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RESEARCH PAPER

The Politics of Translating Bangladeshi Literature into English: Cultural Representation, Ideological Mediation, and Power

Dr. Mohammad Riaz Mahmud

Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6820-6877

Corresponding Author: riazm1972ell@iiuc.ac.bd

ABSTRACT

This article explores how Bangla literature reaches English readers—which routes, by whom, with what representational effects—in translations published 1967–2024. Bangladeshi literature is mostly accessed globally in English. Yet the paths and politics of that dissemination remain unstudied. A mixed-method design combines descriptive translation studies, translation sociology and postcolonial critique. The population comprises English-translated Bangladeshi literature. The sample is a verified corpus of 39 books. Titles and publishers' descriptions are mapped quantitatively. Ten epitexts and four case studies are analysed qualitatively. The field is triangulated: a Dhaka national-patronage pole produces translations but cannot distribute widely; a semi-peripheral Indian relay links Dhaka to global markets; a metropolitan centre consecrates selectively. Each pole frames Bangladesh differently. Translations resist in sentences yet be domesticated by paratexts. The article proposes semi-peripheral relay and mediated legibility as concepts. Core–periphery and postcolonial translation theory should account for regional intermediaries within one target language.

KEYWORDS Bangladeshi Literature, Literary Translation, Postcolonial Translation Studies, Sociology of Translation, Paratext, World Literature, South Asian Publishing

Introduction

In 1967 the London house of Chatto&Windus published a novel called *Tree Without Roots*. Its Bangla original, Syed Waliullah's *Lalsalu* (1948), takes its name from the strip of red cloth that an itinerant opportunist drapes over a nameless grave, turning it into a saint's shrine and himself into its custodian. The English title moves the reader away from that object and towards a metaphor of displacement that requires no acquaintance with rural Bengali Islam. The change is small, yet it is exemplary. It shows, in a single paratextual decision, how a literature written in a language few Anglophone readers can read reaches them only after someone has decided what in it should stay visible.

This article treats such decisions as political. Bangladesh is unusual among postcolonial states in that its national story begins with a language. The Language Movement of 1952, in which students in Dhaka were shot while demanding recognition for Bangla against the Pakistani state's Urdu-only policy, became a founding narrative of the 1971 war of independence (Uddin, 2006; van Schendel, 2020). Yet the literature written in that language circulates internationally, when it circulates at all, through English, the language of the former colonial power and of the contemporary global book market. A national literature defined by its defence of the mother tongue becomes visible abroad largely to the degree that it is carried out of that tongue. I call this tension the *language–nation paradox*. It gives translation from Bangla into English a political charge that the familiar accounts of postcolonial translation do not fully capture.

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Those accounts are substantial. Translation studies has shown that translation is a form of rewriting governed by patronage, ideology, and poetics (Lefevere, 1992/2016); that fluent, domesticating translation into English effaces the translator and assimilates foreign texts to Anglo-American values (Venuti, 2018); and that colonial translation helped fix the colonised as an object of knowledge (Niranjana, 1992). Spivak (1993) warned that translating women's writing from the global South into English can produce a homogenised idiom in which very different literatures begin to sound alike. Sociologists of translation have demonstrated that book translation is organised as a core–periphery system in which English is hypercentral and translation into English comparatively rare (Heilbron, 1999; Heilbron&Sapiro, 2007; Sapiro, 2010). Consecration in metropolitan centres then converts peripheral texts into world literature on terms those centres set (Casanova, 2004). Postcolonial critics have added that the global market commodifies cultural difference as a saleable exoticism (Brouillette, 2007; Huggan, 2001). In South Asia, these arguments have been tested mostly on India, through studies of the cultural politics of English translation and of the uneasy relation between translated and Anglophone Indian writing (Kothari, 2003/2014; Mukherjee, 2000; Trivedi, 2007).

Bangladesh is in a precarious position in this picture. Its literature plays a peripheral role in the world network of translation, but its path from periphery to centre is not a linear one. Many Bangladeshi titles are published in English by Indian publishers and/or translated by Indian translators, or by Dhaka imprints whose distribution rarely extends beyond South Asia, and Bangladeshi writing tends to be subsumed under a "Bengali" category whose canon has long been based in Kolkata. Bangladeshi texts, on the other hand, have been noticed most by the metropole at times of controversy, for their testimony on religion, violence, or the status of women. There is commentary on these translations, but it is largely author-specific, appreciative, or written by translators reflecting on their own practice. The institutional routes, representational frames and ideological framings of Bangladeshi literature in English translation have not yet been analysed as a field.

Correspondingly, the study sets out to map a documented corpus of book-length English translations of Bangladeshi literature; to analyse how that corpus is framed in its peritexts and epitexts; to examine, through selected cases, the cultural and ideological work that translation performs; and to propose a conceptual model suited to literatures that reach the centre through a regional relay. The central argument is that Bangladeshi literature in English is produced within a *triangulated field*, structured by a national-patronage pole in Dhaka, a regional relay in Delhi and Kolkata, and a consecrating centre in London and New York. What a translation makes of Bangladesh depends less on any individual translator's ingenuity than on which of these poles it is oriented towards. The contribution is empirical, in offering a first systematic mapping of the field, and theoretical, in developing the concepts of *semi-peripheral relay* and *mediated legibility*.

