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# Faith, Gender, and Power: Women's Rights in Qur'an Translations for the 21st Century (A Critical Review of Asad and Al-Hilali's Translations)

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## Abstract

This study critically examines how English translations of the Qur'an shape contemporary understandings of women's rights, focusing on the divergent approaches of Muhammad Asad and Muhammad Taqqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali. Through a comparative textual analysis of key verses related to inheritance, marriage, polygamy, divorce, and women's moral and spiritual responsibilities, the research demonstrates that translation is not a neutral conduit but a site of interpretive power where ideology, gender, and authority intersect. Using Chesterman's translation strategies as an analytical framework, the study highlights that Asad's reformist translation foregrounds ethical reasoning, gender equity, and moral agency, presenting women as active participants in their social and spiritual lives. In contrast, Al-Hilali's traditionalist rendering emphasizes juridical fidelity, male authority, and hierarchical structures, reflecting classical jurisprudence and patriarchal norms. The findings reveal that lexical choices, tone, and explanatory additions in translation significantly influence how readers perceive women's rights and responsibilities, both within Muslim communities and in global discourses on gender justice. By situating translation at the intersection of textual fidelity and modern ethical sensibilities, the study underscores the necessity of critically aware and inclusive approaches to Qur'anic translation, highlighting its centrality in mediating the interplay between law, morality, and social perception in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Qur'an Translation and Gender, Comparative Textual Analysis, Women's Rights in Islam, Asad vs. Al-Hilali, Translation Ideology and Power

## Introduction

The revelation of the Qur'an in seventh-century Arabia introduced significant transformations in the legal and social status of women. In a tribal context where women were often excluded from inheritance, denied economic

autonomy, and at times treated as inheritable property, the Qur'an articulated provisions that restructured existing gender norms. These included women's entitlement to inheritance (Qur'an 4:7, 4:11–12), recognition of independent property ownership (Qur'an 4:32), prohibition of coercive marital practices (Qur'an 4:19), and the institutionalization of financial security through *mahr* (Qur'an 4:4). These measures were not merely regulatory; rather, they embedded women's rights within a theological framework in which legal entitlements were grounded in divine authority. As Amina Wadud<sup>1</sup> and Asma Barlas<sup>2</sup> demonstrate, Qur'anic discourse addresses women as morally accountable subjects within the believing community, situating questions of justice within the structure of revelation itself.

However, contemporary understandings of these reforms are significantly mediated through translation. For the majority of Muslims worldwide and for nearly all non-Muslim readers, the Qur'an is encountered primarily in translation. While Arabic retains its canonical authority, English translations have become a dominant medium in academic, political, and public discourse. In classrooms, policy discussions, digital platforms, and media debates, translated renderings frequently function as the operative version of the Qur'an. Consequently, the meanings that inform both scholarly and public discourse are shaped not only by the Arabic source text but also by the interpretive frameworks embedded within translation Chesterman<sup>3</sup>.

Translation theory underscores that such mediation is never neutral. As Andrew Chesterman<sup>4</sup> argues, translation operates within normative systems shaped by ideological positioning, cultural expectations, and strategic decision-making. Choices regarding lexical equivalence, syntactic configuration, explicitation, paraphrasing, and cultural filtering are therefore not merely technical but inherently hermeneutical<sup>5</sup>. When applied to sacred scripture, these decisions assume heightened significance. A translator's preference for juridical precision over ethical generalization, or for literal rendering over contextual paraphrase, can recalibrate the theological and moral resonance of a verse<sup>6</sup>. Translation thus becomes a site where authority is negotiated and meaning is actively constructed<sup>7</sup>.

