

LOOKING FOR FEMINIST TRANSLATORS

Texts, Translators and the Creation of a Feminist Genealogy of Theories and Practices

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Abstract – Translation has been a central tool for widening the reception of feminist theories and practices around the world from one historical/social/political context to another. Local feminisms, along with feminist theories and practices originated in one context, have been re-contextualized and reshaped in totally different situations, acquiring new nuances through translations and translators’ choices and agency. My article starts from the premise that it is through translations that feminist ideas born in the United States have been shared, because of a collaborative network among feminists, with Italian collectives, intellectuals and scholars. From these exchanges ‘translated’ feminist practices have arisen within the Italian collectives in the ‘70s and ‘80s. My intention is to offer a diachronic perspective on the translation of feminist texts into the Italian context from the ‘70s to 2020s, focusing on a number of examples of ‘canonical’ feminist theory. This article is a first result of a research on Italian feminist translators’ archives intended to retrace the translators’ names and their role in the transmission of feminist theories and practices in the Italian context. This implies considering translators as active agents of cultural change. Looking at materials preserved in different libraries and archives in Italy, my aim is to delineate a genealogy of feminist translators and to outline a corpus of texts that have been translated from English into Italian and that have had a crucial role in the transmission of feminist ideas and politics. This article presents a preliminary result of analysis.

Keywords: feminist translation; translators’ archives; feminist translators; collaborative translation; feminist activism.

1. Mapping waves of feminist theories and practices

Translation has always been a central tool for expanding the reception of feminist theories and practices worldwide. Local feminisms, feminist theories and practices born in one context have been re-contextualized and reshaped in entirely different settings, acquiring new nuances through translations. It is through translations that feminist ideas born in the US or other Anglophone contexts have been shared and that feminist practices have arisen within the Italian collectives in the ‘70s, ‘80s, ‘90s and 2000s. The aim of this article is to offer a map of the existing feminist archives, to retrace the names of

translators and their role in the transmission of feminist theories and practices starting from the '70s. This involves in-depth research on keystone feminist texts that have been translated from English into Italian and on the publishing houses which have chosen to introduce feminist theories into the Italian context. My research is divided into two phases: the first focused on the mapping of feminist archives, retrieving materials and identifying feminist translators; the second phase involved a detailed analysis of translated keystone texts aimed at underlining feminist translators' activism and the strategies used to make feminist agency visible. This article presents examples of translations of feminist theories since the '70s to the present with the aim of outlining a map of choices, strategies and collaboration among feminist scholars, writers, editors, translators and publishers.

Since translators play a central role in spreading feminist ideas, I believe it is essential to understand the entire process of translation, to see which texts have been translated into Italian, by whom and when, and to investigate translation and editorial choices in order to map out a development of feminist thoughts in the Italian context and the new shapes these theories acquire in feminist practice and agency.

The corpus of this study is made of a selection of feminist texts that have been translated from English into Italian in the '70s, '80s, '90s and 2000s, based on three main aspects: 1) the spreading and reception of the translated book for the transmission of feminist idea; 2) the visibility of the translator and of her/their agency; and 3) the collaboration among various intellectual figures, scholars, translators and publishers, aimed at the publication of the translation.

The research followed a specific step by step process: 1) identification of keystone feminist theoretical texts; 2) identification of publishing houses and date of publication; 3) name of the translator/editor; 4) identification of editing changes in the translated volume and the use of paratextual elements; 5) adaptations and translation strategies that can be recognized as feminist actions.

The identification of translated keystone feminist texts was conducted through an online search in major library and publishers' catalogues. Information about translators and their work was gathered through online research in prominent feminist archives and secondary sources. The primary archives consulted in the Italian context are the following: 1) Biblioteca Nazionale delle donne (The Women's National library) in Bologna; 2) the Milan Women's bookstore Archive; 3) Fondazione Elvira Baldaracco (the Women's Studies Centre in Milan which contains many historical studies on women's liberation movement in Italy); 4) Carla Lonzi Archive in Rome; 5) Archivio Politico delle donne di Via Dogana (the Women's Political Archive via Dogana) in Milan; 5) Feltrinelli Archive in Milan; 6) Fondazione Mondadori in Milan; 7) Fondo Angela Miglietti at the Piemonte Women's

