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CONSTRUCTING ACTIVIST TRANSLATION IN HISTORY
Women translators' activist engagement in Austria and Germany, 1871-1918

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Abstract – Although translators have been involved in a wide range of political actions and movements throughout history, much of the relevant research – particularly with regard to activism – has focused on contemporary contexts so far (exceptions include Cheung 2010; Gould, Tahmasebian 2020; Simon 1996). Using the examples of several women who were translating into German and also publicly advocating for feminist causes between 1871 and 1918 in the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire and the German Empire, this article aims to stimulate a debate on why a historical perspective is needed to enhance our understanding of the intertwining of translation and activism. In elaborating my argument, I will draw on a broad range of primary sources, (auto-)biographical data and paratextual material and follow the gender studies scholars Elisabeth Klaus and Ulla Wischermann (2008) in their understanding of society as constituted of a single, medium and complex public sphere. By applying a broad understanding of the 'public' and the 'political', the activist potential of women's translation work becomes visible in realms that have traditionally been understood as 'private' and therefore rather 'apolitical' spheres in society. Finally, the insights gained from this approach will not only reveal a more complex image of translation as an activist tool in the past (for women), but should also set a precedent for current theoretical debates on translation-related activism as well as for its real-life practice.

Keywords: women translators; activism; translation history; public/private dichotomy.

1. Translation activism: a not-so-recent phenomenon?

Translation work has always formed an integral part of a broad range of political actions and movements. Since the onset of the sociological turn in Translation Studies in the early 2000s, the numerous historical links between translation and political engagement have attracted substantial research attention within the discipline. For instance, studies have found that bible translations were often a religiously and also an ideologically motivated practice that was aimed at both undermining and/or reproducing repressive social and political conditions in history (see Delisle, Woodsworth [1995] 2012, pp. 160-172 for an overview of the topic, or Fischer *et al*. 2020; Fischer

2021 and Flotow 2000 for more specific case studies on bible translations). Apart from these, translations were also identified as key components of various social and political movements in (Western) history[1] – e.g. the anti-slavery movement (Kadish, Massardier-Kenney 2009) and the first women's movements (Anderson 2000; Misiou 2023; Simon 1996) in Europe and the US – or found to have served as relevant means of communication and networking throughout revolutionary processes such as the French Revolution of 1789 (see D'hulst, Schreiber 2014 and the research project *Radical Translations*),[2] the American Revolution of the 1770s (Tymoczko 2000, p. 40), and the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) (Cronin 1996).

All of these examples – to which many more could be added – attest to the fact that translating to serve ideological and political agendas has had a long-lasting and varied tradition. Many of the instances referred to above could certainly also be associated with activist engagement, i.e. political activities that emanate from civil society contexts and are aimed at effecting social or political change (see Brownlie 2010, p. 46; Yang 2016, p. 1). So far, however, the notion of 'activism' seems to be primarily associated with translators' (and interpreters') involvement in present-day struggles of power and politics (important exceptions include Brownlie 2010; Cheung 2010; Gould, Tahmasebian 2020).

Against this background, this article will first explore potential explanations for the lack of historical references in contemporary research on translation activism (Section 2). This is followed by a wide range of examples of women who were both translating into German and publicly advocating for activist causes –mainly within the radical wing of the bourgeois women's movement or its proletarian counterpart – between 1871 and 1918 in Austria[3] and/or Germany[4] (Section 3).

[1] Since this article focuses on the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire and the German Empire, it inevitably adopts a Western European perspective, which is also reflected in the literature cited and the historical developments described. Nevertheless, I believe that this article can still provide useful points of departure for further research on the relationship between (women's) translation work and activism in both other European and non-European contexts.

[2] The project (conducted at King's College London) looks into the dissemination of the political demands and visions of the French Revolution through translations in Great Britain, France and Italy. Its vast database is also an invaluable source for the study of early women translators' contribution to the circulation of the radical ideas of the French Revolution. (https://radicaltranslations.org [7.9.2023]).

[3] 'Austria' in this article, refers to the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918), which was brought into being by the so-called Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Following this Compromise, each half of the empire was assigned its own constitution, government, parliament and capital. While Vienna represented the states located within the Northern and Western part of the empire (also known as *Cisleithania*), among them the German-speaking ones, Budapest represented the Hungarian crownlands and territories east of the Leitha River (*Transleithania*). Despite being formally equal in terms of power (e.g. the two states conducted common foreign, defense and financial policies), it was the Austrian monarch who

The article's focus on this particular historical and geographical context results from my PhD project, which looks both systematically and over an extended period of time (1848-1918) into the interconnection between translation, politics and women's activism in German-speaking history. The women included in this article form part of a larger dataset of 33 female translator-activists, who were all particularly engaged within the first women's rights or working-class movements at the turn of the last century. While several of these women are already widely known as political figures within the historical context under investigation, their work has – apart from very few exceptions – not yet been linked to translation as a central element of their politically informed actions.

To establish this link, I draw on a broad range of primary sources, (auto-)biographical data and paratextual material gathered from existing research or relevant databases (e.g. *ANNO–Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften*; *biografiA – biografische Datenbank und Lexikon österreichischer Frauen*; *Digitales Deutsches Frauenarchiv*; *Frauen in Bewegung*; *Germersheimer Übersetzerlexikon*; *META* catalogue[5]) as well as through archival research in Austria and Germany.[6] The material studied includes women's private and professional correspondence, diary entries or work-related notes, relevant historical women's journals and the translations published therein, as well as prefaces or comments by the women in their translated texts.

In my analysis, I follow the Austrian and German gender studies scholars Elisabeth Klaus and Ulla Wischermann[7] in their conceptualization of

acted as head of state. This also had a decisive effect on the language policies within the multicultural Empire, with German being the main language of communication and administration (for an extensive history of the Habsburg Monarchy see Beller 2018; for an in-depth study of translation and interpreting activities in the Habsburg Monarchy see Wolf 2012).