This dynamic is particularly consequential in verses concerning women's rights<sup>8</sup>. Contemporary debates about Islam and gender whether within Muslim-majority societies or in Western academic and policy discourse frequently rely on English translations of the Qur'an. Discussions of polygamy (Qur'an 4:3), inheritance ratios (Qur'an 4:11–12), marital authority (Qur'an 4:34), divorce (Qur'an 2:228), and female moral agency (Qur'an 33:35) are often conducted through translated texts, rarely accompanied by sustained engagement with the semantic elasticity of the Arabic original. In this environment, translation functions not simply as

transmission but as representation, mediating how Islam is positioned within global conversations about equality, patriarchy, and modernity.

The implications are both theological and socio-political. Translation shapes how Muslim readers conceptualize divine intent regarding gender relations, while simultaneously influencing how Islam is framed within broader human rights discourse<sup>9</sup>. A rendering that foregrounds conditional justice, reciprocity, and moral accountability may resonate with contemporary egalitarian paradigms, whereas a rendering that emphasizes hierarchy or prescriptive authority without contextual qualification may reinforce perceptions of structural patriarchy. In both cases, the translator's interpretive commitments become inscribed within the received text<sup>10</sup>.

Although scholarship on Islam and gender has extensively examined the role of exegetical traditions in shaping patriarchal interpretations<sup>11</sup>, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to translation as an independent locus of gendered meaning production. Classical *tafsir* literature has been rigorously scrutinized for its hermeneutical assumptions; however, English translations arguably the most globally influential mode of Qur'anic access remain under-theorized within gender-focused inquiry. This lacuna is analytically significant<sup>12</sup>. In an era characterized by digital dissemination, transnational readership, and the global circulation of Islamic texts, translation is not peripheral to interpretation; it is constitutive of it<sup>13</sup>.

Moreover, the politics of translation intersects directly with questions of authority and representation. It raises critical concerns regarding who effectively speaks for the Qur'an in English, which exegetical traditions are privileged or reformulated, and how translators negotiate the tension between fidelity to classical jurisprudence and responsiveness to contemporary ethical discourse<sup>14</sup>. These questions become particularly salient when examining translations produced within divergent ideological orientations whether reformist, revivalist, or institutionally sponsored.

In the twenty-first century, debates concerning Muslim women's rights<sup>15</sup> increasingly unfold within a global normative environment shaped by international legal frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Al-Najimi, 2007) and policy initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women, 2016). While Islamic jurisprudence and international human rights law emerge from distinct epistemological foundations, their interaction in public discourse is frequently mediated through translated texts. English translations of the Qur'an thus become sites where competing normative systems encounter one another sometimes as platforms for dialogue, and at other times as arenas of contestation<sup>16</sup>.

This study proceeds from the premise that translation constitutes a form of interpretive power. By analyzing translational choices in key Qur'anic verses related to inheritance, marriage, polygamy, and divorce<sup>17</sup>, it examines how English renderings contribute to the construction of contemporary gender imaginaries within Islam. Rather than adjudicating theological validity, the analysis foregrounds the linguistic and strategic mechanisms through which meaning is shaped, positioning Qur'anic translation as a critical site where language, gender, and authority converge in the modern world.

### **Objectives**

- This study examines how translation shapes contemporary understandings of women's rights in the Qur'an through a comparative analysis of Muhammad Asad's and Al-Hilali's English renderings of key verses on inheritance, marriage, polygamy, and divorce. By analyzing differences in vocabulary, tone, and explanatory additions, it explores how linguistic choices influence interpretations of women's legal and social status, without seeking to declare one translation more correct than the other.
- The study further investigates how translation strategies reflect broader ideological positions on gender. Since translation involves interpretive decisions shaped by theological and socio-historical contexts, it can either foreground ethical justice and reciprocity or reinforce legal hierarchy and traditional authority. In this way, translation functions as a site where gender and power are negotiated.
- Finally, the research considers the broader implications of these translations within global debates on gender justice. As English translations circulate widely in academic and public spheres, they shape both Muslim self-understanding and external perceptions of Islam, influencing contemporary discussions on equality and women's rights.