Archive; 8) UDI (Unione Donne Italiane) Digital Library; 9) the historical archive of the feminist journal *Noi Donne* (www.noidonnearchivistorico.org) and 10) the digital archive of the journal *effe*.¹

2. A feminist political agenda through time

A diachronic perspective of feminist ideas and practices between North America and Italy, looking at the translation of feminist texts starting from the 1970s to the 2000s can take various directions. My approach is based on a selection of touchstone texts which in my view make clear how major feminist ideas, theories and practices overlapped national borders and spread in a different cultural, social and political context. As I have underlined elsewhere (Federici 2021, 2023), it is through translations that feminist ideas originating in the US context spread to Italy and that feminist practices emerged within Italian collectives in the 1970s, where the exchange of ideas, practices and an active collaboration were at the core of the political feminist agenda. As a matter of fact, the 1970s were a period of feminist turmoil and ideas scattered around the world through women's political and engaged voices, their collective actions and their battle for civil rights. Luisa Passerini called translations of US radical feminist texts “movement translations” done by feminists, read by feminists and adapted for the Italian reader because Italian feminists “turned foreign texts and events into tools that might speak to their own immediate situation” (Bracke 2014, p.18). It is important to highlight how the role of translators has been considered in the spreading and publication of feminist ideas. If the legacy of American feminism in the Italian context can be retraced looking at the translations of core texts done through the collaborative efforts of translators, scholars and feminist intellectuals, it is important to shed some light on translators themselves and their own work, fundamental for an understanding of feminist practices.

At a first glance it was clear that translators' names were difficult to retrace in archives and Italian feminist collectives focused more on disseminating ideas and practices than on highlighting individual translators. Moreover, the idea itself of collectives was to carry out a collaborative effort not an individual one. However, it was possible to find out translators' names in volumes published in the same decade. In the '80s, while the circulation of texts remained key, translators' names gained little emphasis, but activism

¹Láadan Women's Cultural Centre, https://www.memora.piemonte.it/beni/regpie_cabe/615841 (24.09.2025); UDI Digital Library, <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/> (24.09.2025); *Donne*, www.noidonnearchivistorico.org (01.07.2025); *effe*, <https://efferivistafemminista.it/> (01.07.2025).

and agency were often attributed to intellectuals and scholars editing feminist works. In the '90s it was possible to recognize a slight change in the translation and spreading of feminist ideas, as in many cases journals and publishing houses focused on specific theorists who were thought to be central in the development of feminist theories and practices in various disciplines. In this decade translations were adaptations for the Italian context with major changes in the contents of volumes. The paratextual element became more and more important to make the translators' work visible. Starting from 2000s, collectives and collaborative translations – because of a change in the political and social context and the re-emergence of feminist activism – are back with a clear and active aim.

3. The '70s: A decade of collective translations

In the '70s, women collaborated in their activism, by sharing texts that gave birth to the international spread of feminist movements. In so doing, they interacted across geographical and cultural distances. Collaboration arose from reading texts that led to consciousness-raising experiences, trips between Italy and the US and moments of exchange. In 1972 a seminal collection of texts from English and French was published by the Milanese collective *Anabasi* under the title *Donne è bello* (Women is beautiful), while a second translation by the same collective, *Noi e il nostro corpo*, based on the Boston Women's Health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1969), a text full of testimonies and women's experiences, was published and had a profound echo in the Italian context. The first volume is divided into seven sections which present common topics at the time like, for example, women's psychological oppression, women's work and housework, sexuality, the women's liberation movement, consciousness-raising practices and politics. The texts were written by major American feminist intellectuals such as Shulamith Firestone, Pat Mainardi and Monique Wittig, and the translator of the volume is Serena Luce Castaldi, one of the founders of the collective *Anabasi*. The major contributions in the books are due to Serena Castaldi's trip to New York and the involvement in the Women's Liberation Movement. Castaldi was deeply involved in the American and the French women's movements, and this collaboration brought an awareness about feminist practices and a need to introduce these ideas to the Italian context. Castaldi collected and chose the texts that were to be translated and included in the issue *Donne è bello*. The volume is presented as a space for discussing women's issues where the keywords are collaboration and activism. The focus on activism is evident in the Preface – signed by *Anabasi*, not Castaldi – where the collective presents the publication as a tool to create a new form of solidarity among women. The Preface directly addresses women readers,