Literature Review

Translation, empire, and the postcolonial turn

Scholarship on translation and colonialism has moved from treating translation as an instrument of domination to treating it as a contested practice through which formerly colonised cultures negotiate their place in a global order. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) argued that the hierarchy between original and translation had mirrored the hierarchy between Europe and its colonies, and that postcolonial writers were now appropriating translation for their own purposes. Robinson (1997/2014) mapped the field's positions, from translation as a tool of empire to translation as a channel of resistance, while Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002) placed power at the centre of translation studies. Bandia (2008/2014) read Europhone African writing as itself a form of translation, one that carries oral and vernacular modes into colonial languages. Behind these arguments lies the older dispute between writing back in the colonial language (Ashcroft et al., 2002) and refusing it

altogether (NgũgĩwaThiong'o, 1986). This literature supplies the political frame of the present study. Its case studies, however, concern colonial-era translation, Europhone writing, or the literatures of Ireland, Africa, and India. Translation out of a modern Asian national literature after independence has received far less sustained attention.

The sociology of translation and world literature

A second line of research turned from texts to agents and institutions. Drawing on Bourdieu (1993), Simeoni (1998), Inghilleri (2005), and Wolf (2007) analysed the translator's habitus and the fields in which translation takes place, while Buzelin (2005) proposed network approaches attentive to the concrete chains of actors who produce a translated book. Studies of translation flows confirmed the dominance of English and the marginality of most other languages (Heilbron, 1999; Sapiro, 2010), and Sapiro (2016) has examined the mechanisms, among them intermediaries, subsidies, and prizes, that enable or block a work's crossing of borders. A parallel debate has taken place in literary studies with the revival of world literature. For Damrosch (2003), world literature is writing that circulates beyond its culture of origin and gains in translation. Casanova (2004) has described inequality in the world of letters, and the treatment of linguistic difference has been questioned by Apter (2013), Mufti (2016) and Ganguly (2016). The structural vocabulary used below derives from these studies, but they share a blind spot. They draw their maps at the scale of national languages and global capitals, and seldom feature the intermediate institutions where much South Asian writing circulates.

English translation in South Asia

The most directly relevant work comes from South Asia, and almost all of it concerns India. Sengupta (1990) demonstrated how Rabindranath Tagore's English self-translations conformed to an Edwardian image of the Eastern mystic, and in doing so she anticipated many of the later negotiations between Bengali writing and English expectations. Kothari (2003/2014) studied English translation in India, which, she argues, is shaped by class, by an urban English-reading public, and by publishers' pursuit of an 'Indian literature' for national and international markets. In the context of writing in English, Mukherjee (2000) traced the pressures that push Indian writing in English to appear more "Indian", and Trivedi (2007) has pointed out that the focus of postcolonial theory on "cultural translation" has shifted the spotlight away from translation between real languages. Orsini (2015) has demonstrated how multilingual literary cultures are flattened when they are viewed from the perspective of English. These arguments are essential here, but their geography is revealing. In this scholarship, “Bengali” literature generally refers to the literature of Kolkata, and the distinct literary history of East Bengal after 1947 is seldom explored in its own right.

Bangladeshi literature, language and English

Scholarship on the Bangladeshi context is very rich, but there is little on translation. The role of language in the construction of Bengali Muslim identity, and of the Bangladeshi nation, has been traced by historians (R. Ahmed, 1981; Murshid, 1995; Uddin, 2006; van Schendel, 2020). The way English is used in Bangladesh as a class marker and as capital has been demonstrated by sociolinguists (Hamid & Jahan, 2015; Jahan & Hamid, 2019). Feminist scholarship on 1971 has examined how wartime sexual violence was remembered, silenced, and nationalised through the figure of the *birangona*, the "war heroine" (D'Costa, 2011; Mookherjee, 2015; Saikia, 2011). In literary studies, Quayum and Hasan (2018, 2024) have consolidated the study of Bangladeshi writing in English. Translation appears in their work as one of the routes by which that writing emerged, but it is not itself analysed.

Translation-focused scholarship is sparse. Studies in Bangladeshi journals have compared English versions of individual poems in terms of equivalence, as in Huda's (2018)

reading of translations of KaziNazrul Islam's "Bidrohi," or have offered thematic readings of translated texts. Kamal and Sarker (2020) come closest to a political reading when they show that Waliullah's English version of *Lalsalu* omits episodes that carried the novel's social critique. N. Zaman (2025) examines translation from the mother tongue into English as a structurally unequal act, while K. A. Ahmed (2009) reflects on why Bangladeshi vernacular writing is absent from the global reading circuit. The controversy over TaslimaNasrin has been examined as a political and feminist event (Riaz, 1995; H. Zaman, 1999), but the English translations of her work and their packaging have not. The most comprehensive account of translation policy, publishing and strategy is to be found outside academic journals, in newspaper essays and interviews with translators.

