination. There are also alternatives for them, for men to make these kinds of centers. I don't think there is any need for it, since society as a whole is still so male-dominated that we do not need extra facilities for men to promote men's rights. I think it's superfluous. That's my opinion.