inviting them to collaborate with impressions, testimonies, poems, drawings and songs to be included in the publication, which is defined as the “first overground publication by radical feminists rather than about them”. Paratextual elements played a significant role, as the verbal text was strictly correlated to the visual one to enhance clarity. Images, drawings and funny comic strips were added by the members of the *Anabasi* in order to make all the material more ‘Italian’, that is to say, adapted to their own context and goals. This is the reason why the volume also includes Italian feminists’ texts such as excerpts from Italian feminists such as Carla Lonzi and her famous text *Sputiamo su Hegel* (1970), translated in English as *Let’s Spit on Hegel*. Feminist groups prioritized the translation of ideas and practices through translation, the primary aim was to disseminate theories and practice, adapting the source texts to the target audience, reshaping the contents for the new readers. These translations were carriers of ideas and practices for an Italian feminist activism and part of this activism was the collective work and ‘signature’. If the translator was certainly an agent of change, it was translation itself that was the key to agency.

The connection with the US was in the words of Luisa Passerini “the first founding relationship of Italian feminism” (Passerini 2005, p. 184) and the translation of the Boston Women’s Health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1969) into Italian *Noi e il nostro corpo* is another example of the strong bond between Italian and American radical feminism. The volume presents the name of a translator, Angela Miglietti, who was part of the CR Revolutionary Communications Collective in Turin (Collettivo Cr). Tommaso Reborà (2021) has underlined the strong link between the collective and American radical feminist groups. Connected to the Left-wing Party, they organized visits to the US and to the United Kingdom with the idea of creating “transnational networks” (Reborà 2021). In September 1970, the women from Collettivo Cr began translating articles and reflections by the American feminist movement, gathered by Maria Teresa Fenoglio (better known as M.T.) during her stay in Boston. This collective had a subgroup the Collettivo delle compagne (Women’s Left-Wing Collective) fighting for a more democratic balance in the collective among men and women. Their goal was to translate major ideas from the Women’s Lib movement in Boston and spread them in a historical period where ‘consultori autogestiti’ (self-run feminist clinics) were born in the Italian context. Miglietti asked for help to a group of feminist doctors who could help her in her translation of medical issues and appear in the Italian edition as editors with her. As she said in an interview with Stefania Voli (2007), the pamphlet (so she defines the Boston volume) was brought to Turin by Maria Teresa Fenoglio, who thought Angela knew English and could translate it. When the volume was published by Simon & Schuster in the US, the American feminists wanted Angela

Miglietti to be the Italian translator. The book was published by the major publisher Feltrinelli, that in the 1970s was at the forefront for revolutionary ideas and keen on publishing texts about feminism (Piazzoni 2021). The Italian translation, like translations of the volume into other languages (Federici 2023), is a revision and reshaping of the original text. The volume has been revised and adapted to the Italian context with the agreement of the American authors, who understood the importance of an adaptation outside the US. The result is a selection and adaptation of texts tailored for Italian women through a re-arrangement of chapters, a different ordering of topics, and the omission or addition of some sections, demonstrating a strong and collaborative approach to translation. This publication highlights the importance of translation for the spreading of feminist ideas together with an awareness of a growing transnational feminist network based on egalitarian principles.

The result of a precise conjunction between radical American feminism and Italian feminism connected to the Communist Party was the publication of *Per un movimento politico di liberazione della donna* (For a political movement about women's liberation), edited and introduced by Lidia Menapace, a major figure in the Italian context of the '70s. The volume includes 19 essays by American, British, French, Chinese and Cuban authors and a dialogue between Menapace and other feminists of the Demau group (the acronym stands for Demistificazione Autoritarsimo and was against patriarchal values) on women's rights that was originally published by the Italian Left newspaper *Il Manifesto* in 1971. The editor collected various documents and essays that were already familiar within the feminist circles of those years, shaping the volume as a touchstone publication on feminism and capitalism and illustrating the political connection between feminists around the world. The volume reported the authors' names, but not the translators' names; the material was translated by feminist collectives which firstly could better understand the contents, and secondly, could disseminate feminist ideas as part of their political agenda.