The gap is therefore threefold. Empirically, no study has mapped the paths through which Bangladeshi literature reaches English or the agents who control them. At the analytical level, the representational and ideological work of these translations, as it is manifested in titles, publishers' descriptions and the translators' declared strategies, has not yet been studied across a corpus. Theoretically, the Bangladeshi case has not been used to examine core–periphery models of translation or the assumptions of postcolonial translation theory. The present article addresses all three.

Theoretical framework

The overall framework integrates three theories which are typically applied to separate issues. Rewriting theory explains what happens to a text in translation; the sociology of translation explains which texts move, and through whom; and postcolonial critique asks what the texts that do move represent, or are made to represent. Paratext theory provides the methodological bridge, as all three operations are visible in the paratexts.

Translation as rewriting

Lefevere (1992/2016) sees translation as the most visible form of rewriting; that is, the process whereby texts are rewritten to fit the ideology and poetics of the receiving culture. Rewriting is subject to a dual control: first, outside control, exercised by patrons, whose patronage has ideological, economic and status components; and second, inside control, exercised by professionals such as editors, critics and translators. Lefevere distinguishes between undifferentiated patronage, where these components are combined in one agent (e.g., a state), and differentiated patronage, where they are spread across a market. The difference is significant because Bangladeshi literature is made available to English readers in two ways: through state-connected cultural institutions in Dhaka and through commercial publishers in India and the West.

Venuti's (2018) contrast between domesticating and foreignising translation provides the terminology for describing translation strategy. The dominant mode in English, he argues, is fluent, transparent translation, which renders the translator invisible and brings foreign texts into line with receiving-culture values, while foreignising translation registers linguistic and cultural difference. The opposition was formulated for an Anglo-American receiving culture and has been questioned on that basis. As Tymoczko (2000) contends, the political value of a strategy depends on its context: foreignising, like other strategies, can exoticise or resist. The warning is applicable to Bangladesh. A glossary of untranslated Islamic terms can serve to hold the texture of Bengali Muslim life in place, or it can make that life seem foreign; maintaining dialect can respect the poetics of a writer, or it can reduce that life to local colour.

Spivak (1993) raises the ethical stakes further. She asks the translator to surrender to the specificity of the source, to know it well enough to tell resistant from conformist writing, and to resist an English that renders everything uniformly readable. Niranjana

(1992) grounds such concerns historically, tracing colonial translation as one of the technologies through which the colonised were represented and contained. Neither offers a technique. Both point to the stance on representation, explicit or implicit, that is taken in any translation from a formerly colonised language into English.

Translation flows: core, periphery and relay

Heilbron (1999) models book translation as a world system in which languages occupy hypercentral, central, semi-peripheral or peripheral positions relative to one another, depending on their share of translations as source languages. English is hypercentral, and Bangla is peripheral despite its very large number of speakers. Translations generally flow from centre to periphery, and translation into the centre is scarce, selective and highly mediated. Heilbron and Sapiro (2007) further point out that these flows are determined by the political and economic relations between countries, as well as by the strategies of intermediaries such as publishers, agents, editors and translators. Casanova (2004) illustrates how writers from dominated languages are transformed into recognised world authors through consecration in literary capitals, in which translation into a central language is the key factor. Sapiro (2010) demonstrates that translations from peripheral languages are concentrated at the small-scale, prestige-driven end of publishing, and rely on subsidies, small presses and specialist translators.

The models are very useful but incomplete in the South Asian context. They envisage translation as an exchange between a peripheral and a central language. Bangladeshi literature is translated from Bangla into English, but it is usually published in India, edited by Indian editors and read first by Indian readers. The English-language publishing industry in India is a marginal player compared with London and New York, but a major one compared with Dhaka. I term this a semi-peripheral relay position. It is an institutional rather than a linguistic relay, and the term borrows Heilbron's vocabulary of positions. Unlike indirect translation (Assis Rosa et al., 2019), it involves no pivot language: the source and target languages remain Bangla and English throughout. In between lies a regional field, which has its own canon, audience and set of expectations about what “Bengali” literature is.

Representation and the market

The third element is provided by postcolonial criticism. Huggan (2001) argues that the marketing of postcolonial writing is based on an exoticism in which cultural difference is “eaten up”, and Brouillette (2007) demonstrates that writers and publishers are aware of these expectations and negotiate them accordingly. Walkowitz's (2015) category of “born-translated” novels is relevant to Bangladesh, where the equivalent body of writing is the Anglophone fiction of the diaspora, which frequently substitutes for Bangladeshi literature in metropolitan markets. Apter (2013) and Mufti (2016) take the criticism further and argue that world literature itself, despite its apparent openness, is structured by English and by orientalist reading habits. A corrective, as Orsini (2015) reminds us, is that South Asian literary cultures were multilingual rather than national. The layered lexicon of Bangla, drawing on Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and English, makes the point tangible.

