

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

SITE: Germany

**Transcript of Marion Schmidt
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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Marion Schmidt was born in Kiel in northern Germany. She moved to Berlin in 1976 at age 18 and trained as a librarian, eventually working as a music librarian. However, she began teaching Foxtrot and Tango steps with Brigitte Garten in 1986 in the Schoko-Fabrik in Berlin-Kreuzberg. These courses have been very popular for years. There are several women's balls and weekly dance opportunities during the year, at which same-sex couples are welcome. She offered many programs through BEGINE, beginning in the late 1980s. In 1999 Marion completed her studies in educational science at the TU Berlin with a diploma thesis on the subject: "Everything is turning! Feminist couple dance culture in the field of tension between bourgeoisie and subversive practice". This work integrates years of observations, discussions, findings and developments in our dance pedagogical practice. The text is available on request at tanz@donnadanza.de

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).

Marion Schmidt: I was born in Kiel,¹ and I have another sister and I am the older of the two, and I grew up in a very sheltered environment. Yes, I had a very calm and protective childhood and left home at the age of 18, after graduating from high school. I studied in Göttingen² and then discovered other worlds and was not satisfied with my studies of mathematics and physics in Göttingen and then I thought about what else I could do and wanted to become a librarian, and then there was a possibility for me to do that in Hamburg³ or in Berlin.⁴ And then I thought no, Hamburg is too close to Kiel for me. I want something new, something different. I had always read a lot and a lot of exile literature or city literature (Großstadtliteratur).⁵ And I thought Berlin was incredibly exciting. And then I thought: I'll go to Berlin.

And I got a place to study there and had a great-aunt who lived in Tempelhof,⁶ in an old building in an old apartment with cold water, and I found it incredibly different from the way I grew up. And I liked it a lot. I liked that I could experience another world in a way. It all started in this large apartment in Aunt Berta's old building. So, I immediately... When I was 15, I also went to Berlin for a short time and thought, I would like to live in this city. And Kiel was always too small and too narrow and too provincial for me, and... even though it is the capital of Schleswig-Holstein.⁷ But Berlin has always been a place of longing for me, and that's why I moved to Berlin. And then I was also—I didn't succeed in Kiel, but I was successful in Berlin—I quickly went into politics.

I think it was in... I moved to Berlin in '76, and that was a time when people at the university read a lot of Karl Marx.⁸ I was in a Kapital⁹ reading group and took part in

¹ Kiel is a port city in Germany bordering the Baltic Sea. ("Kiel." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiel>)

² Göttingen is a German town known mainly for its university. ("Göttingen." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%B6ttingen>)

³ Hamburg is a major port city in northern Germany bordering the North Sea. ("Hamburg." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg>)

⁴ Berlin is the capital of Germany and dates back to the 13th century. It is known for its art and culture scene. ("Berlin." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin>)

⁵ Exile literature refers to novels written by writers of anti-Nazi sentiment who fled from Nazi Germany and its territories between 1933 and 1945. These authors, several of whom were Jewish, fled the Nazi's oppressive and restrictive mandates and the abolishment of the freedom of the press. These writers convened in various cultural hubs such as Paris, Amsterdam, Stockholm, London, and Prague and formed the "underground." Prominent exile writers include Theodor Adorno, Hannan Arendt, Thomas Mann, and Franz Werfel. ("Exilliteratur." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exilliteratur>)

⁶ Tempelhof is a district in Berlin and is known for the decommissioned Tempelhof Airport, one of the world's earliest airports. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempelhof>)

⁷ Schleswig-Holstein is Germany's northernmost state, and its capital is Kiel. ("Schleswig-Holstein." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schleswig-Holstein>)

⁸ Karl Marx was a German philosopher, economist, sociologist, political theorist, and socialist revolutionary. His critical theories on society, economics, and politics, an ideology known as Marxism, argues for a controlling of the means of productions by the proletariat or the working class, either through cooperation

political actions, demonstrations and so on and so forth. Berlin really opened up a completely different political world for me. And then I... that happened during a time when folk dance and German songs came about. Songs of revolution from 1848.¹⁰ And that was my... I was always busy with music and dance. They were my hobbies, so to speak, and then I was in a heterosexual group at that time, which also saw itself as very political, which ran and danced and did these things at demonstrations and, I can't do that at all, that was so long ago. Anyway, for me it was a very moving time when I first came to Berlin.

