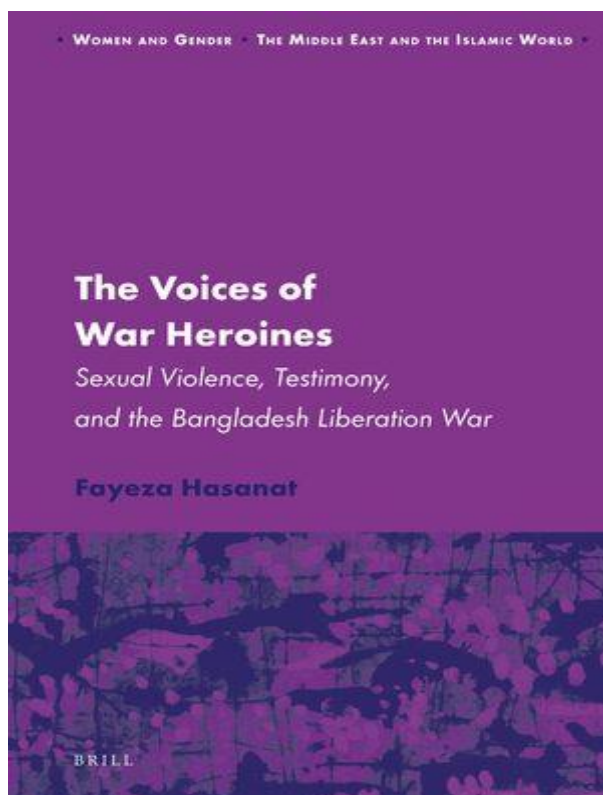


Fayeza Hasanat (Trans.). 2022. *The Voices of War Heroines: Sexual Violence, Testimony, and the Bangladesh Liberation War*. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 143 pp. ISSN: 1570-7628.



While reading Fayeza Hasanat's translation of *Ami Birangona Bolchi* by Neelima Ibrahim, one naturally recalls Urvashi Butalia's 1998 book *The Other Side of Silence*, in which the author's intention was to end the silence in order for the processes of healing and forgetting to begin. This is an equally definitive intent in Neelima Ibrahim's *Ami Birangona Bolchi* that was published in the same year. Seven rape survivors of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 broke their silence about being violated by Pakistani soldiers. The incidents were not only traumatic for them but indeed they became a collective trauma-cum-taboo subject in post-war Bangladesh. In fact, healing and forgetting are never achieved through telling the stories of violence against women. However, the publication of the book created ripples, as it exposed the existence of thousands of women who were regarded as national shame for the new country and were eventually forced to go into oblivion. Fayeza Hasanat's translation under the title *The Voices of War Heroines: Sexual Violence, Testimony, and the Bangladesh Liberation War* is undoubtedly a timely

step to acquaint the new and more cosmopolitan citizens of Bangladesh with women's tragic history of 1971. It is also an important step to make the voice of these women heard by readers not acquainted with the Bangla language.

Hasanat's Introduction is a must-read for those interested in the 1971 war for Bangladesh's independence. She explains the term "Birangona" with references to several texts written on rape as a war weapon. She clearly points out the dichotomy of the term by showing how it brought disgrace for the raped victims of Bangladesh instead of facilitating a process of rehabilitating them. The term became a double-edged sword for those wronged women. Their families received state financial support, while they were deprived of family life and social security. Some of the women went abroad to erase their past with the help of international organisations, and some even preferred leaving the country with their perpetrators to a life of shame as "fallen" women.

Hasanat quite candidly claims in her note that translation is an act of trauma since "[i]t exposes a translator to the wounds of languages and challenges her to mediate between words and silence" (24). She has painstakingly given her account as a translator, while admitting that she has always surrendered to the original. To her, language becomes the medium to contain the rupture between the identities of the translator and the original writer. Indeed, the Introduction to the book and the Translator's Note are excellent additions to the coinage of "afterlife" and "overliving" that translation is. Nonetheless, the idea that translation is an act of trauma is something to be factored in; because the trauma that works on the linguistic level, and commutes between words and silences, must be the outer skin of the translator's negotiation with the traumatised speaking subjects in the book. Perhaps that becomes visible in her changing the way the title could be translated, and also by dividing the narratives into different sections that the original did not have. She has put emphasis on the word "Voice" because she realised the inner strength of these women who raised their voice within the limits of their traumatised state. She has also put the names of the speakers in the subtitles of the chapters to give them a concrete identity.

Tara Nielsen's testimony in the third chapter of the book, for instance, clearly shows the strength and resilience of the war heroines. Ibrahim's narrative of Tara indisputably touches the reader's heart intimately, but Hasanat's translation wrenches the mind too. In the source text, the opening line of this narrative focuses on human life while comparing it with nature. Tara's first comment "prakritir moto monushya shomaj-o koto bichitra" could be translated as "human society is equally diverse as nature." In her translation, Hasanat completely discounts the idea of human society and translates the remark as follows: "Nature will never cease to amaze us" (29). While Ibrahim breaks the first two passages and begins Tara's thoughts on human life in a new paragraph, Hasanat unites two of the first paragraphs in one and connects Tara's thoughts

on her own life with nature, which reads: “Like nature, my life has also gone through a flow of divergences” (29). What is remarkable in this change is that Tara does not philosophise the sufferings of life. Nor does she accept her status as “fallen.” In Ibrahim’s narrative, Tara’s mention of “ashani pataner dabdaho” or “the fire of a devastating fall” is taken away that relieves her of the sense of sin that society had implanted in her as a woman. The translator also imports the word “coward” and puts it in Tara’s chaffing of her society and consequently, her voice becomes stronger in the translation. The translator’s task is not only to carry the message of the original; a text that carries the trauma of a whole nation, needs to be reinforced with strategic translation that may appeal to a greater variety of readers with different orientations of life, which Hasanat has sincerely done.

The fluidity of language is visible in all seven narratives. Indeed, words are the power of any translated work. Neelima Ibrahim’s book contains a bunch of nuanced words that are not translatable because the exact equivalents are not available in the target language. Hasanat has balanced the poetic emotion of the war heroines and the lucidity of meaning of such emotion without creating any hiccup for foreign readers. To make the narratives livelier and appealing to them, she has imported some conversations out of the testimonies of the girls that have made their narratives livelier. Hasanat is a creative writer, and her writer’s self has influenced her translator’s self on several such occasions where she has modified the original text to some extent. This is because translation is original and carries the translator’s imaginative and creative bent of mind.

The translation of *Ami Birangona Bolchi* with its original introduction and notes is precisely important for researchers from diverse backgrounds. It is a significant book for memory and trauma studies, and is equally important for students of polemology, literature, sociology, gender, and legal studies. Butalia comments in her book that when history begins to escape into the world beyond the preserve of historians or academics, it attracts all kinds of people and new questions are raised about the so-called truths we know. It is time to see what new questions arise from this translated representation of history of the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Sabiha Huq, PhD
Professor of English
Khulna University, Bangladesh
Email: sabiha.huq@eng.ku.ac.bd