### **Research Gap**

Although there is a substantial body of scholarship on Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and on gender in Islam, much of this research focuses on interpretation within classical or modern commentaries rather than on translation itself. Studies have examined how legal expert and exegetes understood verses related to women, and how feminist scholars have reread these texts in contemporary contexts. However, comparatively little attention has been given to the role of English translations in shaping how these verses are understood by global audiences. Since many readers encounter the Qur'an primarily through translation, the translator's choices significantly influence perceptions of women's rights, authority, and social roles. The impact of translation as a mediator between the original Arabic

text and modern gender debates therefore remains insufficiently explored. This study addresses that gap by examining how different translational approaches contribute to the construction of contemporary discourse on women's rights within Islam.

### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative textual analysis. A selection of Qur'anic verses central to women's rights was selected for analysis;

1. Surah Al-Baqarah verse 228
2. Surah Al-Imran verses 35-36
3. Surah An-Nisa verses 3, 7, 19, 20
4. Surah At-Tawbah verse 24
5. Surah AN-Nur verses 4, 26

Along with it for comparison, the translations of the above mention verses have been taken of two famous translators Muhammad Asad and Muhammad Taqqi- ud- Din Al-Hilali. The translations are critically analyzed according to the old times and the modern world by focusing on the target audiences.

### Analytical Framework

In this study, Chesterman's translation strategies were applied to analyze the differences in how the two translators rendered the Quranic text. By comparing their work, it becomes clear that each translator reflects a distinct ideological approach. Asad's translation shows a reformist perspective, emphasizing contextual understanding and contemporary interpretation, while Al-Hilali's work follows a more traditionalist approach, closely adhering to classical interpretations. This comparison helps to highlight how translators' beliefs and approaches can influence the meaning conveyed in the target language.

### Data Analysis

#### 1. Mutual Respect and Justice in marriage (chapter 2, verse 228):

وَالْمُطَلَّقاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنْنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ<sup>18</sup>

#### Comparative translations:

Asad	Al-Hilali
And the divorced women shall undergo, without remarrying, a waiting-period of three-monthly courses: for it is not lawful for them to conceal what God may have created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the Last	And divorced women shall wait (as regards their marriage) for three menstrual periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in them wombs, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their

<p>Day. And during this period their husbands are fully entitled to take them back, if they desire reconciliation; but, in accordance with justice, the rights of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them, although men have precedence over them [in this respect]. And God is almighty, wise<sup>19</sup>.</p>	<p>husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And they (women) have rights (over their husbands as regards living expenses) similar (to those of their husbands) over them (as regards obedience and respect) to what is reasonable, but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them. And Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise<sup>20</sup>.</p>
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### Comparative Analysis

The two translations of Qur'an 2:228 reveal distinct interpretive orientations that significantly shape the verse's gender implications. Both translators preserve the legal framework of the waiting period 'iddah' and the conditional possibility of reconciliation; however, they diverge markedly in their handling of the clause وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللرَّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ.<sup>21</sup>

Asad's rendering foregrounds reciprocity by explicitly stating that "the rights of the wives... are equal to the rights... of the husbands." This formulation reflects Chesterman's explicitation strategy, whereby implicit semantic symmetry in the Arabic is made more explicit in the target text<sup>22</sup>. His lexical choices particularly "in accordance with justice" and the bracketed clarification function as pragmatic strengthening toward ethical framing, guiding readers to interpret the verse through a moral-reciprocal lens. The term "precedence" is retained but semantically softened through contextualization, which reduces hierarchical overtones while maintaining textual fidelity.

In contrast, al-Hilali's translation adopts a more formally literal and jurisprudential strategy, closer to what Chesterman<sup>23</sup> describes as semantic literalism combined with explanatory addition. While he preserves the notion of reciprocal rights, the parenthetical expansions "(as regards obedience and respect)" and "(of responsibility)" narrow the semantic range toward a structured hierarchy rooted in classical fiqh discourse. These additions constitute ideologically loaded explicitation, steering the reader toward a duty obedience framework rather than a mutual ethical paradigm.