And then at some point I discovered that I simply find women more exciting than men after having had several relationships with men. But even back in Kiel, it was clear to me at the time that I didn't really want to marry quickly. Having children was not really my priority. And in Berlin, I had the freedom to be different from the way I grew up. That impressed me very much. And here I am. I relatively quickly started looking for female connections.

And there were an incredible number of them here in Berlin at that time. There were various venues, you start with parties and venues and dancing, or at least I started with it. Then I very quickly ended up at "Lärm und Lust." That was a women's music club in Kreuzberg.¹¹ Lesbians got together there and then they opened a floor where women could form women's bands. That was something special, because usually it was always men, and there was a female singer. But women also wanted to play bass and stuff. And I

or by public ownership. He wished this to occur via an economic transition from capitalism to what he believed to be a much fairer and egalitarian way of life. ("Karl Marx." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx)

⁹ Das Kapital is the foundational theoretical text for Marxism. It focuses on capitalism and the economic patterns that compose it, mainly the exploitation of labor. Kapital is regarded as one of the most influential works and was the most cited pre-1950 book in the social. ("Das Kapital." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Kapital)

¹⁰ The German revolution in 1848-1849 was rooted in popular discontent with the German Confederation and a severe economic depression and urban unemployment. The lower social classes had long borne the brunt of industrial and agricultural rationalization and once news hit that the bourgeois French King Louis-Philippe had been overthrown by a public insurrection in Paris, the German Revolt began. In Berlin, the streets turned bloody. However, after months of deliberation and revolution, Germany still remained un-unified (Austria and Prussia) and the small rulers of the German states, previously dethroned, came back to power. ("The Revolutions of 1848-49." Britannica. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www-britannica-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/place/Germany/The-revolutions-of-1848-49>)

¹¹ Kreuzberg is a district of Berlin and is home to students, artists, and a large Turkish population. ("Kreuzberg." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kreuzberg>)

was quite active at "Lärm und Lust." I didn't only play in the samba group; we also went to all Walpurgis Night¹² demos and stuff.

And that was also the time of house occupation. I was relatively close to what was going on there. I didn't do the house occupation myself, but I had a lot of discussions with friends and we watched the occupation of the chocolate factory in Kreuzberg. And then I came across a dance group. I got to know them through my connections with other dancers. When I met that group, it turned out to be made up of lesbians. I was, so to speak, energetic in the things I did. I always ended up with lesbians pretty quickly, just like that. I had long hair and a skirt. That wasn't really PC¹³ in the early eighties, but somehow, I had no problems with it. So, it didn't bother me, it didn't bother the others either.

I had found my roles there, then. I made a lot of music and we did a lot, yes, we were at demonstrations a lot, and we just discussed or formed groups and went to Brokdorf¹⁴ and then to Bonn¹⁵ to the peace demo and things like that. Those were the very eventful 80s, and in 1986 is when it really took off. There was the chocolate factory in Kreuzberg, this house was occupied by women, there was a sports floor, and of course there were self-defense courses on this sports floor. That was, so to speak, the first thing that women started with. And there were free capacities. And then I and others from our dance troupe were asked if we would like to offer dance courses. And we started with standard dance courses, because we enjoyed it. Waltz, Foxtrot, Rumba, Samba, Cha-Cha-Cha, Tango. That was not so PC in some groups at that time. But I wasn't like that then. It never impressed me that much. When I enjoyed things, or I was excited by something, I just did it. And I was always in this women's culture; that was always my big thing. So, I worked then... I trained as a librarian and then as a music librarian. So, I worked in a music library in Berlin, where they have sheet music, books and records.

That was my bread and butter, so to speak. And in my free time I tried to make music with women in some way, to found or support bands and to dance. And as I mentioned before, in 1986 we started our dance courses in the Chocolate Factory. And we were surprised ourselves to have so many visitors. There were an endless number of women who wanted to learn to dance standard. And we had tried it before, so we learned it ourselves from a

¹² Walpurgis Night, also known as Saint Walpurgis' Night, is a holiday observed by the Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches. Celebrations include bonfires and dancing on the night of April 30th. ("Walpurgis Night." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walpurgis_Night)

¹³ PC is an acronym for the term, "politically correct," which entails a belief that language and practices that can be offensive to certain political understandings should not be used. ("Politically correct." Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politically%20correct>)

¹⁴ Brokdorf is a municipality in Schleswig-Holstein, a state in northern Germany. "Brokdorf." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brokdorf>)

¹⁵ Bonn is a city in western Germany that borders the Rhine river. ("Bonn." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonn>)

couple who had danced in a tournament and who had no fear of contact with a lesbian group. We had always tried to call dance schools and learn something else. To have other teachers. And then I got funny answers like, "Yes, I also belong to a sexual fringe group, but I don't want everyone to know that," or "We can get you some gentlemen," or "You are welcome to come, but we will get you some gentlemen to dance with," or "We don't want to impose that on our clients."

