Communicating through books, spaces and personal exchange: Women's bookshops as cultural translators (1970s–1990s)

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One of Switzerland's characteristic features is its multilingualism with four different national languages (German, French, Italian and Rhaeto Romanic). As a consequence, Switzerland's national identity is based on a shared political system, rather than a unifying language and reading culture, as it is the case, for example, in Germany or France. Politically, Switzerland has a federalist system based on direct democratic elements, with 25 relatively independent cantons (26 as of 1979). Switzerland is also culturally diverse. The linguistic regions – except for the rather small Rhaeto Romanic language community – are culturally close to the neighbouring countries Germany and Austria, France and Italy. Although the national languages are part of the educational curriculum, communication among language regions often requires translation. Furthermore, Switzerland is heterogenous in terms of ethnicity (by 1970, foreigners amounted to about 17% of the population), religion (traditionally Catholic and reformed), urbanisation (60% of the countries surface are covered by the Alps and alpine valleys with a very low population density, 40% of the population lives in or around the five biggest cities), and class (with a traditionally important, though over the twentieth century constantly diminishing agrarian sector, a, by the 1970s, crisis shaken industrial sector – textiles, watchmaking – and a growing tertiary sector) (Schuler, Dessemontet and Jemelin 2007).

Briefly looking at the structural context of the federalist and culturally diverse landscape of Switzerland helps to understand the specificities of the women's liberation movement (WLM) that emerged in all parts of the country from the early 1970s onwards. The women's groups developed in a decentralized way, at first in Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Bern, Lausanne and then in numerous smaller cities. They acted mostly on the local and regional level, maintaining manifold relationships with groups and movements in the neighbouring countries. However, as a social movement with a political agenda that addressed legislative change on the federal level, concerning e.g. abortion rights and gender equality legislation, the WLM at certain times also had a strong national focus, bringing together women and women's groups from various backgrounds.[1]

Feminist concerns and advocates were all the more heterogeneous in Switzerland because women's voting rights were not introduced at the federal level until 1971.

Accordingly, women's suffrage organisations were active since the late nineteenth century and until the 1970s, collaborating (and sometimes competing) with a younger generation of feminists, who from the late 1960s on, organised in women's liberation groups and movements. The latter mobilised for issues such as the decriminalisation of abortion, violence against women, the recognition of female sexual needs and for the creation of autonomous women's spaces, such as women's centres or women's shelters. On the whole, the 1970s and 1980s saw an explosion of feminist activism, including political campaigns, e.g. for a law on maternity leave (which was finally introduced in 2004).

Against this backdrop, a nationwide feminist dialogue was a challenge, encompassing not only linguistic regions but also differences in urbanisation, religion, generation or economic situation. In this chapter, we will employ the term *cultural translation*, to refer to a broader process of mediation between different reference systems and contexts of understanding, which goes beyond a word-to-word translation from one language to another ('translation proper') (Bassnett-McGuire 1980, 14).[2] Instead of studying linguistic aspects of translation, we, as historians, offer to study the social contexts and material conditions in which transfers of feminist knowledge and resignification take place, by acknowledging that our understanding of 'translation' is broad, initially unspecified, and to concretise always anew for different contexts. More precisely, the chapter aims to illustrate the role of women's bookshops (including a brief look at feminist publishing) as cultural translators for the women's liberation movement. We argue that the bookshops played a central role in various translation processes that were important in order to establish the WLM as a locally embedded and transregionally operative social actor that was at the same time oriented towards a transnationally connected women's movement and network. The WLM in Switzerland as such went beyond a national movement through its numerous linguistic references, it thus was at the same time locally rooted and culturally deterritorialized.

We will, first, give a brief overview of women's bookshops in Switzerland, and also look at how they functioned as feminist projects in the capitalist market. Secondly, we will trace the relationship between women's bookshops and the WLM, and its changes over time. Based on this, we will turn to our main question, that is how women's bookshops acted as cultural translators. We are looking at this from two angles: how did the bookshops deal with the multilingualism of texts and their readers and how did they manage to bring texts from and by women to a broader audience. An audience that, in terms of education, social status or geographical location, was more or less distant from the centres of the WLM and its literary culture.

Not all WLM activists have thought of archiving their documents. Fortunately, we dispose of large collections of sources related to the WLM groups in Geneva and Zurich.[3] We could complete those by oral history interviews with booksellers. The available documentation precisely on the bookshops allows us to take a closer look at the situation in Zurich, Basel, Bern and Geneva, while integrating some interview material and 'grey literature' from other places, such as pamphlets, leaflets as well as articles or advertisements in magazines or newspapers.