[4] When speaking of 'Germany', I am referring to the German Empire (1871-1918), which was established in the aftermath of the Franco-German War of 1870/71. The proclamation of the German Empire in January 1871 initiated the process of building the modern German nation-state (which had already begun with the establishment of the North German Confederation in 1867) to a symbolic end. The German Empire was a constitutional monarchy that comprised 25 federally organized member states. The largest member state in terms of area and population was the Kingdom of Prussia, which also held most of the power in the Empire, as the King of Prussia was also the head of state (German Emperor) and in charge of appointing the head of the federal government (Chancellor) (for further reading see e.g. Blackbourn 2005).

[5] Umbrella organization of more than 30 lesbian and women's archives and libraries in Germany.

[6] For the present study, I have conducted research at the following archives: *Archiv der deutschen Frauenbewegung* (Kassel); *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (Vienna); *Verein für Geschichte der ArbeiterInnenbewegung* (Vienna). Not all of the material collected was included in this article.

[7] I have already applied Klaus and Wischermann elsewhere (Kölbl 2025). That particular study, however, only focused on the context of the Habsburg Empire and approached the topic of translation as a means of political action from a more general perspective, while the present

the public sphere as a multi-level process "by which society negotiates its values and rules" (Klaus, Wischermann 2008, p. 103). Used particularly in the context of social movement studies, this theoretical model has repeatedly demonstrated that political activists must act on different levels of the public sphere to be able to reach political institutions and influence public opinion (see especially the contributions in Klaus, Drüeke 2017).

In the context of the present study, the insights gained from this approach will not only reveal a wide range of women's translation practices at the time, but also shed light on the numerous, yet largely unnoticed opportunities for public participation that women deliberately created for themselves and others through their translation work.

2. On blank spaces, frustrations and future directions in historical research on translation activism

In her 2010 paper *Rethinking Activism: The Power and Dynamics of Translation in China during the Late Qing Period (1840-1911)*, Martha Cheung notes that "the urgent and compelling problems of the day" (2010, p. 254) continue to be given priority in translation-related studies of activism. She mainly attributes this to the perception of activism as "a distinctly twentieth-century phenomenon" (2010, p. 254). In fact, it was not until the last decades of the 20th century that the term activism became used more consistently in public discourse.[8] This process was to a large extent fuelled by the popular protests and movements of the late 1960s, whose global reach had a decisive effect on how activism would come to be understood among a broad international public. Since then, the term has been largely associated with citizens' political activities, ranging from high-risk protests to moderate civil action (see Nolas *et al*. 2017; Yang 2016). While activism will, to some extent, always remain an ambiguous and contested term with regard to the forms of political action to which it refers (e.g. radical, revolutionary action, or nonrevolutionary, community action), the intended purpose of these actions (e.g. action in the service of the prevailing system of power and

article explores the interrelationship of gender, activism and translation explicitly from a Translation Studies point of view.

[8] Throughout its history, activism adopted a wide variety of meanings, which were in turn influenced by different social and political developments. For instance, during the early 20th century alone, 'activism' could refer to a philosophical orientation in life (see Eisler 1912, pp. 160-161), to a pacifist-socialist literature movement (see Rothe 1969), to the advocates of the burgeoning European nationalisms, to pro-German activities during the First World War, or could simply mean a vigorous political activity (Yang 2016, pp. 1-2). Although its range of meanings has been significantly reduced, the way people think about activism and those who engage in it still varies widely across different countries and their respective cultural, linguistic, and political histories.

values, or in opposition to it), and the means deployed to achieve them (e.g. demonstrations, protests, online campaigning, and so on), its range of meanings have decreased steadily. In this article, 'activism' or 'activist practice' means a form of political participation that (1) has a non-binding character on a formal political level, (2) is mainly based on 'everyday' practices, and (3) aims to challenge the status quo through a participatory or emancipatory political agenda.

The heightened awareness of social, cultural, and political injustices that characterized the global public climate in the second half of the 20th century also eventually led to the emergence of a series of openly activist networks of translators and interpreters that were mainly aimed at challenging global capitalism and its related hegemonic language politics (e.g. ECOS, Babels, Tlaxcala). Up until today, various relevant studies give the impression that translation-related activism primarily emerged from these networks and the ways in which they used the practice of translation (and interpreting) to further activist causes (see e.g. Baker 2013; Boéri, Maier 2010; Boéri 2020). This results in an idealization of "activism as a novel, unprecedented phenomenon" (Cheung 2010, p. 240), and also leads to an overshadowing of lines of tradition that reach back further in time.

A case in point would be the conventional origin story of activist feminist translation that presents the so-called Canadian School of the early 1980s as its birthplace and representing universal paradigm of the practice (Castro, Ergun 2018, p. 126), although feminist interventions in translation actually date back centuries and are therefore not an exclusively recent trend (see e.g. Agorni 2005; Gibbels 2004; Misiou 2023).[9] It certainly needs to be acknowledged that the Canadian School played a decisive role in the "theoretical formulation and institutional recognition of feminist translation" (Castro, Ergun 2018, p. 130), and that the emergence of politicized translation and interpreting networks has led to extensive theoretical discussions of activist translation practices (e.g. Anderlič 2009; Baker 2006; Lampropoulou 2010; Manuel Jerez *et al.* 2004). However, the fact that activism only started to be used as a self-proclaimed label more broadly at the turn of the 20th century does not mean it cannot also be applied to earlier periods and political practices.