MS: So, in the mid 80s it was not possible to learn to dance as a lesbian couple in any dance school in Berlin. So, it was actually quite revolutionary that we started dancing in the chocolate factory. At the same time, this house was occupied, or at a similar time... I think it will become very clear in the other interviews with Manu and Barbara. They built it here. And yes, also in 1986 the BEGiNE opened here, in this house.

So, Frau in West Berlin knew a bit about the scene, went to different places, and then it was clear that a women's café would be opened in the BEGiNE. Of course, this was something new, because the places that existed before... There were only discos where lesbians could go at night. Once there was this place, "die Zwei" here on Motzstraße, at the corner of Martin-Luther-Straße, and that's where the feminist lesbians went, so to speak, and there, a little further on in Kalkreuthstraße near Motzstraße, was the Poele.¹ They didn't go there, so to speak... those who didn't are into politics. It was a place with... you had to ring the bell. And then the door was opened and when one of them came in, everyone turned around, and they looked around to see which ones were new and so on, and my current girlfriend said that when she was in there for the first time she got slapped on the butt, and that... it wasn't like that! That's how the scenes ended. It won't be so much different today, some of the young women who come to the BEGiNE probably won't get slapped on the butt, but they still think that the code of conduct here is just completely different from the places they go to. Of course, it's so... it's in the nature of things. Yeah, so back in Potsdamer Straße, they said there was a café opening next door. It was opened by Gerdien Jonker,¹⁶ a religious educationist or theologian or something like that, and she came up with the name BEGiNE. I don't know whether that was already on the list.

The Beguines¹⁷ were actually not religiously bound, but they were women who wanted to live in communities and in a time when it was impossible to live without religion. That's

¹⁶ Dr. Gerdien Jonker is a religious historian whose literary work and research focuses on collective memory and the public perceptions of religious minorities in Europe. ("Curriculum Vitae." Gerdien Jonker. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www.gerdien-jonker.com/>)

¹⁷ Beguines are a lay religious group that consists of women in the cities of northern Europe. A practice beginning in the Middle Ages, they lead lives of religious devotion without joining a specific religious order. Most Beguines live together in communities called beguinages and often financially supported themselves. While in the community, they are to remain chaste, but they were free to leave it and marry. ("Beguines." Britannica. Accessed May 24, 2020. (<https://www-britannica-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/topic/Beguines>))

why... it was very exciting that they could form these communities. There were a lot of Beguines too. Yes, that's how the café got the name BEGiNE, and fortunately it has remained that way over the many, many years. And yes, I had heard about it. I didn't actually go to the opening celebration, but I was there relatively quickly and heard from friends who, after the opening celebration, said, "Oh, there are no walls between the toilets." That's obviously what... and then we talked about whether or not it was meant to be like that. As far as I can remember, it is now the BEGiNE also, from there ... we couldn't finish it, but if I remember correctly Frau said, "We want everything to be a collective, we don't need walls between the toilets." That was my first memory. Yes, and then I arrived here at some point and enthusiastically participated in all kinds of events, because it was simply new and different. So, we... I used to love to go to concerts that were only done by women bands. So, it was sometimes difficult to find places for them.

Yeah, that was the case with "Lärm und Lust." But here there was of course even more culture.

There was a lot of music, there were many concerts, and you could hear and experience many women. But of course, there were also all the other cultural activities and discussion groups. So that was already a great cultural gain. I also wrote a diary during this time and somehow years later I found another entry like this. When I was single, I found an entry, my girlfriend too. She was supposed to have certain qualities. And one of them was, she should like to go to events in BEGiNE with me. So, for me it was an important place. And back then I was already visiting Kreuzberg more often. I went to the chocolate factory to "Lärm und Lust" with my activities and I found out that there is a course of studies at the TU,¹⁸ which is called feminist education.