Mapping women's bookshops in Switzerland

A look at the landscape of women's bookshops in Switzerland reveals that feminist bookselling of the 1970s (and later on) is related to other forms of expression of political and social movements, such as socialist, gay and lesbian, 'Third World' or pacifist movements. Not all places were therefore dedicated feminist bookshops but took an interest in providing and selling women's literature. The first women's bookshop nationwide, *Annemarie Pfister Bücher & Antiquariat*, established in 1974 in Basel, was a radical bookshop offering a wide range of feminist books alongside with proletarian, New Left, anti-racism, or self-help literature. *Pinkus Genossenschaft*, in Zurich since 1971, also represented different political campaigns. Some bookshops, like *Atropa* in the small city of Winterthur, began as dedicated feminist bookshops and developed into more commercially-oriented community bookshops with a wider assortment of publications. Others were deeply rooted in the local feminist scene, such as *L'Inédite* in Geneva (founded in 1979), *Frauenbuchladen* in Bern and Zurich (1978 and 1976) and *La mauvaise graine* in Lausanne (1978), all located in an urban environment that, because of the size of the alternative scene, allowed for specialisation. All in all, between 1974 and 1982, around a dozen bookshops committed mainly to the feminist movement opened in Switzerland. The *Libreria Clexidra* in Lugano in the Italian-speaking area of Switzerland was a latecomer which started in 1988.[4] The women's bookshops in Switzerland disappeared either after a few years, like those in Lausanne, Lugano and Winterthur, or kept on selling until the early 2000s. The last ones to disappear were *L'Inédite* in Geneva in 2009, and the *Frauenbuchladen Bern* – that was integrated into a wider-ranging bookshop in 2011, which since then has run an online shop for queer books[5] – while the shop in Basel has been taken over by a new owner only in 2019.[6]

The bookshops were located at the crossroads of multiple fields and logics, implying different, and sometimes conflicting strategies, that characterised the feminist movement as a whole: counter-cultural retreat and identity formation as one form of feminist consciousness-

raising on the one hand ('internal mobilization'), reaching a broader audience by means of commercialization, professionalization, and the intensification of transnational cooperation on the other ('external mobilization') (Rucht 1990). They were also places where different social movements and milieus overlapped. The bookshops served as an interface between the 'insiders' of the movement and a larger – not exclusively feminist – public. Therefore, and despite of their pronounced criticism of capitalism and patriarchy alike, they had to integrate an economic imperative into their feminist practice, in other words, translate militant into market strategies and vice versa. How was doing feminist business framed in an anti-capitalist (and anti-patriarchal) setting?

Generally speaking, feminists legitimized the existence of business enterprise in the WLM by pointing to its function as a place where women could meet and get advice. Places like the bookshops, as well as cafés, lending libraries, restaurants, bars etc. were seen as a 'safe space', driven by the principles of self-help (cf. Enke 2007). According to Sibylle Plogstedt, feminist businesswomen understood their projects as part of an alternative economy, directly responding to women's needs and collective mobilisation strategies (cf. 2006, 17f.). With regard to the lesbian scene in the United States, Kathleen Little notes that 'rather than simply a site of commerce, feminist bookstores generally serve as a focal point and de facto community centre' (2005, 146). Bookshops were perceived as vital because they provided knowledge for feminist consciousness-raising. For Lucy Delap, women's claims for independence concerning the production and distribution of books were also rooted in 'a strong critique of the power of leaders and formal political structures within social movements' (2016, 173).

All these arguments also apply to the situation in Switzerland. Affected by New Left activism around 1968, but also horrified by the prevalent male chauvinism, here, as elsewhere, women began to organise themselves, often separately from men. Some groups stayed closer to the Marxist Left, others followed a radial-feminist line, and still others an individualistic-therapeutic strategy. The bookstores provided a bracket for all these tendencies and offered reading material – and a place to meet – for all of them, making information about feminism accessible. Coming from the conservative rural middle class in the Catholic canton of Lucerne, L.H., member of the bookshop collective in Zurich, points out that 'my socialisation was of course very much based on reading, because geographically, I didn't get anywhere. In the first 15 years of my life there were only the books' (L.H.).[7]

The history of women's bookshops is not only a history of the circulation of ideas but reveals also some crucial points about the material aspects of feminist businesses. The link

between women's emancipation, feminist consciousness and self-determined work was intensely debated in the Swiss WLM, involving discussion of Marxian concepts of alienation and exploitation.[8] If paid employment was a key to women's emancipation from the male breadwinner model, it had to be as independent and satisfying as possible, offering women a space for self-realization, consciousness-raising and collective mobilization, at the price of low wages or, paradoxically, voluntary work. 'Self-determined' or 'feminist' work therefore were contested terms, bringing about differentiated business models: The bookshop owners in Basel and Bern always paid themselves some kind of salary and intermittently even hired employees. Cooperatively-run bookshops like Zurich or Geneva strongly relied on volunteers, building up and expanding salaried coordinator positions after some time. All faced the fact that working in a women's bookshop was a luxury that not every woman could allow herself.