That "our sight is so firmly trained on the present" (Cheung 2010, p. 255) can perhaps also be attributed to practical research considerations: with the option of conducting surveys, interviews, or fieldwork, the study of present-day issues allows for more direct – though by no means necessarily easier – access to relevant data. Historical research, on the other hand,

[9] While some TS scholars argue for the existence of a longer line of feminist translation practices (Castro, Ergun 2018), others question this narrative (Brown 2018, 2022).

requires scholars to dig deeper to find relevant sources and lay bare past activist practices, i.e. while contemporary research makes it possible to directly contact the individuals under study and conduct imminent research on their movements and activities, historians can only engage indirectly with their research subjects.

This frustrating truth has sometimes led to strong reservations about historical research. A telling example of this is a statement made by Mona Baker, in which she equates historical analyses of issues of power, resistance and translation with a quest for security and safety:

> Where translation scholars have adopted the perspective of marginalised or resistant groups in society, this has almost exclusively been in the context of historical studies, with temporal distance ensuring that no "spillage" of risk or serious political controversy can contaminate the orderly world of scholarly research. (Baker 2009, p. 222)

Baker's argument fails to address three aspects in particular. Firstly, it overlooks how the present is, in every respect, a product of the past and that more often than not, "the road to the future is through the past" (Solnit [2004] 2016, p. 38). By disconnecting the past from the present, Baker denies that the former has any relevance for the formation and further development of activist practices today. However, to help present-day activists to understand the features and possibilities for the activist use of translations, but also "the necessary conditions required for the success of [translational activism] and its limitations" (Tymoczko 2006, p. 456), we actually need to acquire much more knowledge about the different functions that translations have played in the complex power struggles of history. This is when "temporal distance", to borrow Baker's term, becomes an essential tool of analysis.

The potential that "temporal distance" carries for both historical and contemporary research is the second aspect that is being missed. While it is certainly true that we will never be able to fully understand historical figures' thoughts and actions, nor the exact ways in which certain historical events unfolded (Elias 1999, p. 83), distance in time does not necessarily have to make you feel more detached from your research subject, but can still evoke proximity. By excluding this possibility from the outset, we waste the opportunity to learn whose shoulders we stand on and to create a sense of connectedness to previous generations that is grounded in "shared values and aspirations" (Cheung 2010, p. 255). Dealing with the history of activist struggles and practices does therefore not imply a way of past shelter-seeking, but rather reflects both a necessary and consistent approach. In fact, the study of one's own history has always been of particular importance in the context of political movements, especially with regard to shaping present political awareness and practices. Walter Benjamin also speaks of a "secret agreement between past generations and the present one" (1980, p. 694),

whereby the past does not only exist to teach us lessons, rather, it carries with it the potential for "bringing to fruition in the present what past generations failed to achieve" (Gould, Tahmasebian 2020, p. 4). In doing so, it situates our own political (and scholarly) engagement in history (Bühner, Möhring 2019).

The third and final misbelief concerns Baker's claim that those conducting historical research do so to avoid any "'spillage' of risk or serious political controversy" (Baker 2009, p. 222). To some degree, it is of course true that those who dedicate their research to the pressing events and developments of the day, and who may even form part of these developments, are more likely to face immediate reaction and criticism. However, this does not mean that the choice of a historical research subject and the way it is approached cannot also cause controversy. This is particularly true when it comes to dealing with the topic of women in history, as is the case in this article. Exploring one's own history, re-interpreting and taking inspiration from it has been crucial in transforming women's self-understanding and self-image in the past, and eventually proved to be one of the key prerequisites for their sustainable social and political emancipation (see Lerner 1993).

The idea of using knowledge about the past to guide one's own efforts to shape the future will be of dual concern in this article (McLean 2014, p. 37). On the one hand, the following examples of selected women's rights activists and translators in the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire and the German Empire will reveal specific ways in which these women integrated translations into their political activism, and, it will serve to demonstrate how women at the time used translation work to uncover historical role models, draw parallels with the past, and create historical points of reference on which to base their own political thinking and action. On the other hand, these specific examples will then become precedents for my own reflections about the history of women's activist translations practices and their potential implications for our activist translation practices today.

3. Women, translation, and activism in Austria and Germany, 1871-1918

As has become clear so far, there are only a handful of studies that explicitly address the historical dimension of activist translation work. This is even more apparent when the focus is on women, whose translation practice in the past has traditionally been understood as a 'private' and therefore 'apolitical' endeavour (Chamberlain [1988] 2021; for an extensive criticism on this subject matter see also Brown 2018, 2022; Crawford 2010). The discursive separation between private and public spheres and the gendered attributions

associated therewith became particularly pronounced during the (European) 19th century and have had a decisive influence on historical research since then (Hausen 1992, p. 81). For instance, gender historian Claudia Opitz-Belakhal has noted that women's participation in society and politics was oftentimes rendered invisible from a historical point of view, because some historical studies continued to reproduce the narrative of a male-dominated public sphere that was largely associated with political institutions such as parliaments or political parties and associations, to which women (as well as non-white and non-middle-class men) had been denied access (Opitz-Belakhal [2010] 2018, pp. 113-114).

To counteract such limitations, feminist scholars have long been concerned with establishing a broader understanding of the 'public sphere' that does not view political action exclusively in terms of the state and party politics, but rather as a type of behaviour "that can basically be found anywhere [in society]" (Sutor 1994, p. 45; see also the early works of Nancy Fraser 1990).

In line with such feminist thinking about politics, I draw on Klaus and Wischermann (2008)[10] and their understanding of society as being constituted of multiple public spheres. More specifically, Klaus and Wischermann identify three levels of the public sphere – namely *simple*, *medium* and *complex public spheres* –, which distinguish each other according to their respective structural characteristics, their numbers of communication channels and forums, and their social impact (Klaus, Wischermann 2008, p. 103).[11] By applying the three-tiered model of the public sphere to the study of the functions of translation in the context of women's activism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I aim to demonstrate how women used the practice of translation to widen or exploit their opportunities for political agency and to raise awareness of feminist issues among various 'public' audiences. In doing so, I ultimately intend to generate a more differentiated understanding of the activist dimension of women's translation practices at the time, one that goes beyond the actual act of translating.

