

Importing Languages, Circulating Ideas. Political Dimensions of Foreign-Language Bookselling in Berlin

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The city of Berlin boasts a great number and diversity of bookstores specializing in languages other than German. These booksellers carry texts across borders despite additional costs and logistical constraints and thus contribute to the cultural diversity of the city. What motivates them to go to great lengths to make books in their various languages available? Why do some booksellers even publish books in Berlin, far removed from where their languages are mainly read? While many define their activity primarily through their linguistic or regional focus, their presence is by no means apolitical. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Berlin booksellers and site visits conducted in 2024, this talk proposes an exploration of the political dimensions of foreign-language bookselling in Berlin. It will also investigate how their degree of politicization can change following global geopolitical events and the local repercussions thereof, and how these changes interact with a store's language policies.

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