Collaboration between American, British and Italian feminists was evident in the issues of the journal *Sottosopra*, published between 1973 and 1976 in Milan with the idea of reaching as many Italian collectives as possible and to share ideas from feminist groups outside Italy. The first issue released in 1973 included translations of documents from the Notting Hill Women's Liberation Workshop and at the National Women's conference in Manchester in 1972 (March 25-26). The issue was primarily dedicated to the issue of women, work and the role of Trade Unions in the advancement of the feminist cause. Translators' names were omitted since collective action was the priority, and translation was seen as part of the feminist struggle for rights. It is not a chance that the same number also includes and extract from the translation of Juliet Mitchell's *La condizione della donna* (*Woman's*

Estate) published in 1972 by Feltrinelli.

The '70s saw a bloom in feminist journals, some of which have been digitalized and are accessible, for example, the first numbers of *effe*, a magazine published between 1976 and 1983 which shared its premises with the feminist “Teatro della Maddalena”, in Rome, and dealt at large with women’s cultural production, including the performing arts — from theatre to dance, from happenings to community art. The magazine introduced women’s liberation issues achieved elsewhere, creating an echo of international women’s rights. The theatre also operated as feminist publishing house with the name Edizioni delle donne (Women’s editions) between 1974 and 1982. The name referred to the French *Éditions des femmes* and the aim was to publish as part of a feminist practice and action. Among their publications, the first translation of Monique Wittig’s *Il corpo lesbico* (*The Lesbian body*) with an Introduction by Elisabetta Rasy (the volume has recently been re-translated and edited by Deborah Ardilli by the feminist publishing house VandA Edizioni 2023). These the years saw the birth of feminist publishing houses, in Italy La Salamandra (publishing from 1974 to 1987) defined itself as a publisher offering “libri scritti da donne per le donne” (books written by women for women) and the most famous feminist publisher, La Tartaruga (1975-1998), whose editorial director Laura Lepetit introduced many international feminist writers to the Italian publishing market.

During the '70s major publishers also released feminist texts sometimes with a very short distance from the publication of the original text. However, in most of the cases these texts were thought for a wider audience of readers and were not translated through a feminist lens. For example, one of the most well-known text, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was translated into Italian and published by Edizioni di comunità in 1964, just one year after its publication. The translator was Loretta Valtz Mannucci, Professor of American history at the University of Milan, married to the sociologist Cesare Mannucci. The publishing house funded by Adriano Olivetti in 1946 was an innovative enterprise willing to present to Italian readers contemporary criticism about sociology, psychology and American culture. As Scarpino (2024) points out, the reception of text was not particularly positive in Italy, likely because it was ahead of its time in that context. It is no coincidence that the book has been retranslated and republished in 2021 by Castelvechi, showing a recent wave within Italian feminism of a rebirth and rediscovery of keystone texts of feminism which are re-translated and re-presented to the Italian reader. The new edition has been edited by Chiara Turozzi, affiliated to the Diotima group and connected to Adriana Cavarero and the Italian politics of sexual difference. Why is there this necessity to rediscover a text from the mid-60s at the beginning of this

decade? Reading Friedan's work is a way to rediscover the roots of American feminism, and its political and social context, but which is its role today in our context? Is it still important to talk about a feminine mystique? In the US *The Feminine Mystique* is regularly listed among the most influential non-fiction books of the 20th century. Notwithstanding Friedan's controversial figure, the book is part of a feminist legacy worldwide because it encouraged readers to think about women's role and expectations (Horowitz 1996). Sixty years is a long-time span, in these decades the Italian context has changed, and women's role has changed but the question at the core of the book, that is 'what makes a woman accomplished?' is still to be answered, even if from another perspective. The ethics of care still is at the centre of a woman's life. Chiara Turozzi's decision to revive the interest in Friedan's book aligns with her activism in editorial contexts: she has served as editor in chief of a feminist publishing house L'Iguana editrice, and part of the feminist journal *DWF*.