[10] The *three-tiered model of the public sphere* was originally suggested by Elisabeth Klaus (2001) and inspired by the so-called arena-model developed by Jürgen Gerhards and Friedhelm Neidhart (1990). Klaus's model was applied and extended further, especially in the context of both historical and contemporary feminist media and communication studies (see also Wischermann 2003; Drüeke 2013).

[11] While Klaus's and Wischermann's model, like any attempt at classification, is arguably too simplistic to be able to fully take into account the complexities that distinguish the different levels of public sphere and the (political) functions of translations therein, their suggested categories are useful, "as long as they are not taken as 'pure types', but as categories with fuzzy boundaries" that overlap and influence each other, as Martha Cheung has taught us (2010, p. 242).

3.1. From individual politicization to collective feminist consciousness: translation activism within the simple public sphere

Simple public spheres establish themselves through spontaneous encounters and are characterized by direct and egalitarian forms of communication (Klaus 2001, p. 22). As far as the present study is concerned, women engaged in such informal exchanges in the context of private social gatherings or joint activities, through letter-writing, or within specifically 'female' spaces, such as women's clubs, women's associations, or women's libraries. These contexts offered space for personal and sometimes intimate communication, fostering relationships and networks as well as creating a sense of belonging and joint concern (Wischermann 2017, pp. 65-67). This, in turn, formed the basis for a *movement culture* (Wischermann 2003), i.e. a specific form of collective identity, which is crucial for any sustainable political alliance between individuals.

In the context of the Austrian and German women's movements at the turn of the 20th century,[12] the processes of shaping and strengthening such a collective identity was not only based on a frequent exchange and a tightly woven network of relationships among contemporary women's rights activists, but was also influenced by historical and fictional references. One such reference was the trailblazing work of British philosopher and feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). In 1899, her most famous text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) was published in a German re-translation by the Austrian-Jewish feminist Bertha Pappenheim (1859-1936). Pappenheim, who then lived in Frankfurt, undertook the translation project when Wollstonecraft's radical and emancipatory demands were being rediscovered in the context of female suffrage campaigns in Austria and Germany (Hecht 2012, pp. 311-

[12] Around 1900, the scope of the Austrian and German women's movements was highly differentiated. Despite numerous legal restrictions, women-specific associations and organizations had formed in both countries from the 1860s onwards. These included local associations for educational, professional or trade-union activities, women's suffrage or women workers' associations as well as national federations, such as the *General German Women's Association* (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*) (1865) or the *Federation of German Women's Associations* (*Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*) (1894) in Germany, and the *General Austrian Women's Association* (*Allgemeiner Österreichischer Frauenverein*) (1893) as well as the *Austrian National Council of Women* (*Bund Österreichischer Frauenvereine*) (1902), in Austria. Between 1899 and 1916, both countries also saw the establishment of a number of religious women's associations, among them the *League of Jewish Women* (*Jüdischer Frauenbund*) (1904). Since the turn of the century, some Austrian and German women's associations were also represented in different international alliances, depending on their overall political stances and feminist orientations (socialist-oriented women's rights activists vs. the radical and more moderate wings within the liberal bourgeois women's movements) (see Gerhard 2008a, p. 197; Wischermann 2003, p. 261).

312). While working on the re-translation of the *Vindication*, Pappenheim's own political thinking also became increasingly influenced by the British feminist's ideas. For instance, her criticism of women's oppression in bourgeois societies and their subordinate role in Jewish culture, which Pappenheim published in the liberal German Jewish magazine *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* in 1897,[13] strongly resembles the line of argumentation pursued by Mary Wollstonecraft in the preface of her feminist manifesto. Like Wollstonecraft, Pappenheim had argued that the disadvantaged position of women in society resulted from the systematic neglect of their education, that women had to be raised to fulfil their duties (including their maternal duties), and that they should actively strive for developing their intellectual skills so as to be worthy of having equal rights (to men) (Pappenheim 1897, in Hecht 2012, pp. 309-310).

The appropriation of Wollstonecraft's text and its use for the dissemination of Pappenheim's own ideas on women and female emancipation is also reflected in the way she tackled the translation. Apart from extensive omissions and cuts to the original text, Pappenheim also added new information and simplified Wollstonecraft's style of writing. Various references to women's current situation at the time and other content-related updates also support the conclusion that Pappenheim aimed to facilitate contemporary women's identification with the text and to further her own feminist-activist agenda through the translation (Hecht 2012, pp. 310, 314; for an extensive analysis of Pappenheim's translation see also Gibbels 2004).

Using the idea of building on one's own translations to further political causes, the Austrian socialist, journalist and writer Emma Adler (1858-1935) serves as another key example. For instance, her major work *Die berühmten Frauen der Französischen Revolution 1789-1795* (*The Famous Women of the French Revolution 1789-1795*), published in 1906, is almost exclusively based on previously unpublished French-language sources (see Adler 1906, pp. 279-280). The translation process underlying the creation of the text involved, on the one hand, the translation of the source material into German, and, on the other hand, the further processing and adaptation of this material to a specifically female audience. The book portrays nine women on both sides of the French Revolution, whose roles, commitments, and sacrifices had until then not been mentioned in German historiography (Geber 2014, pp. 183-184). In her recounts of these women's political lives, Adler takes a clear stance against the popular image that politically active women are "sentimental", "unfeminine", or "crazy" (Geber, Schuberth 2021, p. 29) – a

[13] Despite her pronounced social and feminist engagement, Pappenheim preferably used the gender-neutral pseudonym "P. Berthold" for her publications (Hecht 2012, p. 309).