In retrospect, it is easy to observe (and criticize) the fact that the employment politics of the women's bookshops until the 1990s were based on self-exploitation. It is especially striking as, from the early 1970s onwards, the complex relationship between unpaid labour, voluntary work, and female exploitation played an important role for feminist criticism of patriarchy and capitalism. But beyond all theoretical considerations, voluntary work in the book trade was largely determined by structural conditions which required an extraordinary effort. In the case of women's bookshops, the specialized range of publications required complicated and time-consuming individual orders, and the expectations of competent and personalized advice were high. Moreover, a lot of customers had limited financial resources. Also, there was an ethical component: for many bookshops' employees, the (financial) success of the overall project was at the forefront, with individual material needs being put aside. On the whole, the bookshop women regarded their work as part of a feminist activism which, like other forms of feminist activism, was not necessarily financially rewarding. One member of the women's bookshop collective in Zurich recalls that moment in time as a collective experiment and 'new ground': 'We avoided dependence structures as far as possible and tried to free ourselves from the motto "*Wes Brot ich ess', des Lied ich sing*" [literally: "Whose bread I eat, whose song I sing"].[9] So we could compose our own songs and sing them.'[10] Without doubt, the search for the 'authentic' – a conglomerate of values of immediacy, self-discovery, self-realization and revolution of everyday life (Reichardt 2014) – in the face of increasing commercialization played an important role here: 'We could not imagine to work in another way, we wanted freedom and the possibility to do everything, from ordering books to selling them' (D.L.). Over the years, voluntary work in feminist businesses became more and more contested from within the WLM. Accordingly, most of the

bookshops started to expand salary payments, even if they remained low in view of the limited financial resources.

It remains an open question to what extent material aspects also affected the field of translation of feminist texts. The source material from Swiss bookshops does not allow a clear statement to be made on this. It was a common practice in the WLM that texts were either not signed by name, or were signed collectively. The problem is even more acute with regard to translations. Many pamphlets and smaller publications seem to have been translated spontaneously, by movement activists, who were sometimes bilingual, and without a professional background. But it may be worthwhile to ask about the dynamics of remuneration and professionalisation in the context of feminist translation practice and to relate those developments to the discussions about exploitation and alienation that took place in the contexts of the bookshops and other feminist businesses.

Women's bookshops and feminist reading culture after 1968

Feminists insisted on the importance of places where women could sell, buy, and discuss the written, and sometimes spoken word. This interest in the circulation of feminist knowledge is to be contextualized within the radical and countercultural movements that emerged in the aftermath of the 1968 protest movement. Key terms of that time were 'counterculture' or 'counterpublics': places where criticism of dominant ideologies and practices could be expressed and where cultural forms beyond the mainstream could flourish. Bookshops, publishing houses, (pirate) presses, journals, book clubs, professional associations, cooperatives and federations around the distribution of left-wing and alternative texts were brought to life (cf. Noël 2012). They followed the example of earlier experiments, for instance during the French Third Republic after 1871 or the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, or the Edwardian era (1901–1914) in the UK which was characterized by the flourishing of literature and art and by ongoing discussions about women's suffrage (cf. DiCenzo, Delap and Ryan 2010). All these examples show that there is a connection between social change (such as literacy and democratisation and feminisation of universities), social protest and the circulation of texts and ideas, often in connection to the topic of women's emancipation.

In the last third of the twentieth century, women's bookshops emerged against the backdrop of a growing left-alternative cultural scene, in which agitation and enlightenment were intertwined with a revolutionary self-understanding (Sonnenberg 2010, 16, 2016; Hage 2008) and where 'reading' was understood 'as social action' (Saldern 2004, 150). Radical bookshops flourished wherever politicized milieus emerged. The search for political

information through reading and discussing was both cause and consequence of the social upheavals of the late 1960s, and its absorption into different political organisations, strands and subcultures. In the early 1970s, 'questions of subjectivity became central' (Häberlen, Keck-Szajbel and Mahoney 2019, 1). Women's literary practices inscribed themselves into a comprehensive understanding of the political, which identified both material and symbolic structures as the cause of oppression. Language and its production and distribution system seemed to be an obvious starting point for change.

The women's bookshops that emerged from the mid 1970s on – in Switzerland as well as elsewhere in Western Europe: Paris, Milan, Berlin, Munich, London, just to mention a few – were also a consequence of women's growing awareness that, despite the revolutionary rhetoric of equality in the post-68 era, their voices continued to be silenced. As Nancy Fraser has pointed out, the public sphere of the responsible citizen (Habermas) – 'a theatre […] in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk' (Fraser 1990, 57) – was still dominated by male voices, and civil society was still thought to be a male domain. This explains why literary practices became so important in the WLM. *Weibliches Schreiben*, *écriture feminine*, *scrittura femminile* – writing, but also translating, from a female point of view, for a female audience and with the goal of female self-discovery (cf. Schulz 2012, 308) – was considered as an important step towards emancipation and self-determination of women and stood in sharp contrast to the fatherly-paternalistic conduct literature, designed, since the Enlightenment, to supply women of the bourgeois class with necessary (though limited) knowledge.[11]