Paratexts and mediated legibility

Genette (1997) uses the term paratexts for the thresholds at which a text is presented to its readers. Peritexts, such as titles, subtitles and cover copy, are attached to the book; epitexts, such as interviews and essays, circulate around it. Translation scholars have treated paratexts as sites where the translator becomes visible and as evidence of the norms that regulate translation in a receiving culture (Batchelor, 2018; Tahir Gürçağlar, 2002). In a field where systematic source–target comparison across many texts is

impractical, paratexts provide the most consistent evidence of how translations are positioned.

Drawing these strands together, I use *mediated legibility* to name the conditions under which a Bangladeshi text becomes readable, and saleable, in English. Legibility is produced on three planes: institutional (who selects, finances, and publishes), paratextual (how the text is named and framed), and textual (how culturally charged elements are rendered). It is produced differently at each pole of the triangulated field (Figure 1). The concept does not presume that legibility is a loss, since a text that cannot be read cannot circulate. It asks instead which features of the source are made legible, for whom, and at whose cost.

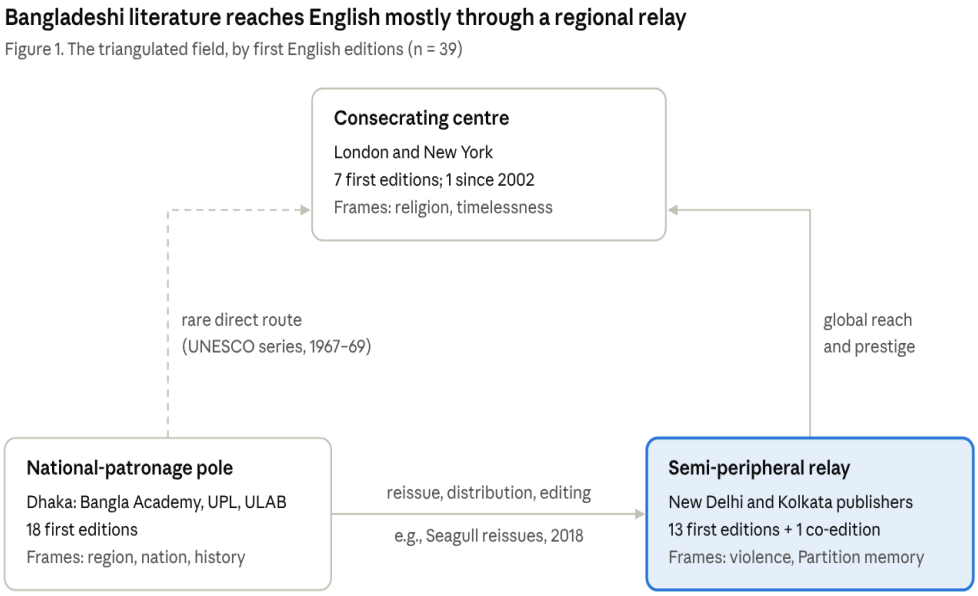


Figure 1. The triangulated field. Boxes give the location and number of first English editions in the corpus (Appendix A) and the dominant framing in publishers' descriptions; arrows mark the routes by which titles move, with the dashed arrow showing the rare direct route from Dhaka to the metropolitan centre.

Material and Methods

Research design

The research is qualitative and multi-level, and combines the target-oriented approaches of descriptive translation studies and the agent-oriented approaches of the sociology of translation with the interpretive approaches of paratext analysis. Following Toury (2012), translations are treated as facts of the receiving culture, and the analysis starts from the books in English rather than from questions of equivalence. Drawing on Heilbron and Sapiro (2007) and Buzelin (2005), it traces the publishers, editors, translators and institutions through which each book passed. The design was abductive: categories were developed from the framework in Section 3 and modified when data did not fit them.

Corpus construction

The unit of analysis is the book-length English translation of a literary work, or a collection of works, originally written in Bangla. For the purposes of the corpus, Bangladeshi literature is defined as writing by authors whose literary careers were based principally in East Pakistan or Bangladesh after 1947. Five books by writers canonised in Bangladesh but

active mainly before 1947 or principally in Kolkata, namely RokeyaSakhawat Hossain, KaziNazrul Islam, and Jibanananda Das, were recorded as boundary cases; they are discussed where relevant but not counted. Translations published only in journals or anthologies outside Bangladesh were excluded, as were works written in English by Bangladeshi authors.