reality that she and other female political activists were also facing at the beginning of the 20th century.[14]

In another sense, Emma Adler's work can also be read as a contribution to the creation of a "feminist consciousness" as understood by Gerda Lerner:

> Human beings have always used history in order to find their direction toward the future: to repeat the past or to depart from it. Lacking knowledge of their own history, women thinkers did not have the self-knowledge from which to project a desired future. (Lerner 1993, p. 281)

Even more so than in the case of Pappenheim, the activist potential of Adler's translation work lies not so much in specific translation strategies or within the translated text alone, but in a further processing of translated material that was aimed at encouraging other women in their emancipatory efforts through knowledge of their own pasts.[15]

A final example shall be linked to these considerations. When Jenny Adler-Herzmark (1877-1950), a Riga-born doctor and journalist, moved to Vienna in 1904 and became actively involved in the Austrian working-class movement, she also started to translate revolutionary Russian literature into German (Hasleder 2016, pp. 48-49).[16] Drawing on her language skills and her knowledge of Russian literature, she also went on to publicly share some of the observations she made while translating and reading works of Russian authors. For instance, in 1911, she gave a talk on the topic of "The Woman in Tolstoy's work" at the *New Vienna Women's Club*[17] (*Neues Wiener Tagblatt,* 23 January 1911, p. 12). Although she had not translated any of Tolstoy's

[14] In fact, Adler's work was most harshly criticized by her own husband, Victor Adler (1852-1918), physician and founder of the *Austrian Social Democratic Workers' Party*. He called his wife's work "utterly reactionary" and even considered publicly distancing himself from her (see Geber, Schuberth 2021, p. 29).

[15] Whether Pappenheim's or Adler's translations actually had such an immediate effect at the time is hard to verify. However, the fact that both the German translation of *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* and the biographical portraits of revolutionary women in Adler's *Die berühmten Frauen der französischen Revolution 1789-1795* were not only being promoted and discussed within the political (women's) press at the time (e.g. Frost 1902, pp. 299-301; A.P. 1906, pp. 4-5), but continue to be the topic of analysis and critical reflection to the present day (see e.g. Geber 2014; Gibbels 2004; Hecht 2012), certainly gives us reason to believe that their aim of forging alliances between past and present generations of women was eventually met.

[16] Jenny Adler-Herzmark mainly translated texts on the first Russian Revolution, including authors such as A. P. Berezovskij, Aleksandr Kuprin, or Fedor Rešetnikov.

[17] The *New Vienna Women's Club* (*Neue Wiener Frauenklub*) was founded in 1903 as successor to the *First Vienna Women's Club* (*Erster Wiener Frauenklub*) by twelve liberal women's rights activists. Its premises were open for use by all representatives of the women's rights movement at the time, regardless of their political affiliations. In March 1938, however, the *Women's Club* expelled all of its numerous Jewish members. Yet, it was dissolved by the National Socialists at the end of November 1938.

works herself, the preparation for her lecture still required a twofold translation process: firstly, Adler-Herzmark needed to translate the relevant passages she wanted to discuss for herself and, in a further step, transfer her observations for a non-Russian speaking audience. The analysis of Tolstoy's female characters, who embody strong and self-determined personalities, but also represent conventional, patriarchal ideas of 'womanhood', illustrates yet another way of how translation work – both in a narrow and broader sense of the term – was used to convey female role models and alternative ways of living. Moreover, the fact that Jenny Adler-Herzmark chose to acquaint her contemporaries with a variety of female role models – even if they were fictional – in the form of a lecture, can be considered a particularly low-threshold way of encouraging other women in their individual and collective emancipatory aspirations and visions.

The various translation-related phenomena that emerged at the *simple level of public sphere*, and the ways in which women's translation work was linked to the processes of politicization and feminist consciousness-raising, are already indicative of how women would continue to use translations to further promote and disseminate their political visions and demands within the *medium* and *complex public spheres*. Translations were not 'simply' published and made available to a specific target audience, but the information and contents included therein had oftentimes already been processed further within the context of the women's respective activist agendas.

3.2. Translation as central element of women's political activism: inside the medium public spheres of the bourgeoisie and proletarian women's movements

The examples so far have shown that, at the *simple level of the public sphere*, translated texts and their further uses were primarily directed at a (politicized) female target audience, thus helping to establish and shape a specific *movement culture*. By familiarizing contemporary women with their predecessors' political demands, visions, and emancipatory ways of living, translations were an important instrument in the formation of a new self-understanding and sense of shared identity among women who were politically active and/or interested in politics. The ideas, visions, and themes that emerged in this process – first and foremost in individual women's imagination and work, then in mostly informal and spontaneous encounters – were developed further within the *medium public sphere*.

Medium public spheres manifest themselves in political alliances that are already more organized and hierarchical in structure, such as social movements. What is being said by whom and at what time is already subject to more regulation (Klaus, Wischermann 2008, pp. 107-108).

Following Ulla Wischermann's concept of *movement public*, the historical bourgeois and proletarian women's movements in Austria and Germany all constituted a public sphere in their own right. Within these spheres, women's rights activists were mainly concerned with substantiating their arguments and demands, with strengthening their oppositional stances and with forming a more or less common opinion on specific matters to promote both the internal and external mobilization of their respective movements (Klaus, Wischermann 2008, pp. 109-110; Wischermann 2003, p. 264).

In these processes of opinion-forming and consensus-building, women's journals constituted an important means of communication and platform for discussion – both on national and international levels. In Austria and Germany, journals edited by women and dedicated to feminist concerns became increasingly widespread from the 1890s onwards. The central organs of the bourgeois-radical women's movements included *Die Frauenbewegung* (1895-1919), edited by Minna Cauer (1841-1922) in Germany and *Dokumente der Frauen* (1899-1902) and its successor *Neues Frauenleben* (1902-1917) in Austria. On the side of the proletarian women's movement, Adelheid Popp's (1869-1939) *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung: Sozialdemokratisches Organ für Frauen und Mädchen* (1892-1924) and *Die Gleichheit* (1892-1923), edited (until 1917) by German communist and women's rights activist Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) constituted the most important media outlets.