In the multilingual context of a small country like Switzerland (13 out of 26 cantons come up against the national border, four cantons are officially multilingual), the reach of the bookshops was both extensive and small-scale. On the one hand, their influence was wide-ranging, because they facilitated a cross border circulation of texts, ideas, and people. Women from Annemasse, a provincial town in Upper Savoy/France, for example were to visit the women's bookshop in the more metropolitan city of Geneva. It was the easiest and closest access to books from French publishing houses. The same could be said for German speaking areas of Switzerland. The bookshops allowed a relatively easy access to books, that were published in Germany – or Austria. A comparable situation existed in Ticino, which had traditionally strong ties to Lombardy, especially Milan (cf. Castelletti 2007, 303). On the other hand, the influence of the women's bookshop was also very local. They not only provided books and related products, such as calendars, diaries, stickers, buttons, posters, music records and tapes etc., but also space – or, in Virginia Woolf's often-cited words: 'A

room of one's own'. After moving the Zurich women's bookshop to another location in 1987, a flyer informed the customers that the new premises made it possible to set up a coffee corner as well as a reading and music lounge, 'space and quiet to immerse oneself in the books.'[12]

Women's bookshops therefore had a strong social function in the WLM. Beyond the intellectual encounter, they served as nodes of mobilization. The founding members of *L'Inédite* in Geneva laid down in their statutes:

> The purpose of the association is to make available to its members and the general public feminine and feminist books, magazines and other women's creations. […] This bookshop will also be a place of meeting and dialogue open to all.[13]

Annemarie Pfister, founder of the bookshop in Basel in 1974, recalls having become a central contact person and address during the exciting times of squatting and negotiating with the authorities about a women's centre, which finally opened in 1976. Because of its (at least semi-) institutional character, Annemarie Pfister's bookshop could provide room for meetings of different, sometimes even conflicting groups. A friend recalls: 'She knew a lot of people, so she really had a network, she arranged contacts. […] She posted notices at events, distributed flyers and such. It was pretty much... a kind of information marketplace' (R.W.). *La Mauvaise Graine* opened its doors in 1978 in Lausanne and organized 'a lot of events and encounters […]. We organized workshops on self-defence and mechanics for women.'[14]

The pinboard and the counter were mandatary for every bookshop: flyers, movement press, announcements for demonstrations, campaigns and other information materials were available here. The self-portrayal that the bookshop founders in Zurich published in the movement press contained a whole paragraph about the information board, formulated in a bizarre mixture of movement bureaucracy and participatory culture: 'Women should be able to inform themselves about the activities of the various women's organisations. We therefore ask them [*fordern sie auf*] to send us their event programs and dates on a regular basis' (Frauezitig 1978, 6).