And Professor Christina Thürmer-Rohr¹⁹ was the person, so to speak. And she was also a very, very important person for the women's movement of the time. She made various provocative theses and published them in books. That was discussed a lot and I... that was the Department of Education. And you could study social pedagogy²⁰ there with a

¹⁸ TU is the acronym for "Technische Universität," also known as the Berlin Institute of Technology. It is a premier research university with a total enrollment of about 34,000. ("Technical University of Berlin." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technical_University_of_Berlin)

¹⁹ Christina Thürmer-Rohr is a feminist philosopher, social scientist, and professor at TU. ("Christina Thürmer-Rohr." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Th%C3%BCrmer-Rohr)

²⁰ Social pedagogy centers around the intersection of social work and education and has its roots in German progressive education or community education. It emphasizes the idea that the upbringing and care for children is not only a parental responsibility, but a communal one. In this way, social pedagogy looks to address social inequality through holistic caretaking. ("Social pedagogy: the development of theory and practice." Infed. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://infed.org/mobi/social-pedagogy-the-development-of-theory-and-practice/>)

university degree. So, you could become a social worker with a degree or a degree from a university of applied sciences.

And I had a college degree from the time I became a music librarian. I got my A-levels and I always thought, oh, actually I have many... I had a lot of friends who went to university. I envied them somehow, and then I found out in my dance classes that all the women I find interesting somehow actually come from this department. They study there, and that's... Such things take a bit of time. I had a job. I could support myself. And then I reduced my job as a music librarian from a full-time job to a part-time job, because the number of dance courses was constantly increasing, because more and more women were coming, and we somehow made more and more courses. It was really a gap or rather...it was due to the zeitgeist.²¹

And then I... yeah, I used to have the... so I made friends with various students from that department, and then I thought, okay, maybe you should try again. And so, I looked at that one, and it was a degree program that was for older people... When did I start studying? I think when I was 35 or something? In '91, yes, I was 35 then, so I started studying at the TU again. That was really important for me. This feminist framework, this theory that I have always... that I already... I read a lot and had a lot of... I had a lot of discussions., I already had these basic structures of freedom of hierarchy... That was, so to speak, already my image of society, the way I wanted society to be.

And that's what I tried to convey in my dance classes, all of that. But through this study-we started in '86 with the dance courses and in '91, I started studying, and that was really great. Biggi and I did the whole thing again. Well, I studied there, but they talked about everything and also about the things we taught. Then we realized how we could support this theoretically, how we could teach this and what these ideas of freedom of hierarchy and of equality or of respect for life situations women find themselves in is all about. This was special. It was something that only happens when there are only women in a room and do something like dancing with each other. You actually have the couple dance, that is a bourgeois form of the dance. The couple dance was born through the bourgeois society.²²

²¹ A zeitgeist is the defining intellectual, moral, and cultural mood or climate of a time period ("Zeitgeist." Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zeitgeist>)

²² The Bourgeoisie refers to a social order composed of the middle-class. In popular speech, the term implies materialism and a desire for "respectability." The term originated in medieval France with a social class composed of professionals and manufacturers, a class whose political influence grew as they did. ("Bourgeoisie." Britannica. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www-britannica-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/topic/bourgeoisie>)

At that moment when every man had his single wife, so to speak, that's where this couple dance originated, right? Before that, there were group dances, which were oriented towards the monarchy, oriented towards the king, and then, when bourgeois society came into being, so to speak, that's when the waltz and these couple dances began to become popular, and then we got rid of this fixation on couples in our courses by saying. "Just come here by yourself. You don't have to come as a couple." That's the way it is in almost every dance school today. You have to register in pairs, you have to bring a dance partner, and we said, no, everyone can come alone, and everyone can come in groups, and you can have a beautiful dance as a couple. But it doesn't always have to be the same partner.

And it's much better for the togetherness and for experiencing how you can also experience yourself as equal in communication with each other. You also change partners, and above all, you change roles. That was our basic pattern, so to speak. No one was forced to do anything either. That's also an important part. The fact that you're not allowed to force anyone to do it. Instead we tried to make very clever offers, and it was often very successful, for example, that we could do something like that... when there's an odd number of women in the room we did a round robin, so every time a song finished playing one woman was replaced with another. That way only one woman has to sit down for a timeout and only for one song at a time. Otherwise, if some come in pairs, and one comes without a dance partner, then we always have to... we always change. Then one woman would always have to change with another, and she'd get the feeling that she is not welcome here.