The widely ramified international networks of these journals' editors, the close transnational collaboration between different women's journals and the variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the women (and men) who contributed to these journals made translation work essential for providing the intended contents. For instance, reports on international developments and events with regard to women's rights were a thematic priority in all of the magazines. Various Austrian women's rights activists, such as Leopoldine Kulka (1872-1920), Else Migerka (n.d.), or Therese Schlesinger-Eckstein (1863-1940), regularly translated foreign press reports that were related to the 'woman question', reported on international women's congresses as well as other relevant political events, or provided translations of women's personal accounts from all over the world.[18] For example, Else Migerka translated an article on *Free Marriage and Types of Marriages in*

[18] It was primarily feminist and emancipatory texts from Finland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Russia and Sweden that were translated into German. Some political contributions and reports, but even more so literary texts, were also translated into German from Czechoslovakian, Dutch, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovenian. Occasionally, translations by Australian, South African or US-American authors can also be found. An additional aspect that cannot be addressed in detail here, but should be mentioned nonetheless, is how some of the male partners or political companions of Austrian or German feminists also translated for the political women's press at the time (e.g. Friedrich Jodl or Karl Kautsky).

Sweden in 1905 (Bugge Wicksell-Lund 1905, pp. 6-7), reported from the 1908 Women's Congress in Rome (Migerka 1908, pp. 127-131), and regularly published on international feminist developments (e.g. Migerka 1906, pp. 13-15). Similar practices can be found in the German women's journal *Die Frauenbewegung*, where different pieces on women's rights movements around the world were based on translations of foreign press reports (e.g. Lüders 1902, pp. 59-60).

By reporting on the progress and setbacks of women's movements around the world and by providing information about women's achievements in political, economic and daily life, the readers of these magazines learned that different groups of women were facing similar problems and injustices in other countries and thus sharing their own fights. Against this background, the need for and practice of translation did not only foster collaboration between women's rights activists around the world, but also helped strengthen the ties between the German-speaking movements. For instance, certain pieces that had been published in some translated form in one journal were often re-printed in another woman's journal (e.g. N.N. 1894, pp. 2-3; N.N. 1896, pp. 1-2; N.N. 1897, pp. 116-118 or Beer 1907, pp. 6-7).

Apart from the permanent sections dedicated to contemporary international developments, the women's journals in question also published German translations of literary texts or poems that dealt with specifically female realities of life or socio-critical matters in other European countries, such as Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, or Scandinavia. These translations were either included in full length or published in parts over the course of several issues. What is more, the relevant magazines did not only prominently list translated books, but also had them discussed and criticized in more or less detailed reviews and commentaries.

A case in point would be the German translations of various books and articles by the Swedish reformist educator and writer Ellen Key (1849-1926). Her views on motherhood and the social 'role' of women were generally met with rejection both within proletarian women's circles and the radical wing of the bourgeois women's movement. For instance, *Neues Frauenleben* and *Die Frauenbewegung* regularly published excerpts from Key's texts – which were primarily translated into German by well-known Scandinavian literature translator Marie Franzos (1870-1941) – and critical commentaries of them, which helped to sharpen Austrian feminists' points of view on the subject matter (see, for example O. N. 1904, pp. 19-20; O. N. 1905, pp. 16-19 or Welzcek 1902, pp. 75-76).

A similar example can be found in Adele Gerber's (1863-1937) analysis of *Women and Economics* (1898), written by the US-American writer and women's rights advocate Charlotte Gilman-Perkins (1860-1935) and translated into German in 1901 by the president of the *Federation of German Women's Associations* (*Bund deutscher Frauenvereine*) (1894),

Marie Stritt (1855-1928). In Gerber's piece *Women and Economics in seiner Bedeutung für die Frauenbewegung*,[19] which appeared as an editorial in *Neues Frauenleben* in 1902, Gerber discusses the connection between the 'woman question' and other social issues, such as the question of class and the economic dependency of bourgeois women (Gerber 1902, pp. 1-7). Her excerpt is particularly exemplary of how contents or information provided through translation were built upon and linked to local circumstances. In so doing, women resorted to other women's translations, but also used texts they had translated themselves. For example, Austrian writer and co-editor of *Neues Frauenleben,* Leopoldine Kulka, published a first excerpt from her German translation of *Woman and Labour* by the South African writer and feminist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) in a 1912 issue of the journal. Published at the dawn of the First World War, Kulka's text focused in particular on Schreiner's analysis of women's relationship to war. Their relevance at the time of the German publication was also noted in a footnote by the editors of this journal issue:

> Dieses Fragment [von Leopoldine Kulka] ist dem Werk „Woman and Labour" (ersch. bei Unwin & Fisher London) entnommen. Die bekannte, in Süd-Afrika lebende Autorin hat das Buch während des Burenkrieges unter dem unmittelbaren Eindruck desselben, [sic] geschrieben. Ihre Ausführungen über das Verhältnis der Frau zum Krieg gewinnen im gegenwärtigen Moment besondere Bedeutung. D.R. [Die Redaktion].[20] (Schreiner 1912, p. 285)

What becomes clear from this example, as well as from the others in this section, is that the importance of translation for the political activities of the women's movement members was particularly pronounced at the level of the *medium public sphere*. Translation activities were closely linked to the women's political activities, such as editing women's journals, journalistic work or travel activities. The knowledge transfer and learning processes stimulated by these activities did not only foster solidarity among women, but also helped identify weaknesses in their own arguments and approaches (see Gratzer 2001, pp. 16, 20). More importantly, these processes eventually laid the foundation for women's efforts to mobilize public opinion at the *complex level of the public sphere*, where responses are usually indicative of the success or at least the potential power of any social movement (Gerhard 2008a, p. 197).