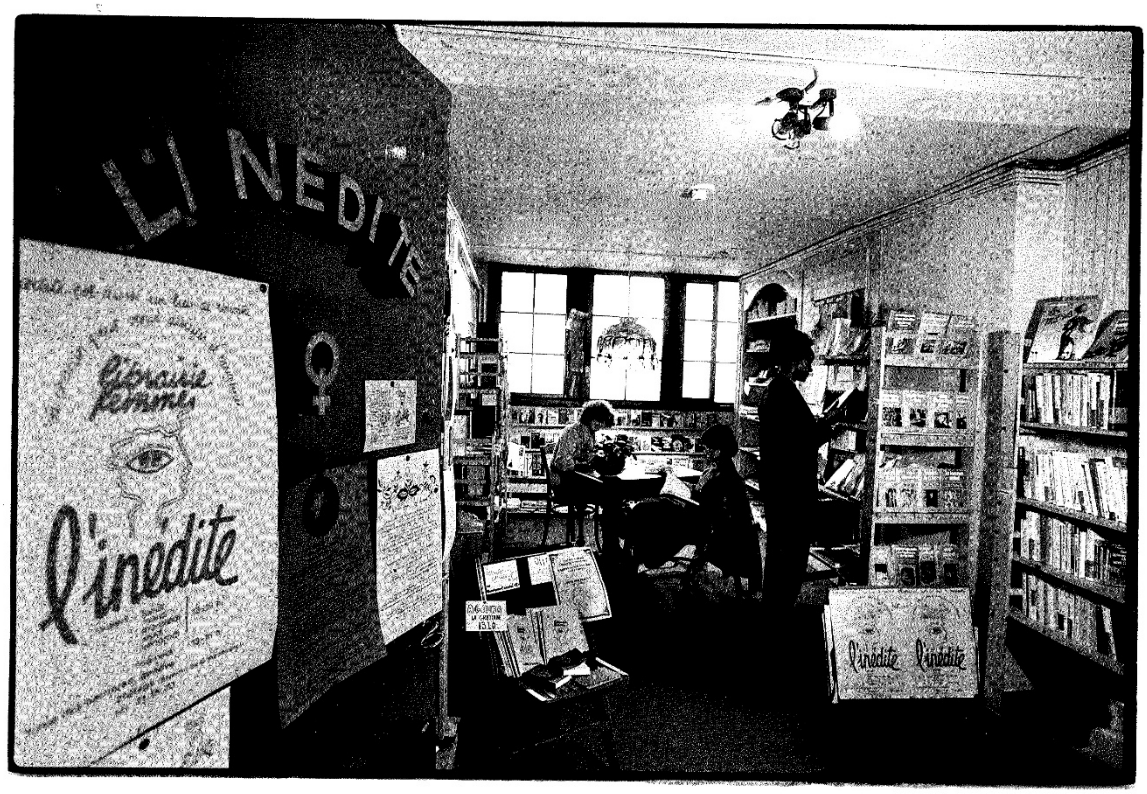

Figure 1. The pinboard and the cosy corner of the women's bookshop *l'Inédite* in Geneva ca. 1979; Photo de Dany Gignoux, Bibliothèque filigrane, Fonds d'archives de la librairie féministe l'Inédite, Carouge/Genève, Historique de la vie culturelle à la librairie 1979–2009, CH A2 FA7-S1, ancienne cote: 001 INE.

Bookshops also provided information about where to get personal advice. According to its self-portrayal, *La Mauvaise Graine* was 'a place where women could come to get information, whether it was about what was going on with women or to get addresses of gynaecologists, lawyers, or for personal problems.'[15] Identifying itself 'as a place for women, as a project that contributes to the fight against the oppression of women',[16] the Zurich collective kept and maintained a file with addresses. 'And we would provide them when you came, we passed them on, or say, look, there's the women's clinic when it came to medical questions, or a women's shelter, or *Frauen machen Musik* [women make music] or whatever' (U.B.). Obviously, the bookstores in Switzerland were pragmatic and open to different feminist tendencies. In contrast to the European metropolitan areas like Paris, Berlin and London, where it was possible to differentiate between, say, socialist, radical, or differentialist feminists, the aim here was to fuse activism.

Agents of cultural translation

As providers of spaces as well as texts, women's bookshops were actors of cultural translation on at least two levels. Firstly, they played an important role in dealing with linguistic diversity in the Swiss WLM and its relation to movements in other countries. Secondly, they were to bring important feminist texts to women and acted therefore as translators between feminist insiders and a broader public.

As numerous studies have shown, to mediate among linguistic diversity was an issue in the WLM all over the Western world and beyond (Bracke, Morris and Ryder 2018; von Flotow and Kamal 2020). The emergence of a feminist canon in the West – with all its omissions and blind spots[17] – was largely based on translations, as shown by the translation and reception history of *The Second Sex*, treated by Julia Bullock and Pauline Henry-Tierney in this volume, of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963 in English, 1964 in French, 1966 in German, 1976 in Italian), or by the global travels of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Davis 2007). As places that developed around books and texts, women's bookshops played an important role in the field of translation and cross-lingual communication of ideas. They organized lectures with female authors from other linguistic contexts; sold books in different languages; published texts; and, in some cases, arranged for translation, as is shown by the example of the *Libreria delle donne di Milano*, producer of a series of booklets under the title *Sottosopra* which were translated in parts in the German feminist press, and later on in the women's book publishing house Christel Göttert.[18] In Paris, *Des femmes* was a bookshop and a publishing house at once, curating the translation of non-francophone feminist authors, such as Juliet Mitchell, author of *Woman's Estate* and *Psychoanalyses and feminism* (both translated into French and published in 1974), or Erin Pizzey, whose *Scream quietly or the neighbours will hear* (1974) came out in French in 1975, with a foreword by Benoît Groult.[19]

In Switzerland, given the peripheral location with regard to the centres of the literary field, and the delimited publics in an important, but fragmented and thus limited movement, such endeavours were more modest. But as the analysis of information material from the women's bookshops shows, books from abroad and translations played an important role in the feminist literary landscape that the bookshops helped shape. Asked about the selections of books, a member of the Geneva collective said that 'a large majority' came from France and that only 'a small proportion' (A.K.) were by Swiss editors or writers. As mentioned above, the WLM in Switzerland is generally regarded as more pragmatic, less ideologically divided than for example, in France or Germany (except maybe for some local constellations, where radical and Marxist feminists competed with each other). One can hypothesise that importing

books and translations does not necessarily mean importing the controversies that accompanied their initial release.

Against this background, the actual publications offered by the bookshops in Switzerland seem revealing. Both the collectives of the Geneva and the Zurich bookshops regularly published a catalogue with new publications and reading tips, nearly exclusively by female authors. Looking closer at this list of new releases for the case of Zurich in the late 1970s and early 1980s, three different but overlapping focuses can be identified. First, the offer was clearly international with many books by German authors and publishing houses, but also covering a lot of translations, undertaken by mainstream publishing houses in Germany, mostly from other languages to German. This was the case for the works of Simone de Beauvoir, which, in German, came out as cheaper paperback editions one after the other (e.g. *The Second Sex* in 1968, *The Coming of Age* in 1972, both with Rowohlt[20]). Other classics were sold in German translation, all published by established houses, such as S. Fischer (Doris Lessing, Virginia Wolf) or Suhrkamp (Luce Irigaray). Some issues of the newsletter contain a section 'Other countries' – a clear indication of an international feminist orientation, but also of the intersection of different international solidarity movements – advertising, for example, Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* (in German: *Die Chinesin)*. Newsletter n° 13 announces Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (in German: *Cheechum's Enkelin*), the autobiography of a Canadian métis women, a book about female experiences of racial discrimination and the fight for dignity, 'integrity and hope'.[21]