Candidate titles were identified in three steps. A seed list was drawn from the authors most often represented in literary histories and anthologies of Bangladeshi writing. It was extended by snowball searches of publishers' series, notably the Library of Bangladesh series issued by Bengal Lights Books with the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), of translators' bibliographies, and of newspaper surveys of Bangladeshi writing in translation (e.g., Anjum, 2020). Each candidate was then verified against at least one library catalogue record or publisher's page, and the original title and date, English title, translator, publisher, place, year, and later editions were recorded. Seven candidate titles whose publisher and/or year could not be verified were excluded. The resulting corpus comprises 39 English books published between 1967 and 2024 (Appendix A). Lajja appears twice because it was translated independently for Indian (1994) and American (1997) publication.

The corpus is not claimed to be complete. Dhaka imprints are poorly catalogued, and translations published by small presses or in small print runs are often under-represented. It is best read as a documented, verifiable map of the visible part of the field, whose unevenness is itself one of the objects of study.

Paratextual and epitextual data

Three additional data sets were collected. First, the English titles of the 39 books were matched with their Bangla originals wherever the original title could be verified, resulting in 23 title decisions. Second, for 18 books, the publishers' descriptions, retailer copy and recent reviews were collected from publishers' and retailers' websites as available in October 2026; these are included in the list of primary sources. Third, 10 epitexts were collected: interviews, essays and reviews by translators, editors, authors and critics, published in Bangladeshi and Indian periodicals and on an international translation platform between 2005 and 2022. Each quotation from these sources was verified against the original web page.

Analytical procedures

Analysis proceeded in four stages. The first was mapping: each book was coded for its period of English publication (1947–1971, 1972–1999, 2000–2025), for the location of its first English publisher (Dhaka, India, or the United Kingdom and United States), and for later editions elsewhere. The second was title analysis. Each title decision was classified as retention (transliteration, with or without a gloss), literal translation, adaptation (a partial change, an added marker, or a substituted genre term), or substitution (a new title), and its semantic direction, for example from concrete to abstract or from neutral to affective, was noted.

The third stage was framing analysis. Descriptions and epitexts were coded deductively for seven frames suggested by the theoretical framework: war and violence; religion; gender; locality and exoticism; national allegory; comparison with canonical world literature; and the naming of the source as Bengali, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, or South Asian. They were also coded inductively for further themes, following the reflexive procedure of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fourth stage was case analysis. Four cases were chosen for detailed study using a maximum-variation criterion across periods and poles (Flyvbjerg, 2006): Tree Without Roots (London, 1967); the two English translations of Lajja (New Delhi, 1994; Amherst, New York, 1997); the Library of Bangladesh and its

Seagull reissues (Dhaka and Kolkata, 2015–2018); and Life and Political Reality (New Delhi, 2022). In the first case, the textual analysis is based on a published comparative reading of the Bangla and English texts (Kamal &Sarker, 2020).

Trustworthiness and limitations

Credibility rests on the triangulation of bibliographic, peritextual and epitextual data, and on an audit trail: Appendix A lists all books, along with a verification source for each. The design has limitations. Publisher and retailer copy was accessed online and may differ from the cover text of the printed editions. The analysis focuses on the text and the declared strategy, not on reader reception, and some textual claims rely on secondary comparative reading. Counts indicate how often a phenomenon occurs; they do not provide a basis for statistical inference. Finally, the study is written from within Bangladeshi English studies, a field of which it speaks, and the coding frame was applied with attention to the risk of reproducing assumptions of that field that rest on such translations.

Results and Discussion

Three circuits and a relay

Table 1
English translations of Bangladeshi literature by period and location of first publisher (n = 39)

Period	Dhaka	Dhaka–India co-edition	India	UK/US	Total
1947–1971	0	0	0	2	2
1972–1999	3	0	2	4	9
2000–2025	15	1	11	1	28
Total	18	1	13	7	39

Note. Later editions in other locations are not counted. Four Dhaka titles were later reissued by Seagull Books, Kolkata. Sources for every entry are listed in Appendix A.

Three features stand out. First, both books of the Pakistan period were published in London in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Pakistan Series: Waliullah's*Tree Without Roots* (1967) and Jasimuddin's*Gipsy Wharf* (1969). East Bengali literature thus entered English as Pakistani literature, chosen within an international programme whose partners were states. This is Lefevere's undifferentiated patronage operating transnationally, since the apparatus that selected the texts also certified them as "representative." The *Spectator*'s reviewer noted that the novel had taken eighteen years to reach England from Pakistan and praised its "timeless quality of a Bengali legend" (Braybrooke, 1967). The national label was contemporary and political; the cultural one was ethnic and outside history.

Second, the metropolitan centre took up Bangladeshi writing intermittently and, for a decade, chiefly through one author. Of the five books issued by British or American publishers between 1993 and 2002, three were by TaslimaNasrin, published after the threats and exile that made her an international figure. After 2002 only one corpus title, a children's novella by Humayun Azad, appeared first with a metropolitan publisher.