[19] "'*Women and Economics*' *and its relevance for the women's movement*" [translation J.K.].

[20] This fragment [from Leopoldine Kulka] is taken from the text *Women and Labour* (published by Unwin & Fisher London). The well-known South African author wrote the book while experiencing the Boer War. Her remarks on women's relationship to war are of particular relevance in the present moment [The editors], [translation J.K.].

3.3. Translation work as the driver of direct political action and public opinion-forming in the complex public sphere

Complex public spheres are composed of the political, economic and journalistic elites of a society, who are in the most powerful position to exert influence on public discourse and opinion and thus to maintain and secure their social power. The more complex the level of the public sphere, the fewer opportunities citizens have to participate in processes of public communication and opinion-forming and to be noticed by their contemporary social elites (Klaus 2017, pp. 21-23, 26).

The women who were able to take part in these processes through their translation work were either already well known as political activists or translated the kind of political texts that caused major international controversy or political debate at the time. For instance, Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), one of the most prominent revolutionary socialist theorists and political activists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, regularly translated foreign press reports from French, Polish and Russian into German to document and critically analyse the developments within the international working-class movement (Tashinskiy 2019, pp. 85-86). In addition, she also translated the first volume of the autobiography of Ukrainian-born writer, journalist and human rights activist Vladimir Korolenko (1853-1921) while in prison for three years and four months during the First World War (Kelletat 2017). Other examples of influential translations by women include the German (re-)translations of various English-written key texts and letters of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels by Social Democrat Luise Kautsky (1864-1944) and her husband Karl, a prominent Marxist theorist, which were published between 1900 and 1925 – a time during which the international and German working-class movements were undergoing profound changes on political and organizational levels. Finally, a couple of years earlier, the German translation of John Stuart Mill's and Harriett Taylor Mill's essay *The Subjection of Women* (1872) by Jewish-German publisher, translator and co-founder of the *General German Women's Association* (1865) Jenny Hirsch (1829-1902) had triggered widespread political debate on the so-called woman question in Germany (and Austria) (see Gerhard 2008b, p. 105, or N.N. 1902, p. 53). The fact that major public reaction to women's translation work was mainly reserved for a specific type of woman, however, does not mean that other women's translations could not influence and exert pressure on the political-administrative system in the historical period under study. Two examples are worth looking at in more detail here.

When Russia experienced its first series of unrest and strike movements on behalf of the working class between 1905 and 1907, the women's journals *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung, Die Gleichheit* and *Neues Frauenleben* issued several reports on the revolutionary events in Russia (e.g.

Krille 1905, p. 138; Luxemburg 1905, p. 139).[21] They also included translations of eyewitness accounts, political analyses, and literary texts on the revolution, as well as several portraits of Russian revolutionaries, most of which were also based on some type of translation work (N.N. 1905a, p. 60; 1905b, pp. 1-8; N.N. 1906, pp. 6-7).[22] Following these contributions, debates about the role of women in the revolutionary uprisings and about the extent to which Russian women's emancipation efforts were ahead of those in Western Europe arose (see N.N. 1905c, p. 8 or Kulka 1905, pp. 6-8). The strategies deployed by the revolutionary forces were analysed and discussed closely, especially within the women's press that represented the female working class. Soon afterwards, mass strikes, which had proven an effective 'weapon' in the emancipation efforts of the Russian working class, would become a powerful means of agitation among Austrian socialists as well (see, for example Popp-Dworak 1906, pp. 1-3 and Roland-Volk 1906, pp. 3-4).

The interconnectedness of the *simple, medium* and *complex public spheres* also becomes particularly eminent with regard to the May Day demonstrations, which were organized by socialist groups around the world from 1890 onwards, or the events on International Women's Day that was held for the first time in 1911 in a number of European countries and in the United States. Ideas and guidance for these events and the way that Austrian and German women (and men) involved chose to present themselves publicly were not only inspired by (translated) information in the women's magazines, but also by personal contacts and relationships on an international level.

This can also be observed within radical bourgeois women's circles. For instance, in 1910, London-based suffragist Isabel Seymour (1862-1963) was invited by the *Austrian Women's Suffrage Committee* (*Österreichisches Frauenstimmrechtskomitee)* to Vienna to give a talk about the organizational structure and agitation strategies of the English suffragettes, which included boycotts, strikes and various other forms of civil disobedience. Following Seymour's talk, the editor of *Neues Frauenleben*, Auguste Fickert (1855-1910), issued a report from the event, within which they also reflected upon the legal and cultural conditions necessary for the success of certain political actions (N.N. 1903, pp. 93-94). A year before Seymour's visit to Vienna, the *Zeitschrift für Frauenstimmrecht*, a supplement of the magazine *Die Frauenbewegung*, reported on several public and private lectures (given both in German and English) by suffragettes in Munich and on their political

[21] *Die Frauenbewegung* did not cover the Russian Revolution as extensively as the other women's magazines.

[22] In some of these cases, the authors and/or translators of the respective texts were not mentioned. At times, hints at the author's identity can be deduced from footnotes, e.g. ("Aus dem Brief eines russischen Heldenmädchens" ("From the letter of a Russian heroine", N.N. 1906, pp. 6-7) or "Ein russischer Revolutionär" ("A Russian revolutionary", N.N. 1905b, p. 1-8).

demands and tactics of civil disobedience (Goldberg 1909, p. 10; Pethwick-Lawrence 1908, pp. 16-17).