The latter examples represent a second type of book on offer. The *Frauenbuchladen* first and foremost had books from small radical and, most of all, women's publishing houses on the shelf, whether in the original version, or in German translation. Kristeva's *Die Chinesin*, which came out with an established publishing company in Germany, had first been published by Editions des femmes in 1974, the first and most successful (albeit most controversial) feminist publishing house in France.[22] *Cheekum's Enkelin*, together with a whole range of other book translations, was published with Frauenoffensive (Munich), the first women's publishing house in the German speaking countries, which, in 1974, grew out of the radical Tricont Verlag. French feminist theorist and writer Monique Wittig was published in German by Frauenoffensive, and, of course, Verena Stefan, the Swiss-German writer whose first work *Sheddings* (in German: *Häutungen*) became a best-seller in 1974 and provided the financial base for the publishing house. This book was translated into French by Editions des femmes and into English by The Women's Press (London).

The third focus was on local creations. Even if feminist publishing in Switzerland only started in the 1980s and covered a very small segment of the book market, the women's bookshops tried to encourage local initiatives of female writing and publishing. The Zurich collective announced books that had been self-published (e.g. *Tagebuch einer Indienreise*, s.t., s.l., Zurich 1977) by the feminist sculptor, graphic artist and painter Regina de Vries, but also poetry. In November 1979, a series of events was organised with the bookshop to foster women's writing, including lectures, reprographies and exhibitions. The local focus was also very present in the periodicals offered: *Emanzipation* (Basel), *FRAueZitig* (Zurich), *L'insoumise* (Geneva) and *La Fronde* (French-speaking Switzerland) were available, alongside the German feminist press. This local focus had nothing to do with local patriotism, but with the clear intention to give every woman a voice, and to make writing a means of consciousness raising. There is no evidence in the archives that these book catalogues were efforts to deliberately build a canon. Nevertheless, in practice the book presentations contributed to the fact that certain books attracted more attention than others.

Feminist publishing in Switzerland only started in the 1980s and always remained dominated by more powerful players in the German-, Italian- and French-speaking world. While bookshops in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, quite obviously, mostly ordered their books from publishing houses in Germany, the French-speaking part was oriented towards France and the Italian-speaking part towards Italy. In parallel 'several nonconventional publishing houses came into existence in Switzerland' (Schulz 2017, 100) and in 1988 the specific feminist publishing company eFeF was founded. Still, booksellers were always obliged to find books abroad. Annemarie Pfister in Basel for example ordered as many (English) books as possible from the United States. As postage was expensive, she made use of her own transnational network: 'I asked people who went on vacation, look, can you bring me something back […].' Moreover, 'well, you always visited each other, when you were somewhere […], I always went to the women's bookshops when being abroad' (A.P). Even as the amount of feminist literature in German, French and Italian increased, the conditions remained quite difficult, due to patchy distribution systems, as for example Anne-Christine Kasser-Sauvin from the Geneva collective remembers: 'Yes, they [the feminist books] had to be searched, found actually, […] we found out what we could and looked a bit here and here.' However, the distribution system 'at any rate […] was professionalized, […] as time went by' (A.K.). For Irene Candinas from the *Frauenbuchladen Bern* the situation was somewhat different, as she had already been keeping a radical bookshop for some years – together with her partner – before independently opening her women's bookshop in 1978. As

a consequence, she could make use of her existing personal connections to publishers and distributers, which simplified the acquisition of feminist books: '[W]ell I knew about all the published books, this wasn't a secret at all, anyone could have ordered them and--, but most libraries were frightened of going out on a limb with feminist books' (I.C.). Whereas the number of feminist publications increased, the distribution process took more time to get institutionalized. Due to multilingualism, the practices of ordering and distribution developed differently and with diverse cultural reference points.

Women's bookshops fulfilled another function with regard to translations. They were to bring feminist texts to women who might be part of the WLM, but also to those who had no personal affinity to the movement or even to feminism in a larger sense. The bookshops had to negotiate between expectations from the ranks of the WLM and those brought to them from outside the movement. They were places, where everyday knowledge of women encountered texts, where individual experiences and feelings received a collectively produced wording. Feminist key ideas and agendas were exposed to a wide audience. Running a bookshop therefore meant translating feminist claims to non-feminist clients. What then were the strategies?