Third, after 2000 production divided between Dhaka and India, and the two are linked by a relay. Dhaka's output came from academic and small presses: University Press Limited's anthologies edited by Niaz Zaman, the Library of Bangladesh series from 2015, and imprints such as Adorn. Indian output came from multinational subsidiaries (Penguin, HarperCollins, Hamish Hamilton) and from feminist and independent houses (Kali for Women, Zubaan, Palimpsest, Eka). Four of the seven Library of Bangladesh titles in the corpus were reissued by Seagull Books, a Kolkata publisher with distribution in Britain and the United States, three of them in 2018, under an agreement the series editor presented as

joining the series to Seagull's global reach (Munim, 2017). By 2021 the series was reported to have stalled, and Bangladeshi publishers could not sell directly through Amazon, so overseas circulation depended on the Indian partner (Bari, 2021). Agency is concentrated as well: Arunava Sinha, a translator based in India, is credited as translator or series editor on ten of the 28 books published since 2000.

The distribution matches the semi-peripheral relay outlined in Section 3 and shown in Figure 1. Dhaka produces translations but cannot circulate them beyond South Asia; the metropolitan centre produces few; India connects the two, providing distribution, editorial labour and a readership. The asymmetry was articulated most sharply by Hasan AzizulHuq, who remarked that Bangladeshis could not colonise the world, and that the one publisher Bangla writers wanted to reach was Penguin (Munim, 2013). In practice, the route to that metropolitan brand now passes through New Delhi.

Naming Bangladesh – titles and descriptions

Of the 23 title decisions that can be compared with their originals, 13 are literal, 4 retain a Bangla word from the original, 4 are adaptations and 2 are substitutions. Since 2000, literal titles have prevailed in both Dhaka and Indian editions (Black Ice, Letters of Blood, Absurd Night, Life and Political Reality), pointing to an emerging norm of fidelity (Toury, 2012). Literal titles can also shift meaning. The Persianate layer of Bengali Muslim vocabulary disappears at the threshold: Shaheen Akhtar's Talaash (from Persian, and common to both Bangla and Hindustani) becomes The Search.

Ideology is most apparent in the non-literal decisions. Substitution occurs where the distance between source and reader is greatest. Lalsalu, the name of a concrete religious object, becomes Tree Without Roots; Jahanara Imam's EkattorerDinguli ("The days of '71") becomes Of Blood and Fire: The Untold Story of Bangladesh's War of Independence (New Delhi, 1989), which heightens the affect, supplies the national name and addresses a reader to whom the story is untold. Adaptations add markers. In Maa ("Mother"), by AnisulHoque, the national allegory takes the place of the Bengali mangal and its characters, while Ayeshamangal becomes The Ballad of Ayesha, a mangal in English. Retention increasingly comes with an explanatory marker. Nasrin's memoir appeared in India as *My Girlhood* (2001) and in the United States as *Meyebela: My Bengali Girlhood* (2002), which keeps the Bangla word and adds the ethnonym an American reader was assumed to need. Akhteruzzaman Elias's *Khoabnama* became *Khwabnama*, romanised according to the Hindustani convention familiar to Indian readers.

Publishers' descriptions frame the books differently at each pole. In Indian and Seagull copy, violence predominates. *The Search* "captures the brutalities of the 1971 war of liberation" (Zubaan, n.d.); *Letters of Blood* is set in "the often violent world of prostitution in Bangladesh" (Seagull Books, n.d.-a); *The Mercenary* concerns "the deadly draw of violence" (Seagull Books, n.d.-b). Metropolitan copy of the 1990s and early 2000s turns on religion: *Shame* was summarised as a story of "retaliatory Muslim fanaticism" (Publishers Weekly, 1997), and *Meyebela* as an account of a family "beleaguered by religious intolerance" (Kirkus Reviews, n.d.). Dhaka copy anchors texts in place, as when Beloved Rongomala is presented as a legend from 'Bangladesh's Noakhali region' (ULAB Press, n.d.).

Each pole names the setting differently. The 1967 London review located the novel in Pakistan. Penguin India situates Khwabnama in an anachronism, 'rural pre-partition Bangladesh', which projects the post-1947 nation back into the pre-Partition period (Penguin Random House India, n.d.). The Indian description of Black Ice folds a Bangladeshi novel into Indian memory, giving its protagonist a childhood 'in the suburbs of Calcutta' (Oxford Bookstore, n.d.). When consecration is sought, the reference point is Latin America. Zahir's novellas are sold as 'magic realism' (Pagdandi Books, n.d.), and the editor of the

Library of Bangladesh characterised their publication as Bangladesh's GarcíaMárquez moment (Munim, 2017).

Rewriting the sacred: *Tree Without Roots*

The first case shows mediated legibility at its most complete, because author and rewriter were the same person. The English version was prepared by Waliullah with credited collaborators, among them his wife, Anne-Marie Thibaud, and it served as the basis of her French translation, *L'Arbre sans racines* (1961), six years before the London edition (N. Zaman, 2016). Comparative readings identify a consistent set of changes. The English text omits Akkas, the young man who hopes to found a secular school, together with the episode of a rival holy man, so that the novel's argument about religious and secular education disappears and the focus moves from society to the individual (Kamal &Sarker, 2020). An extended account of rural poverty is added for readers unfamiliar with Bengal (Kamal, 2018). A trader becomes a figure nearer to a country squire, a change Haq (2005) attributes to Anglo-American expectations, and the protagonist acquires a late dignity absent from the Bangla text (N. Zaman, 2016).