In the '70s, not surprisingly, many voices of radical American feminism were translated into Italian, for example, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, published in 1971 with the equivalent title in Italian *La politica del sesso* by a major publisher, Rizzoli. The translator was Bruno Oddera, a major figure within the Italian editorial context who has translated many American novels. In this case the presence of the translator's name was certainly due to his status as a well-known professional figure. Another keystone volume, Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) was translated into Italian with the title *Nato di donna* in 1979 by Garzanti. Recently, it has been republished by Mondadori with the translation by Maria Teresa Marengo and a Preface by Nadia Terranova. In this Preface, Terranova underlines the importance of this book for herself and, generally, for all women. According to Terranova, the book is an illuminating book about motherhood. In her words this book talks to women, mothers and daughters across different generations. The paratext is part of the politics of feminist translation, the addition of paratextual elements, such as editorials, prefaces and footnotes, in order to explain the text to its new readership is central for informing the reader that the text is a useful instrument in facilitating the exchange across frontiers, cultures and generations. As in the collectives' publications where Italian feminist groups translated and published materials from abroad inserting paratextual elements to introduce these ideas to Italian readers adapting them for the new context, the recent re-publication of key feminist texts is probably done with the idea that some texts are still key readings for the present and that, in most cases, they were completely forgotten by the Italian editorial market. The paratext is still a central tool to introduce and explain the text in a different context and to a younger generation of readers.

Collaboration was a key factor in the 1970s because women's

liberation movements depended on women coming together to negotiate, share experiences and read texts from other women. Women collaborated in their activism, sharing texts that gave birth to the international spread of feminist movements; they interacted across geographical and cultural distances, seeds of feminisms were grown in other fields giving birth to different feminisms around the world, adapting feminism and activism to the soil where they were brought.

4. Collaborative decades: The '80s and '90s

In the 1980s and 1990s, the collaboration between feminist authors, publishers, editors and translators became evident. As I have underlined elsewhere (Federici 2021), publishers and editors tailored texts for the Italian reader, adapting content and incorporating paratextual elements such as Introduction and prefaces. Texts were published as result of a collaborative effort of feminist scholars, activists, translators and publishing houses. It is clear when we look at the Italian translations that texts of North American thinkers were not translated in their wholeness, but publishers or editors make a choice for the Italian reader. A selection of materials was done from different writings and publications. One example of a partially translated book is, for example, bell hooks's choice of essays in *Elogio del margine. Razza, sesso e mercato culturale* (1998), a volume edited by Maria Nadotti with a choice of chapters taken from different books by the author. In her Introduction, Nadotti affirms that this selection wants to offer the author's theories and thought in a wider perspective for the Italian reader. Nadotti points out that the choice was made to make the Italian reader understand the "sostanzioso apparato teorico" (sophisticated theoretical apparatus – Nadotti 1998, p. 10). Nadotti does not discuss her work as a translator, nor she underlines the importance of translation for a transmission of feminist ideas. However, the translation of these essays will open in the following a wider debate within the Italian academic and feminist panorama. In the same year, 1998, La Tartaruga publishing house published another volume focused on bell hooks, *Scrivere al buio* (Writing in the dark), that was a dialogue between bell hooks and Maria Nadotti addressing gender and racial issues. This work serves as a political manifesto, a framework through which we can understand our world and deconstruct it through a feminist, anti-racist and decolonial perspective, what today is recognized as intersectional feminism. The dialogue between two different women of distinct backgrounds thoughtfully explores themes of gender, sexuality, race, class and identity. Recently, Tamu publishing house re-published these two works as a single volume. However, in the Preface to the new edition Nadotti makes clear that there has been a choice about the essays translated for this volume. The new

volume has been re-adapted to the present, some of the essays which dealt with judicial cases of the '80s and '90s have not been included. The choice is probably due to the fact that times have changed, and that the editor thought the book would be important to read and be known for other reasons, mainly hooks's theories about race, feminism and the difficult dialogue with other feminists. As a translator, Nadotti highlights some changes done in the text to make it more readable and fluent for the Italian reader.