On the one hand, the shop window was of great importance. The relocation of the *Frauenbuchladen Zürich*, for example, was largely motivated by the fact that the first location did not have a large shop window and was located off the street – the shop in Gerechtigkeitsgasse, by contrast, had a large double window with changing displays. The bookshops in Bern and Geneva, too, both started in premises located in the upper floor and after some years moved to the basement, which was seen as a 'huge advantage' (I.C.), 'that finally allows us to tempt passers-by.'[23] For women who had no connection to the movement, entering a shop could be easier than entering other places of feminist sociability. Ulla from the Zurich collective recalls that, from all feminist contact points,

> the women's bookshop was the place that was most open. It had the longest opening hours and the least barrier to getting there. There was no obligation, you could go there easily. And you could also go away if you didn't like it. (U.B.)

Still, for many women, entering the bookshop was an obstacle, either because reading in general had no place in their everyday lives or because they did not want to be associated with feminist activism.

Figure 2. The shop window of the *Frauenbuchladen* in Zurich, 1987; SozArch, Datenbank Bild+Ton, Genossenschaft Frauenbuchladen Zürich, F_5125.

On the other hand, true to the motto 'if the mountain will not come to Muhammed, Muhammed must go to the mountain', the bookshops found ways to address a larger public *extra muros*. 1975 was the United Nations 'Year of the woman'. That year, the general trade fair in Basel organised a special exhibition on women and *Annemarie Pfister Bücher & Antiquariat* was invited to contribute a bookstall. From then on, and for almost twenty years, the women's bookshop presented a selection of books 'by and for women' at the fair. Annemarie Pfister recalls having had 'a large effect on people, who--, who did not have access to this kind of literature' (A.P.). She remembered having sold a lot of the early numbers of *Emma*, a monthly feminist magazine from Germany. *Emma*, though very successful in Germany since it first appeared in 1977, was not easy to get in Switzerland, and even if it was for sale, women, even more in rural contexts, did not dare to buy it for fear that the neighbours would mock them. As the records from Geneva show, *L'Inédite* took part in the 'alternative village' of the Geneva *Salon du livre* in 1992, whose motto was 'De l'Europe à Rio', and emphasized its attachment to a 'Europe of women' and to 'women from elsewhere.'[24]

Another possibility to address a larger range of women was to organize events, often of the 'meet the author' type, but not only. Anniversaries provided the occasion for open door days. The archives of *L'Inédite* attests to the active search for cooperation with cultural and educational institutions, such as the university and adult education centres, addressing

‘mothers and daughters, married women and lovers, workers with legal or undocumented status, free or alienated, triumphant or unlucky women.’[25]

Multilingualism has definitely left its mark on the literary landscape, and thus on women’s bookshops in Switzerland. Instead of being connected on a national level, which would have meant communicating beyond linguistic borders, women’s bookshops were more likely to refer to publishing houses, translators, distributers and women’s bookshops abroad. In that way, the feminist literary scene did not differ much from other literary scenes in Switzerland. But in contrast to other bookshops, women’s bookshops were also strongly rooted locally, by being very close to the needs of their customers. They were to provide help – books, advice, translation – out of a spirit of feminist solidarity.

Running a women’s bookshop therefore required not only to provide an attractive product range and space for exchange, but also to take care of and invest in the WLM. This of course required flexibility, as the movement itself changed over time: All of the interview partners observed social changes during the 1990s directly influencing the feminist movement and its ideas of progress in an ambivalent way. On the one hand, parts of the WLM passed through a process of institutionalization, be it public institutions, be it feminist counter institutions. On the other hand, esoteric tendencies increased, often linked to an individualistic concern for one’s self. Such reorientations also found their expression in the composition of the pinboard, which would now announce yoga and shiatsu classes instead of demonstration calls or projects coming from the WLM. To sum up, the existence of feminist bookshops in the 1990s and beyond depended on how well the translation process between bookshops and its customers worked and over the time required different adjustments from all participants regarding the offer of publications, events as well as personal advice.

Conclusion

Between the 1970s and 1990s, women’s bookshops in Switzerland played a crucial role in the cultural translation of feminist ideas. As this paper has shown this translation process took place on different levels: Firstly, the bookshops were pioneers in providing and enabling access to feminist publications from all over the world. As spaces that were perceived as floating somewhere between commercial and empowering, they, secondly, managed to make feminist ideas more accessible to a broader – and not necessarily feminist – audience than most other WLM-projects. They ‘spread the word’.

Women’s bookshops were important in the feminist landscape of Switzerland in the last decades of the twentieth century and beyond. They were an expression of both separatist

and integrative tendencies of women's liberation, places of opening and closing off a feminist counterculture at the same time. The changes of the movement over time not only had an impact on collective action, but also on individual lives. During the interview, Annemarie Pfister talked about how she changed herself by adapting to the needs of her clients:

> Today I sell books on, on what my customers do in their free time. […] I have a lot of customers, who have a garden, […] or do urban gardening […]. First it was collecting mushrooms or something like this, that--, that were connected to the older generation, got a new value and a new position in people's lives. And … to a certain extent, I took part in these changes, well, maybe this might be something rather essential in my business, that I partly personify what I sell as books. […] I don't sell anything that I'm not deeply interested in. (A.P.)

Even though Annemarie Pfister's offer of books evolved over time, the section with feminist books always remained central, as for her, women's rights are a crucial part of her commitment for a fairer world.