Together with the new title, these changes form a pattern. The Bangla novel, published a year after Partition, intervened in a specific argument within East Bengali Muslim society about religious authority, rural exploitation, and education. The English novel offers a parable of rootlessness, legible through the existentialist idiom then prominent in European fiction and still the dominant lens for reading it (Chowdhury, 2011). What was removed made the novel contemporary; what was added made it timeless, the very quality its London reviewer praised. Self-translation did not shield the text from rewriting. It allowed an author living in France to perform the domestication a metropolitan publisher might otherwise have required, much as Tagore's English self-translations had done half a century earlier (Sengupta, 1990; see also Grutman& Van Bolderen, 2014).

One novel, two receptions: *Lajja*

Lajja (1993), which depicts attacks on a Hindu family in Bangladesh after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India in December 1992, was translated into English twice within three years: by Tutul Gupta for Penguin in New Delhi (1994), under the retained title *Lajja* glossed as *Shame*, and by KankabatiDatta for Prometheus Books in New York State (1997), as *Shame*. The duplication registers how differently two receiving fields valued the book. In India, according to H. Zaman (1999), Hindu nationalist groups circulated an unauthorised translation because the novel seemed to confirm their account of Muslim persecution of Hindus. In the West it entered a discourse on Islam and free expression in which Nasrin appeared as a lone dissident, an image that, H. Zaman argues, erased the Bangladeshi secular and feminist movements from which her work emerged. Riaz (1995) also interprets the controversy as a battle within Bangladeshi politics rather than an international cause.

The voice of the novel is that of "Bengali secular nationalism", which judges the treatment of Hindu citizens against the promises of 1971. Each receiving frame adopted the novel's evidence but discarded its viewpoint. In this case, mediated legibility operates primarily at the institutional and paratextual levels. The same narrative was read as a story of communal grievance and as a story of Islamic intolerance, and neither reading required any understanding of the debate in Bangladesh about secularism and citizenship.

Resistance inside the relay: the Library of Bangladesh and ShahidulZahir

The Library of Bangladesh offers a window on the relay. It was conceived in Dhaka, published by a private university, edited by an Indian translator, and translated by Indian, Bangladeshi and diasporic translators, who use carefully domesticating tactics, as they

themselves declare. ShabnamNadiya has said that she avoids footnotes in fiction and instead builds cultural cues into the English sentence; in *Beloved Rongomala* a mullah is "smuggled in" rather than brought into a household, so that readers outside South Asia sense a boundary being crossed (Bhatt, 2020). Khademul Islam, editor of the Dhaka magazine *Bengal Lights*, has described the cost of such smoothing as a text left "ironed-out," without the creases of the original, and has observed that English is received in Bangladesh as the language of power and modernity (Islam, 2018).

Life and Political Reality (HarperCollins India, 2022) takes the opposite course within the same relay. Zahir drew on the speech of Old Dhaka, which has no equivalent in any standard English register. His translators kept dialogue and dialect in transliteration, a strategy ShahrozaNahrin calls their "way of resisting the authority of the 'global language'" (Harper Broadcast, 2022). In the same interview, V. Ramaswamy acknowledged that some flattening was inevitable, identified hegemony in international publishing and insisted that the Bangla of Bangladesh is in fact many languages. This is resistance at the sentence level, in Venuti's and Spivak's sense. But the same book reaches its readers through cover copy that invokes magic realism and post-war disillusionment. The text is foreignised whilst its packaging is domesticated.

The key result of the case analysis is this divergence. Mediated legibility is not produced in equal measure along its three axes. Inside the relay, translators can resist at the level of the sentence; the institutions that circulate their work, by contrast, can undo that resistance by attaching the books to the existing categories of the metropolitan market.

Discussion

The research questions are answered below on the basis of the analysis. On the first, Bangladeshi literature travelled to English in the Pakistan period through a state-mediated, London-based circuit; in the 1990s, through an intermittent, controversy-driven metropolitan circuit; and since 2000, through a Dhaka-based circuit that has produced a lot but circulated very little, with the help of Indian publishers and translators. Power is written into this structure much as it is elsewhere, but at the levels of distribution, editorial labour and prestige, which lie largely outside Dhaka.

On the second, framing varies with the pole of publication. Metropolitan copy privileges religion, violence and timelessness; Indian copy, shared Partition memory; and Dhaka copy, region and national history. These frames tend to mute the debate within Bangladeshi society on secularism, citizenship, class and the status of Islam in Bengali national culture. On the third, culturally charged material is handled in a variety of ways, ranging from omission (the secular schoolteacher of Lalsalu) through in-text glossing to transliterated dialect. Omission universalises, glossing makes the source accessible, and transliteration preserves its irreducibility. These strategies coexist within one circuit, and sometimes within books whose paratexts work against them.