Another example of collaboration between feminist authors, publishers, editors and translators is the Italian publication of the iconic *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) by Donna Haraway, which was presented to the Italian reader in 1995 with the title *Manifesto Cyborg. Donne, tecnologie e biopolitiche del corpo* by a major publisher, Feltrinelli. As I have emphasized elsewhere (Federici 2021), the volume, translated by the Italian feminist scholar Liana Borghi, included a very long paratextual element, an Introduction by the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti who, in her preface to the text not only clarified Haraway's central position in the feminist context of the US but also demonstrated the influence of Haraway's works on American culture and society. The Introduction covers many themes: Braidotti analyses the powerful figuration of the cyborg created by Haraway and how not only it became an icon for a new planetary feminism, but it brought a new perspective into the international debate on women, feminism, science, and technology. In the Italian Introduction, the text is connected both to the North American technophile–technophobe debate of feminist women scientists like Evelyne Fox Keller and to the Italian context and the debate among women of science like Elisabetta Donini. The importance of the Italian translation is thus explained through the connection with the wider international debate on women, science, and technological developments and it is perceived by Italian readers as an important instrument to better understand this controversy through a planetary perspective. Braidotti highlights Haraway's key role in the cyberfeminist wave and provides interpretative guidance for readers. The Italian translation clarifies the content of the volume thanks to its subtitle “women, technologies and body biopolitics”. The translator, Liana Borghi, was a well-known feminist Italian figure and she translated many feminist texts introducing them to the Italian reader. Borghi shared the idea of collaboration among feminist thinkers and dedicated her life to the dissemination of feminist ideas in Italy. However, in this volume Borghi's voice is silent, there is no discussion of her translation of Haraway's work. The Introduction of the American scholar is totally in Braidotti's hands and her Introduction. However, her involvement is more direct in the second volume she edited, *Testimone-Modesta@FemaleMan-incontra-OncoTopo:femminismo e tecnoscienza*, published by Feltrinelli in 2000 where Borghi writes the Introduction to the volume and to Haraway's feminism. The translation done

by Maurizio Morganti is revised by Borghi herself, which reveals she acknowledged the importance of translation as a means to introduce the volume to the Italian reader. However, one year before, something changed in the Italian translation of Haraway's *Chthulucene. Sopravvivere su un pianeta infetto* published by Nero in 2019. The translators are Claudia Durastanti and Clara Ciccioni, and a translator's note is inserted at the beginning of the volume. The translators underline how a reflection on words has been important in the translation process, and how they were aware that any choice could make a difference in the reception of the text. Durastanti highlights the responsibility of the translator to maintain the author's aims. She talks about "response-ability" ("responso-abilità") (Haraway 2019, p. 4), and she outlines how Haraway's neologisms have been translated trying to maintain the same meaning and wordplay (like for example, "thinking-with" translated as "compensare") following Haraway's "linguistic corridors". One of the main points of the Preface is the connection between Haraway's theory and the Italian debate on inclusive language and the choices translators must make in the translation of the text towards a gender marked language like Italian. Durastanti is an Italian American writer and has been editor for La Tartaruga series since 2021, and a translator deeply aware of her role and choices in disseminating feminist ideas. Haraway was a focal point of the Italian publishing market in 2019 when Angela Balzano edited another of her volumes, *Le promesse dei mostri. Una politica rigeneratrice per l'alterità inappropriata* for the publisher Derive Approdi. Haraway's text, *The Promises of Monsters a Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* originally published in 1992, almost thirty years earlier than the Italian publication, analyses hybrid subjectivities through technological progress remaining even now a thoughtful reading for the present. The Introduction to the text is academic but at the same time didactic, almost personal. Balzano, who is a translator and a researcher, tells us that as a translator she "got lost looking for science fiction novels" which could help her understand Haraway's theory. She informs the reader that: "E se in me c'era qualcosa di simile a un intento didattico è scomparso a traduzione ultimata. Non c'è bisogno che introduca questo saggio, voi saprete usarlo" (and if there is something in me similar to a pedagogical intent it has vanished once I completed the translation. There is no need to introduce this essay, you will know how to use it – my translation). Balzano thus asks the reader to collaborate in the meaning of the text, and in its interpretation, she plays with words like "translate" and "betray" going back to the old debate about translation as "betrayal" and directly challenging the readers affirming that a translation is always "a falso d'autore" ("an art forgery fake").

The translation of feminist critical texts in the '80s and '90s was the result of collaboration among scholars, editors, translators and publishing

houses who regarded the moment as suitably timed for introducing feminist theories to the Italian reader. It is thanks to this collaboration that today we know that feminism is a method, a movement, and a critique. Today it has become transnational, open to multiple women's voices, thanks to the work of editors and translators who have ensured the exchange of ideas and have enabled feminist theories to travel from one place to another and another and another.