Although it is arguably harder to locate these more implicit translation processes within the *complex public sphere* and to precisely trace their effects on the dominant political and social institutions at the time, some of the examples analysed in this section provide some indication of how translations were able to spark public interest or controversy and trigger notable reactions among the Austrian and German social and political elites of the early 20th century. For instance, to return to the example of the Russian Revolution, the fact that the confiscation of individual articles or entire issues of women's magazines – at least with regard to the *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung* and *Neues Frauenleben* – intensified with the success of the Second Russian Revolution in February 1917, clearly suggests that the reports and debates on the topic in the women's movement press were perceived and, above all, taken seriously by the state authorities. Finally, the authorities' reaction cannot be interpreted solely as a way of counteracting the spread of communist or socialist ideas. The actual success of the Russian revolutionaries also revived the fear of the revolutionary force of working-class people that had prevailed since the 'great' European revolutions of 1789 and 1848/49 and of the potential realization of revolutionary demands, such as the eventual introduction of women's suffrage in Russia between February 1917 and July 1918.

The role of translation in these developments might have been implicit, but still wielded the powerful potential to influence public opinion and undermine discriminatory cultural norms and values. Rather than fearing the publication of a translation, those in power were afraid of the direct and collective actions that women could potentially undertake on the basis of the arguments, images, and political ideas they learned about through translations and transnational relationships.

4. Discussion: Contemporary implications of women translators' activism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

The aim of this article was to outline how a historical perspective can broaden our understanding of the relationship between translation and activism. What do the examples of selected women translators and activists of the first Austrian and German women's rights movements tell us about this relationship now?

Firstly, they remind us that "even things that seem to happen suddenly [mostly] arise from deep roots in the past […]" (Solnit [2004] 2016, p. xxii). Thus, while some major research in Translation and Interpreting Studies seems to suggest that activist translation is rather a recent phenomenon (see

Sections 1 and 2), the examples analysed in this article attest to how those practices associated with activism and activist translation today actually do have a long-standing history.

Secondly, it has become clear that most histories of political activism or social movements usually take the moment the 'real' action begins as their starting point, thereby obscuring the variety of work leading up to those actions (see also Solnit [2004] 2016, p. 26 or Wischermann 2003, p. 12). By illustrating how translations often provided the basis for further political actions, including journalistic or editorial work, demonstrations, (mass)strikes, or public campaigns, this article shows that it is worthwhile to take several backward steps before engaging more closely with those activities that – in retrospect – were much more likely to attract attention and support for the demands and goals of the women's movements among the political and social elites of the time.

What allowed me to take such retrospective steps, to pick up *before* the action began, was Klaus's and Wischermann's concept of the public sphere, manifest on three different levels. The distinction between the *simple*, *medium* and *complex public spheres* that overlap and influence each other has made it particularly clear that the political potential and impact of translations cannot be understood through a one-dimensional view of the public sphere. Rather than having a direct effect within the dominant, or *complex public sphere*, where formal political institutions and media outlets shape 'public opinion', translations first and foremost enable the shifts in thought and the knowledge transfer necessary for undertaking more direct activist actions.

If, as Rebecca Solnit writes, it is true that "politics [or political action] arises out of the spread of ideas and the shaping of imaginations" ([2004] 2016, p. 26), then the women's translation work might have done exactly that within the activist contexts under study. In fact, what has emerged from distinguishing between three different public spheres is that in many cases, translations were rather the starting point of women's political actions and not the end point or 'peak' of their political engagement. At the *simple level of the public sphere*, translations mostly served as the basis for a first political exchange among women, enriching their imagination and expanding their political consciousness (Section 3.1.). Within the *medium public sphere*, where the various wings of the German-speaking women's movements consolidated their own political standpoints and prepared themselves to influence the dominant political and media landscape, translation work already formed a central element of women's activism (Section 3.2.). Finally, the *complex level of the public sphere* was usually where specific arguments, information or activist tools the women had learned about through translations were put into practice, directly and politically (Section 3.3).

Moreover, what has become evident at all levels of public spheres is that a translation process seldomly ended with the publication of a translated

text, but continued to inspire and inform women's political actions over and over again (i.e. women 'worked' with translated texts and used the arguments and ideas they identified therein for their own political agendas, publications, and direct political actions). Studies on translation and activism, therefore, should not focus so much on the questions of who, what and how a text was being translated, but more on the ways in which translations were – repeatedly – used to create political impact and meaning well beyond that text's publication period. Even when translations were directly declared as politically motivated, their social and political impact cannot be understood by analysing the translated texts alone or the practice of translation in general, but can only become apparent when examining how translation work interacts with the other political activities in which the women were engaged.

Thirdly, the intricate relationship between translation work and political activism became particularly manifest (1) in various translation phenomena that can only be grasped through a broader understanding of the term translation, including a mixture of direct translation and authorship (e.g. Bertha Pappenheim), 'political authorship' based on translation (e.g. Leopoldine Kulka), or translation work in a less explicit and more metaphorical sense (e.g. Emma Adler, Jenny Adler-Herzmark) and (2) where the various public spheres intersected, i.e. in those moments, where women were building upon the knowledge, information, or role models that they had oftentimes learned through translated content so that they could take their political activism a step further (see especially the examples in Section 3.3.).

That it was *always* translations which triggered the most foundational changes in the women's imagination and concrete activist practices would certainly be too great a claim. However, even though explicit connections are not always easy to track retrospectively, this article has, in various ways, illustrated that translation work often played an undeniable role in bringing about those changes.

Finally, what we can mostly learn from these findings to inform and encourage our own activist translation practices today is the certainty that what are usually just regarded as 'symbolic' actions, i.e. "actions carried out with words, images, [or] with communications" (Solnit [2004] 2016, p. 41), have, at various periods in history, proven as powerful as physical acts of resistance and opposition.

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