But because we always say from the outset that we are a group, and we learn everything in a circle of friends, we all connect with each other, and we don't learn what step is meant for which role, but instead we do everything together at first, because dancing together is supposed to be fun at first, and then at some point you explain what the roles are and then you offer to change roles. That's why it's a very... there is a much bigger flow and more of this... Everyone can expand their possibilities more, usually women come with these preconceptions... I have an inner image. I lead or I'm being led. And if they come in pairs or are lovers, they usually discuss this beforehand to be on the safe side. And if they get here with that kind of mindset, they're allowed to so. And if one of them says I don't want to dance with anyone else, due to physical reasons or such, that's okay of course, but many people dare not do certain things. And if you give them a space like this one, then it just works. And I think that we really have a very feminist approach there. We always had this approach, and we still have it now.

And I was very lucky. Not in regard to Christina Thürmer-Rohr. While she is intellectually very impressive, she is not so easy to deal with as a person. And I had Christine Holtzkorb

and Astrid Albrecht-Heide,²³ two professors. They took my diploma thesis from me, and I wrote a diploma thesis. "Alles Dreht Sich:" Feminist Couple Dance, Culture, the Tension between Bourgeoisie and Subversive Practice. And for this thesis, yes, it's down here... For this work, Biggi and I spent two years or so discussing everything and writing research diaries and somehow trying to capture what we're doing a little bit and write it down so to speak. And yes, because it really is something new and something great, or was then, and still is today.

It's like that... Yes, it is. That was my study. I finished when... it was in the year 2000... and I had a woman in one of my dance classes, Gerhild Vollherbst. She was there in this... she actually found a small group in this dance group. There were five of them. It was really nice, because it was exactly what we had in mind. We also said, you don't have to come in pairs. There are also dances where you can dance in threes, or in fours or in fives. So, we also offered things like that, and they were like a group of five and changed partners back and forth in such a joyful manner and something—and Gerhild worked in the BEGiNE back then. She had a job here in BEGiNE. And during my studies I said to her, "Oh Gerhild, when I'm finished, could I actually do an internship with you?" She is ten years younger than me.

She was really scared/irritated, I just spoke to her again the other day, and then she said, "Wow! I was kind of surprised that you wanted to do an internship with me." But then I said: "Yes, I mean, I can do a lot of things. I've experienced a lot. I've done a lot in my life, but I don't know what the behind-the-scenes work is like in BEGiNE. I've been on stage a lot, but I don't really know much about the behind the scenes work. And I have a degree in social pedagogy, but I'd like to be in the cultural field." I didn't mean to get into any... I didn't want to go to a shelter or an addiction center or... or I didn't want to go to these places. I wanted to continue in the field of culture, and then Gerhild said: "Well, then come, if you mean that." Yes, and then I arrived here, and there was the office, I think it was in this room here. Everything changed a couple of times and...

[Video cuts forward]

[The interviewee shows various flyers and brochures for dance and music events which she has organized in BEGiNE.]

And I'm not on this picture unfortunately. My very latest development, you have to, like... I have to say that again. My very latest development is... I was... the fact is that I always had a lot of respect for the concerts that took place in BEGiNE, because there were really quite often very, very, very top-class musicians here. It's not that you had concerts here in

²³ Astrid Albrecht-Heide is freelance author, professor, and researcher whose work focuses on peace and German socialization and education. ("Astrid Albrecht-Heide." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrid_Albrecht-Heide)

BEGiNE, where you had to act with the bonus of women or such, but they were really very, very good musicians.

And I myself once... I also made music myself, but was actually part of larger formations, on stage or such. So actually, I myself was in BEGiNE, not on stage, and this year I was on the BEGiNE stage.

This is the announcement, unfortunately there is no photo of me. I was in a band with Kordula Völker, so to speak. Kordula Völker is a lesbian singer-songwriter, and I have been playing ukulele for a few years now. And my partner Monika, Monika Sasse and I, we both play the ukulele, and we gave a New Year's Eve course, in the women's education center. We have been doing that for several years. And Kordula was there as a participant. She does beautiful lyrics and plays guitar very well. And she made some music with us and said, "I dream of a trio. Won't you be my trio?" And then we developed quite a lot over the last year, Monika and I. Monika switched from the little ukulele to the ukulele bass, and I play cajon and sing second voice, and we are now the Kordula Völker Trio with Kordula Völker and we are called "Friedas Vergnügen."