5. A new collective activism in the new millenium

In the last ten years a new wave of feminist theories and practices has been rising in Italy and worldwide. An international dialogue is taking place around different feminist issues, among which is translation as an instrument for the transmission of theories and practices. Translations have enabled a dialogue among different women from various social/cultural contexts and it has been conceived as a form of feminist agency and activism. Italian translations of texts from different languages and contexts have made it clear that feminisms are many and different but also that reading voices from other contexts can help to rethink theories and practices, it can help to widen our horizon and to adapt theories and practices to our own activism. The same theories and practices take a different shape according to the new place where they are transplanted through translation. Since the '70s translations have made it possible to envisage new spaces of fruitful debates among feminists. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Federici 2021), translated texts across the Atlantic Ocean have certainly deepened and widened the debate on feminist thoughts and practices in the Italian context because translation has always been a primary instrument of international dialogues and exchanges of feminist theories and practices among the Atlantic shores.

As Jhumpa Lahiri says, “translation is an act of radical change” (Lahiri 2023); it is a political act, as Laura Fontanella tells us in her recently published volume *Perdere il filo. Esperienze collettive di traduzione transfemminista* (2024). In the last ten years, Fontanella has coordinated the ‘Gender in Translation lab’, dealing with gender issues in translation with a focus on intersectional feminism and collaborating with different associations and women's bookstores. She defines herself as a transfeminist translator and has emphasized in interviews the importance of exchange and collaboration among women (Giaume 2024). The title of her volume reveals that translation is for her a process of ‘losing the thread’ where translation itself becomes a collective experience of transfeminism. In her Introduction to the volume, which is the result of many collective experiences of translation done in her lab, Fontanella plays with words and with metaphors connected to ‘losing a thread of an argument’, of a conversation, and deconstructs the

negative connotation of losing a track; instead, to lose track becomes an active way of reacting to a text, of engaging with it. Fontanella refers to bell hooks' theory and specifically to the idea of losing oneself in a text to find a plurality of voices and gazes. The act of feminist translation becomes for her a collective and political process; she acknowledges the influence of theorists and writers she has read, and of translators with whom she has discussed in her lab. She presents herself as a feminist translator highly aware of feminist theories and practices which she acknowledges in the paratext of the text. From this perspective, translation becomes an act not only of discovering an author but also to discover ourselves as translators, an act of self-discovery in dialogue with others.

Compared to the previous decades, now the translator's presence and agency is declared and well defined. In her study about Onna Pas Collective, Michela Baldo (Baldo 2023) has outlined how transfeminist translation is now an affective practice that brings about joyful and playful encounters, a performative act capable of producing other translations, performances, objects, collectivities and alliances among women. The collective was born in 2019 after a series of workshops centred on the reading and translation of Wittig's and Zeig's work *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (1975). The volume was published with the title *Appunti per un dizionario delle amanti* by Meltemi in 2020, with a Preface by Anne F. Garreta where she underlines the importance of re-reading today this controversial form of dictionary. This reading takes the reader back in time to rethink the use of words in our society in the mid-70s which is still a useful practice today. The authors illustrate how dictionaries can function as containers regarding something that cannot be contained, resulting in the power of language and the inevitable change through time in how words are used. Wittig and Zeig deconstruct the idea of norms, of 'boxes' where everything is classified; they force us to rethink our use of language and our thoughts about the world we live in. Language is still sexist and patriarchal, it is still non inclusive – at least in the Italian context, where media reflect a controversial attitude towards the use of a more inclusive terms –, therefore the translation of this text after fifty years is still useful for us. The collective has signed the translation, and the name they have chosen for themselves which comes from the French expression 'on n'a pas' (we don't own anything – my translation) reveals a lot about their politics of translation.

