

Einstein Institute, Golm Tuesday July 17<sup>th</sup> 2018

Let me first thank Almuth Barta and Elke Müller for hosting the exhibition at the Einstein Institute in Golm. The exhibition, which was born in Berlin in July 2016, is now two years old. When only a few months old, the exhibition came to Golm in the Autumn of 2016. It has now come back, having grown and travelled a lot in the mean time. It expanded with portraits of women scientists of the University of Cambridge, later with further portraits of South American mathematicians, will soon be complemented by portraits of women computer scientists. It set off for the wide world, timidly at first, with a trip through France and to England after its first steps through Potsdam and then Bonn. It later dared cross the ocean to go as far as Melbourne in Australia, and then to the other side of the world, to Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Cuba... it has been to Beirut in Lebanon where veiled female faces were facing the unveiled faces on the panels, and to M'bour in Senegal where it triggered strong reactions from African male mathematicians who do not want their wife to be as educated as them.

At first we intended to accompany the exhibition as we are doing today, with an opening talk, a way to keep things under control, to see whether the exhibition is in good hands. Together with the photographer Noel Matoff, we went to Clermont-Ferrand and Perpignan. Other openings brought me to Bonn, Cambridge and Paris. Like all mothers, Noel and myself would get worried if the exhibition had some delay coming back from a venue, if it came back with some damage, or if it had served as a model for other portraits without us knowing... then little by little, as things got out of control with the increasing distance, we got used to its mischiefs and rejoiced for any piece of news we would get from the exhibition being shown somewhere in the world. The thirteen mathematicians portrayed in the exhibition do not all know each other, yet as portraits they have travelled together as sisters all around the world; only once did a participant of a workshop in M'Bour, Dorcas Addo from Ghana, ask whether she could take one portrait back to her country, which I suspect what that of Katrin Wendland, who had organized the workshop Dorcas had just been attending.

The actual mother of the exhibition you see here, is a small handcrafted wandering exhibition "*Women mathematicians around the world*", based on interviews with ten female mathematicians from ten different countries who had kindly answered the questions I asked them in an email in preparation for a talk on "Women in mathematics" I had been asked to give in Koblenz. **Agnes Handwerk**, a film maker based in Hamburg who had seen the booklet of interviews that resulted from this, was the person who triggered the idea of a more ambitious project in professionalism and more realistic geographically involving only women based in Europe. The conception and making of the exhibition was a real enterprise to which various people took part, amongst them **Sara Azzali** who has been actively involved in the project all along, **Magdalena Georgescu** who contributed in an essential way to the making of the catalogue, and more recently **Pascale Castro-Belloc** who serves as a relay in France where the exhibition has its own independent life.

The interviews and photography took us, Noel and I, to Veliko Tarnovo in Bulgaria, where **Stefka Bouyuklieva** told us how, at the beginning of her career at the Academy of Science in 1998, she and her husband had to leave their children to their grandparents the other side of the country, to Turku in Finland, where we met **Kaisa Matomaki** who was then expecting her second child and claiming that the maternity leave for her first child had given her time to think seriously about maths, even if not actually do much maths, it took us to Oxford in England, where from her office window, **Frances Kirwan** showed us the place opposite the institute where the hospital she was born in used to stand, we also went to Jena, where **Oksana Yakimova** claimed to find it easier to collaborate with men with whom you don't talk about flowers as you tend to do with women. This sentence which we chose to put on the panels, triggered reactions from the *Good Practice Committee of the School of Mathematics* of the University of Edinburgh and the International Centre for Mathematical Sciences back in February 2018 as you can see from the related correspondence uploaded on the website in the forum section.

We also had the pleasure to have **Nalini Anatharaman** who hesitated a while before choosing between a mathematical and a musical career (she plays the piano) and **Barbara Nelli** who had to wait some time before climbing up in the academic hierarchy, come to Potsdam where they gave mathematical talks and we could interview them.

We interviewed the remaining seven protagonists of this exhibition in the Renaissance Palazzone di Cortona, in Toscana, Italy, in the beautiful rooms of the palace that you will guess from some pictures at the bottom of the panels. They had gathered there for a meeting of the European Women in Maths association, which as an aside, is about to celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in Graz this coming September.

These seven mathematicians are **Karin Baur** from Switzerland, who managed to become professor of mathematics in spite of the social pressure put on her to stay at home to raise her four children, **Alice Fialowski** from Hungary, who for family reasons had to give up a professorship in the US, **Irina Kmit** from Lviv in Ukraine, where Stefan Banach spent 25 years of his life, **Margarita Mendes-Lopes** from Portugal who finished her PhD thesis while raising her children, **Duřanka Perišić** from Serbia, who told us about her experience of the war, **Kasia Rejzner** from Poland who like **Katrin Wendland** from Germany works at the threshold of mathematics and theoretical physics.

Some of the names you see in the exhibition are well-known mathematicians, whereas others names might not sound not familiar. The mix of well-known and not so famous mathematicians is deliberate and so are the geographic and generational mix. It took some resistance on our part not to focus on excellence, a concept nowadays in vogue, which ensures you funding. Yet we wanted all mathematicians to be able to relate to the portrayed women and not only reach out to an elite. We would have made it difficult for the everyday mathematician to relate to the portrayed women mathematicians, had we chosen to portray only outstanding mathematicians.

The very concept of the exhibition is based on subjectivity, starting from the portraits by a photographer who by the very essence of her art throws a subjective look on the protagonists of her photographs. The excerpts you see on the panels also stem from a subjective pick from the interviews whose questions are geared to trigger subjective answers. The subject, were it the

person on the photograph, the mathematician behind this person with her subjective outlook on mathematics, lies at the center of this project.

Let me wish you an enjoyable visit of the exhibition.

Sylvie Paycha