On the fourth, the case suggests three revisions to current theory. First, core–periphery models need a category of “institutional relays” that operate within the same target language. Lindqvist (2019) shows that French Caribbean writing reaches Sweden only after consecration in Paris and in Anglo-American centres. The Bangladeshi relay differs in that it involves no change of language, so its effects go unnoticed, yet it has the same capacity as a pivot language to redistribute representation. It has its own canon and memory of Partition, its own romanisation system and its own idea of what a Bengali novel should be.

Second, the language–nation paradox needs to be taken into account in postcolonial readings of translation into English as appropriation or resistance. For a nation founded in defence of a language, translation out of that language is both the means of international

visibility and a reminder of the hierarchy that the nation's founding sought to overturn. It is this double bind that Huq's remark about colonising captures.

Third, mediated legibility shows that Venuti's opposition between domestication and foreignization describes only one plane of a translation's existence. A text may be foreignized in its sentences and domesticated in its packaging, as *Life and Political Reality* is, so any judgement of a translation's politics has to read across planes. The finding also extends Baker's (2006) account of framing by locating frames in identifiable institutional positions. Practically, it implies that national translation programmes which invest in translation without investing in distribution, rights, and editorial capacity will reproduce the asymmetry they were created to correct.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the politics of translating Bangladeshi literature into English lies as much in where, by whom, and under what description translations are published as in how their sentences are rendered. On the evidence of a documented corpus of 39 books, Bangladeshi writing travels through a triangulated field in which a national-patronage pole in Dhaka, a semi-peripheral relay in India, and a consecrating centre in London and New York each make different features of the source legible. The concepts of semi-peripheral relay and mediated legibility may prove useful for other literatures that reach English through regional intermediaries.

The study's limits point to further work. The corpus is documented but not exhaustive, reception has not been examined, and the textual claims rest partly on secondary comparative readings. The patterns described here could be tested at the sentence level by a systematic source–target comparison of the corpus, especially of religious vocabulary, kinship terms and dialect. Archival research on the UNESCO Pakistan Series and the Bangla Academy's translation programme would clarify how texts were selected through state patronage. A comparison with translation from Bangla into French, German or Japanese would reveal whether the relay is specific to English. A core principle of the founding of Bangladesh was that a people could be fully itself in its own language. This article records the English side of that story: how far the language must travel before it can be seen abroad.

Recommendations

The results have implications for the institutions that create and disseminate Bangladeshi literature in English. National translation programmes must invest more – beyond the translation itself – in the first place. The Dhaka pole has proven its ability to make books but it has not yet won distribution, rights control and editorial power, and that is why there continues to be an imbalance it intended to right. Therefore, alternative funding sources like Bangla Academy and private universities should help in making more resources available for co-publication deals, foreign rights sales and continued cooperation with metropolitan and Indian distributors—rather than viewing a completed translation as the job done.

Secondly, the Indian relay should be openly recognized as a partner and filter. Dhaka-based editors and translators have an advantage of working with the Indian presses, but must get control over the elements of a book—titles, cover copy, glossaries and introductions—that tend to dampen debates on secularism, citizenship and class issues in Bangladesh. A translation may be able to withstand the packaging and the sentences when commissioned paratexts come from Bangladeshi scholars (co-written paratexts).

Third, it is important that a translator can be expected to exercise his or her own choices within the framework of an institution, and that these choices are supported.

Methods of transliteration or dialect and in-text glossing are often de-dialectized downstream, and the translator notes or prefaces explaining the rationale of this approach should be kept in its original form and preserved in contracts, not excised or thrown away because it is not perceived as being marketable.

Fourth, it should be noted that there should be a scholarship that follows where this study could not. The following, which is a systematic source–target comparison of the corpus, an analysis of religious terminology, and a study of kinship terms and dialect would help determine whether there is any special English semi-peripheral relay; archival research on the UNESCO Pakistan Series and on Bangla's programme in the UNESCO, and a parallel study of Bangla translation into French, German or Japanese would shed light on this question. The picture provided by paratexts is incomplete and would be completed by reception studies, based on reviews and reader responses.

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Authors' Contribution

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Ethical Considerations

No human subjects or personal information was used in this study. It is based exclusively on published books that are accessible to the public (and publisher descriptions and epitexts) cited in the references. Ethical approval was not necessary.

AI Use Statement

Generative AI (ChatGpt and Grammarly) was used for language editing and condensing text. It was not used for the data collection, coding the corpus and drawing findings. All text generated by AI is reviewed and edited by the author, and the author is responsible for the article's content.

Data Availability Statement

The data analysed are all published data, as mentioned in the references. The 39 corpus books are listed verifying, with the verification sources. The coding frame and coded dataset are available on reasonable request from the author.

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