Obviously, the widening of the range of publications sold was to some extent linked to the transformation of the book market in general, especially from the 1990s onwards. From a feminist point of view this development was ambivalent. On the one hand, the feminist movement with its bookshops lost spaces of female sociability and thus places where difference and diversity could be negotiated face to face. On the other hand, thanks to online trade and the commercialization of women's literature, women were better than ever able to supply themselves with feminist literature.

[1] On the women's liberation movement in Switzerland in general see Joris 1992; Joris and Witzig 2001; Studer 2011; Schär and Pereira 2012; Schulz, Schmitter and Kiani 2014 (with further reading suggestions); Kiani 2019. On feminist writing and reading culture in the Swiss context: Schulz 2017.

[2] Referring to one of the pioneers of structural linguistic translation studies, Roman Jakobson, Bassnett, whose considerations can also be called 'classical' by now, is working on the basis of three types of translation: Interlingual (from one language to another), intralingual (within different dialects, sociolects etc. of one and the same language), and intersemiotic (non-verbal transfer of signification) translation. In our context all those types come into play, according to very concrete situations and places. For a sociological perspective: Sapiro 2016.

[3] The Sozialarchiv in Zurich hosts a collection of sources from the suffrage and from the women's liberation movement, and especially from the Zurich women's bookshop, https://www.findmittel.ch/archive/archNeu/Ar571.html. The *Bibliothèque* Filigrane in Geneva hosts the collection of the Geneva bookshop *L'Inédite,* https://www.f-information.org/filigrane.

[4] There is some evidence of a few ephemeral initiatives and mixed community bookshops, more esoteric than radical, that also had a feminist section, but without the claim or the possibility of being a contact point for local women's groups. Sometimes the boundaries between bookshop, library and women's meeting place were blurred, as for example in the case of the still existing women's library *Wyborada* in St. Gallen.

[5] Queer Books, https://www.queerbooks.ch.

[6] Buchhandlung Annemarie Pfister, https://www.annemariepfister.ch/index.php?id=6.

[7] All quotes from interviews are translated from German and French to English by the authors.

[8] This becomes very clear when studying texts produced for the purpose of self-reflection (e.g. Marx 1987, 1988), or early ethnographical or sociological studies (e.g. Danner 1983).
[9] Or: 'He who pays the piper calls the tune'.
[10] Letter from U.B., May 2014, private possession K.S. All quotes from primary sources are translations from German and French to English by the authors. Most of the newspaper cuttings, flyers, grey literature are part of the collections in Geneva and Zurich.
[11] On female reading and writing culture in Switzerland cf. von Matt 1998; Sebestova 2002; for Germany cf. Schmidt 1982. A broader perspective: Hook-Demarle 1994; Gnüg and Möhrmann 1999;
[12] Flyer signed by Judith Annen-Bertschi, Ulla Balzer, Ursula Schmid-Fritz and Lotta Waldvogel, ca. 1987, Genossenschaft Frauenbuchladen Zürich, Sozialarchiv Zurich (SozArch), Ar 571.
[13] Statutes de la librairie femmes l'inédite, ca. 1979, Bibliothèque Filigrane Geneva, 001 INE.
[14] 'Il était une fois…la Mauvaise Graine…', *A tire d'elle* 8 (1985), Bibliothèque Filigrane Geneva, 001 INE.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Collective Frauenbuchladen Zurich, Informationen für Frauen s.t., ca. 1988, Sozialarchiv Zurich (SozArch), Genossenschaft Frauenbuchladen Zürich, Ar 571.
[17] On the link between translation and selective canon building for the case of lusophone literature cf. Martins 2017.
[18] Founded in 1992, the publishing house's motto was 'to publish books by women for the world', occasionally with bi-lingual editions, such as several editions of *Sottosopra.*
[19] This case shows particularly well that translations are not naïve transfers of content, but also acts of appropriation. Benoît Groult was a bestselling author of women's novels. Born in 1920, she was closer to the generation of Simone de Beauvoir (*1908) than to the representatives of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (born in 1949 and younger). Inviting her to write the preface meant strengthening a cultural strand of feminism over that of social feminism, which in turn was supported by Simone de Beauvoir. On the terms and divisions between cultural and social feminism cf. Schulz 2018.
[20] Rowohlt was a respected literary publishing house near Hamburg, which became a pioneer in the production of cheap paperback editions after 1945.
[21] Frauenbuchladen Katalog n° 13, Spring 1983, Sozialarchiv Zurich (SozArch), Genossenschaft Frauenbuchladen Zürich, Ar 571.
[22] On the French case: Pavard 2005; Sweatman 2014.
[23] Letter to the cooperative members of l'*Inédite*, December 1984, Bibliothèque Filigrane Geneva, 001 INE.
[24] Village alternative au salon du livre du 29 avril au 3 mai, p. 48, Bibliothèque Filigrane Geneva, 001 INE.
[25] Village alternative au salon du livre, p. 48.

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