### Translator Orientation and Contemporary Readership

From the standpoint of twenty-first-century readership, Asad's translation demonstrates greater discursive proximity to contemporary gender-sensitive discourse. His interpretive strategy aligns the verse with broader ethical principles of reciprocity, accountability, and marital balance, which resonate

with modern hermeneutical and human-rights-oriented conversations<sup>24</sup>. Importantly, this does not alter the legal structure of the verse but reframes its semantic emphasis through ethically inflected language.

Al-Hilali's rendering, by contrast, reflects a traditionalist exegetical alignment, prioritizing juridical clarity and hierarchical ordering consistent with classical Sunni commentary traditions<sup>25</sup>. His strategy may appeal to audiences seeking doctrinal certainty and continuity with established jurisprudence; however, for contemporary global readers particularly those encountering the Qur'an through translation the phrasing more strongly foregrounds male authority.

### Analytical Significance

This comparison demonstrates that translation is not merely a vehicle of semantic transfer but a site of ideological mediation. Through selective explicitation and framing, Asad constructs a reading that is more readily legible within present-day egalitarian discourse, whereas al-Hilali's approach reinforces a jurisprudential hierarchy grounded in classical interpretive authority. The divergence illustrates how micro-level translational decisions lexical selection, parenthetical expansion, and pragmatic framing can substantially influence contemporary perceptions of women's rights in the Qur'an.

### 2. Women's Spiritual and Moral Responsibility (Chapter 3, verse 35-36):

إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ  
فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا أُنْثَىٰ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعْتَ وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنْثَىٰ وَإِنِّي سَمَّيْتُهَا  
مَرْيَمَ وَإِنِّي أُعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذَرَيْتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ<sup>26</sup>

### Comparative translations:

Asad	Al-Hilali
35. when a woman of [the House of] 'Imran prayed: "O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!"	35. (Remember) when the wife of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I have vowed to You what (the child that) is in my womb to be dedicated for Your services (free from all worldly work; to serve Your Place of worship), so accept this from me. Verily, you are the All-Hearer, the All-Knowing."
36. But when she had given birth to the child, she said: "O my Sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female" - the while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to, and [fully aware] that no male child [she	36. Then when she gave birth to her [ child Maryam (Mary)], she said: "O my Lord! I have given birth to a female child," – and Allah knew better what she brought forth, -

might have hoped for] could ever have been like this female - "and I have named her Mary. And, verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed <sup>27</sup> ."	"And the male is not like the female, and I have named her Maryam (Mary), and I seek refuge with You (Allah) for her and for her offspring from <i>Shaitan</i> (Satan), the outcast. <sup>28</sup> "
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### Comparative Analysis

The translations of Qur'an 3:35–36 by Asad and al-Hilali exhibit distinct hermeneutical orientations that shape the portrayal of women's spiritual agency and moral subjectivity. While both renderings faithfully transmit the narrative of the wife of 'Imran's vow and the birth of Mary, their lexical and pragmatic choices produce different interpretive emphases.

Asad's translation foregrounds the woman's intentional devotion and interior religiosity. His phrasing particularly "unto Thee do I vow" and "devoted to Thy service" reflects Chesterman's pragmatic explication, whereby the affective and volitional dimensions of the Arabic supplication are made more explicit for the target audience<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, his interpretive insertion "no male child... could ever have been like this female" constitutes contextual modulation, subtly reframing the Qur'anic contrast (وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَىٰ) in a way that foregrounds Mary's exceptional spiritual status rather than a generalized gender hierarchy. Through this strategy, Asad constructs the female figure as a locus of moral distinction and divine favor.