The emergence of feminist translation collectives is visible in the Italian context. An interesting example is the WiT (Women in Translation) collective made of seven translators born in Bologna in 2014. They translated Audre Lorde's poetry, *D'amore e di lotta*, for the publisher Le Lettere in 2018. The WiT (Women in Translation) collective started working together in 2014, stemming from the desire of the translators (of different

geographical origins and professional experiences), to translate into Italian, for the first time, Audre Lorde's poetry. Audre Lorde was a poet, writer, feminist, and activist for civil rights. After the publication of Lorde's essays in Italy, the collective felt that there was a need to introduce to the Italian context also Lorde's poems (Coppola *et al.* 2018). One of the translators, Loredana Magazzeni, in her Introduction to the volume, explains that establishing a unique experience in Italy, the women of the collective share a deep passion for Audre Lorde's words, for linguistics and cultures as well as for a methodological accuracy in the process of cooperative translation (Magazzeni 2018). Another member of the collective, Anna Zani (Zani 2018), affirms that they shared a methodological rigorous approach in the process of cooperative translation and that the underlying idea was inspired by Audre Lorde's writings and actions. Zani has stressed the power of women's collective creative energy. She explains how the collective works: each translator chooses and translates some poems that will be discussed by the group, a discussion which is part of the translation work, not anymore a solitary enterprise but a collective and engaging one. Zani refers to Angela Davis's model of 'diffused leadership', underlining there is not a coordinator or an editor of the collection, but the result has been made out of collective decisions.

The last example that I want to highlight in the Italian context is one that I believe opens up perspectives on non-Western feminism, is the publication of Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), translated into Italian by Marta D'Epifanio, Bea Gusmano, Serena Naim, and Roberta Granelli with the revision of Liana Borghi and Marco Pustianaz in 2021, with the title *Vivere una vita femminista*. The text is entirely translated in the feminine, – a non-common choice in the Italian publishing market – because, as the translators affirm in the Translators' note, language is a performative tool that can shape reality, and therefore to translate in the feminine can make readers think about language use. The voice of the translators is clearly visible in this volume, not only their names. In the translators' note they explain their willingness to introduce Ahmed's work into the Italian context because they believe it is a central feminist text in the global panorama, and with the willingness to decolonialize feminist practices. They underline the importance of translation as a means to give the work a new life in another social and cultural context, and they emphasize working collaboratively as translators, intellectuals and scholars united by a political objective. The translators' note also makes clear that they are aware of feminist theories about translation and collaboration, as well as that of the practice of translation, which is a process that forces us to weigh any single word, to evaluate some passages, to have doubts and to opt for strategies that allow us to recognize limits and contradictions we have as translators working in a specific context.

6. Conclusion

The collaborative work has always been part of the feminist practice. To translate key feminist texts into Italian has always been a way to introduce and share ideas, values and feminist agency from other contexts to the Italian one. Since the '70s, the idea of collaborative translation has changed and has developed into different forms, from the '70s collectives' willingness to share and adapt American and French feminist practices to the Italian context, to the '80s and '90s when the growth of feminist publications in Italy was visible and when foreign texts were adapted and explained to the Italian readers through paratextual elements (mainly Introductions and Prefaces), arriving at the re-emergence in the new millennium of translation collectives. The awareness of the centrality of the translators' work as the way to introduce theories, practice and feminist agency into a different social and cultural context has always been raised. Since the 2000s, the voice of translators has become increasingly visible, and texts include paratextual elements where translators explain their own work and connect the practice of translation to feminist theories and agency.

The idea of translation as life experience and the value of collaboration has been growing in the last decades, and I am referring to one project as an example of this change. The project "Ideas destroying muros" is a collective of artists, writers and translators for whom translation is part of a project to disseminate feminist and lesbian books.² Translation is part of the project together with feminist research, performance, video creation, writing and drawing. The collective, created in 2005, defines itself as a trans-cultural artistic group and underlines that "our artistic practice has made possible the analysis, via the interpretation and translation of our individual and collective life experiences, of the geopolitical and social processes that we have lived through".

This first stage of my research has demonstrated that a mapping of translated texts, translations and translators make us understand how feminist ideas cross borders, cultures and languages and how collaboration has always been a key factor for feminists. Considerable work remains to be done in mapping translators and their role in feminist movements, however preliminary research has revealed that they have been and remain crucial agents of feminist activism.

² Ideas destroying muros, <https://www.ideadestroyingmuros.info/bio/chi-siamo/> (02.07.2025)

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