And so, I was, no, not that June. That's not true at all. It says here that it was in June 2017. No, it was in November 2018, the wrong programme, but it was something like that, anyway. With her we were here in BEGiNE on stage, and "Friedas Vergnügen" was another step forward for me.

[Video cuts forwards]

[...] My father is no longer alive. He's been dead for ten years now. My mother is about to turn 90. When I told my mother, I was in love with a woman, the first thing she said was... she started crying and said, "I want grandchildren." The next day, luckily, that thought of hers went away and she hugged me... and said that she loves me. And my grandmother, she was there, too. It was a classic scene... That's what I told her at Christmas. My grandmother said, "Oh, child, take it as an **"encounter."** She was very wise. My mother. I have a lot of contact with... I'm in touch with my family. There's my mother, my sister... They're alive. The others all died. I had it easy. I told you I come from a sheltered family; I come from a more liberal family. Something like that.

They used to say, "Let each one live their own life and save them," but it was different. My mother let me be, but she said, "Well, Berlin is responsible for that. Responsible for you becoming a lesbian." My aunt, she was very open. My aunt and my mother's sister always asked me about all my girlfriends, and she came to visit me in Berlin. And she was already, I think, 80 or so. Then she came back to the prom. She came to the "Schoko" and stayed

until the end and even cleaned up with us and ... so.²⁴ And my sister, she's younger than me. She was still ... She was already more rebellious than me at school back in Kiel ... when I ... and she already left and became radical. She really occupied houses in Kiel, when she was still at school. And when I said, "I've fallen in love with a woman, and I'm a lesbian," she said, "At last you have a flaw too, now."

[laughs] It's brought me even closer to my sister, so to speak. It was really quite good in a way. So that's why I... I don't have any problems with my family.

There is another story. Of course, I have this strong criticism of the couple constellation, this strong criticism of the marriage construct, too. I also have... I also took an exam about homosexual marriage, because I didn't think I needed the same privileges as a lesbian. I'd rather have the splitting of the spouses than marriage, and I never wanted to get married and stuff. I have to admit that as I get older, things have changed a little bit.

And I've been with a woman for 20 years. I fell in love with a woman who has children. She has three children, and they are all over 30 now, and her eldest daughter also has two grandchildren, so two children. That means I have two grandchildren. There is a three-year-old and a five-year-old with whom I spent my holidays recently and they call me grandma. It's just a change. And I must honestly say once again that I have been very, very lucky and I think there are some women in the women's movement. This... I had a father who was an entrepreneur, and I live in a condominium that was financed by my parents, by my father, so to speak. When he died, I was his... my sister and I sold his house, and inherited something, and I was able to buy a condominium, which I still live in with my partner. And my father had given me money for a condo even after the fall of the Berlin Wall²⁵... I still have a second condo. Biggi, my dancing partner, lives there and pays a small rent, so to speak. Just what this flat needs to keep it going. And this construct, because we both don't pay much rent, enabled us to keep DonnaDanza for such a long time.

I just have to say that again. We can get by with the money... We've always been able to get by, but we can't build a big pension with it. And that's something I also know, for example, from... there used to be a women's bookstore here in Berlin, Lillith was its name, and these

²⁴ The Schokoladenfabrik center (also referred to as "Schokofabrik" or "Schoko" (translated as "chocolate factory") is the largest women's center in Berlin. It was founded in the 1980s and currently provides women with counseling and educational services as well as recreational opportunities. ("About us." Frauenzentrum Schokofabrik. <http://www.frauenzentrum-schokofabrik.de/index.php?id=22&L=1>, 5/24/20).

²⁵ The city of Berlin was divided during the Cold War, separating East and West Berlin by a border wall commonly dubbed the Berlin Wall. The division was enforced for almost 28 years and fell in November of 1991. Today, only the wall's graffitied rubble remains, but its legacy lies undiminished as one of the most enduring symbols of the Cold War. ("Berlin Wall." History.com. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/berlin-wall>)

women also said we inherited an apartment there. We put them in this bookstore, so to speak, because our commitment was to ensure that women can get books and women's books, and lesbian books. I believe that a lot of money, inheritance and such things have ended up there. I have to say that. A large number of these women who work in the projects will either receive little pension or are perhaps lucky enough to have other sources of funding. One does not know exactly how women finance themselves. But that's one thing I have to say, thank you, Dad, I always say to my father, you have done the women's movement in Berlin a service, that we were able to create a certain scene.