In contrast, al-Hilali's rendering reflects a more formally literal and exegetically conservative approach. His parenthetical expansions "free from all worldly work; to serve Your Place of worship" represent explanatory addition, a strategy identified by Chesterman<sup>30</sup> in which translators embed traditional interpretive glosses directly into the target text. While this enhances theoretical clarity, it also narrows the semantic openness of the Arabic by anchoring the vow within institutional temple service. Similarly, the unmodulated rendering "the male is not like the female" preserves the surface structure of the Arabic but functions as hierarchy-preserving literalism, allowing classical gender asymmetry to remain more visible to the reader.

### Translator Orientation and Contemporary Readership

In relation to present-day global readership, Asad's translation demonstrates stronger discursive alignment with contemporary hermeneutical sensibilities. By emphasizing intentional devotion, moral individuality, and the exceptional status of Maryam (Mary), his strategy resonates with modern interpretive trends that foreground women's spiritual agency and ethical subjecthood<sup>31</sup>. Importantly, this effect emerges not through overt reinterpretation but through selective pragmatic framing and semantic modulation.

Al-Hilali's translation, by contrast, reflects a traditionalist jurisprudential-exegetical orientation consistent with classical tafsir conventions<sup>32</sup>. His reliance on parenthetical clarification and structural literalism prioritizes doctrinal precision and continuity with inherited interpretive authority. While this may appeal to readers seeking textual conservatism, it offers less interpretive mediation for contemporary audiences unfamiliar with the historical exegetical context.

### Analytical Significance

This comparison further demonstrates that Qur'anic translation functions as a site of interpretive negotiation rather than neutral transmission. Through pragmatic framing and selective modulation, Asad's rendering constructs the female figure specifically Maryam and her mother as an active moral agent whose spiritual significance is foregrounded for contemporary readers. Al-Hilali's approach, while textually faithful in a formal sense, embeds the narrative more firmly within traditional exegetical structures that foreground established gender distinctions.

The divergence illustrates how micro-level translational strategies particularly explication, parenthetical expansion, and semantic modulation shape modern perceptions of women's spiritual authority in the Qur'an. As English translations continue to mediate global engagement with the text, such differences carry substantial implications for how gender, piety, and moral responsibility are understood in twenty-first-century discourse.

### 3. Power and Justice (Chapter 4, verse 3):

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَنِّي وَتَلَّتْ وَرُبِعَ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَلِكَ آدَتِي أَلَّا تَعُولُوا<sup>33</sup>

#### Comparative Translations:

Asad	Al-Hilali
And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among [other] women such as are lawful to you - [even] two, or three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then [only] one - or [from among] those whom you rightfully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course <sup>34</sup> .	And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan-girls then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (the slaves) that your right hands possess. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice <sup>35</sup> .

### **Comparative Analysis**

The translations of Qur'an 4:3 by Asad and al-Hilali reveal differing translational priorities in representing the relationship between polygamy, justice, and ethical responsibility. While both preserve the conditional structure of the verse linking plural marriage to the requirement of equitable treatment their lexical and pragmatic choices produce distinct interpretive effects.

Asad's rendering frames the verse within a strongly ethical register. His phrase "if you have reason to fear" reflects pragmatic explicitation, expanding the Arabic conditional (إِنْ خِفْتُمْ) to foreground reflective moral consciousness rather than mere legal apprehension<sup>36</sup>. Additionally, the closing clause "that you will not deviate from the right course" constitutes semantic modulation, shifting the focus from technical injustice to broader moral rectitude. Through this strategy, Asad constructs the verse as an ethical safeguard designed to restrain male authority through the principle of justice. The cumulative effect is a reader-oriented framing that emphasizes accountability and moral self-regulation.

By contrast, al-Hilali's translation adheres more closely to formal semantic literalism. His phrasing "that you shall not be able to deal justly" mirrors the surface legal tone of the Arabic and maintains a jurisprudential orientation. The concluding expression, "nearer to prevent you from doing injustice," represents minimal explicitation with doctrinal preservation, retaining the legalistic emphasis found in classical tafsir traditions. Unlike Asad, al-Hilali does not broaden the semantic field toward moral philosophy; instead, he preserves the verse's regulatory function within a rule-based framework. This approach reflects a commitment to juridical clarity and continuity with traditional exegesis.

### **Translator Orientation and Contemporary Readership**

In terms of twenty-first-century interpretive accessibility, Asad's translation again demonstrates stronger resonance with contemporary ethical discourse. By foregrounding fairness toward orphans and the moral burden attached to plural marriage, his rendering aligns with modern readings that interpret the verse as a restrictive rather than permissive statement on polygamy<sup>37</sup>. His strategy implicitly highlights the Qur'anic logic of conditional justice as a mechanism of social protection.

Al-Hilali's version reflects a traditionalist jurisprudential alignment consistent with classical commentary<sup>38</sup>. His retention of a formal legal tone and minimal interpretive modulation preserves doctrinal continuity but provides less hermeneutical mediation for contemporary global audiences, particularly those engaging the text through gender-justice frameworks.

### Analytical Significance

This comparison underscores how translation mediates the perceived balance between male authority and ethical restraint in Qur'an 4:3. Through pragmatic and semantic shifts, Asad's rendering foregrounds justice as the controlling principle of marital plurality, making the verse more legible within contemporary discussions of gender equity and social responsibility. Al-Hilali's translation, while textually faithful in a formal sense, maintains the verse within a traditional legal register that foregrounds compliance over ethical deliberation.

The divergence illustrates that translational micro-decisions particularly in handling conditionality, justice terminology, and concluding rationale play a decisive role in shaping modern understandings of power, responsibility, and gender in the Qur'an. As English translations continue to function as primary points of access for global audiences, these strategic differences remain central to how Qur'anic norms are interpreted within twenty-first-century debates on justice and family ethics.

### 4. Faith Meets Equity (Chapter 4, verse 7):

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنْهُ  
أَوْ كَثُرَ ۖ نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا<sup>39</sup>

### Comparative Translations:

Al-Hilali	Asad
There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large - a legal share. <sup>41</sup>	MEN SHALL have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, whether it be little or much - a share ordained [by God]. <sup>40</sup>

### Comparative Analysis

The two translations of Qur'an 4:7 reveal distinct interpretive orientations in presenting gender equity in inheritance. Both translators faithfully convey the Qur'anic affirmation that women possess a defined share of inheritance, a historically significant reform in seventh-century Arabia<sup>42</sup>. However, their lexical and rhetorical choices frame this entitlement differently.

Muhammad Asad adopts a reformist and ethically foregrounded rendering. His phrase "a share ordained [by God]" emphasizes divine intentionality and moral justice, implicitly highlighting the egalitarian spirit of the verse. By structuring the sentence symmetrically ("men shall have... and women shall have..."), Asad employs what can be identified through Chesterman's model as a combination of semantic strategy (explicitation)

and pragmatic strategy (audience orientation). The explicitation lies in foregrounding the theological basis of justice, while the pragmatic orientation makes the verse resonate with modern readers concerned with gender equity. His diction universalizes the ethical message rather than merely stating a rule.

In contrast, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali presents a juridically oriented and structurally literal rendering. The phrase “a legal share” frames the verse primarily within the domain of fixed law. This reflects Chesterman's syntactic strategy (literal translation) combined with a pragmatic strategy of conservatism, preserving traditional juridical tone and classical exegetical emphasis. Al-Hilali's wording maintains formal equivalence and legal clarity but does not foreground the ethical philosophy underlying the ruling.

### 21st-Century Relevance

For present-day audiences, particularly those engaged in global gender discourse, Asad's translation is more closely aligned with 21st-century sensibilities. His ethical framing, balanced syntax, and emphasis on divine justice make the verse accessible to readers who seek coherence between Qur'anic guidance and contemporary human rights language. The translation foregrounds women's entitlement as part of a broader moral vision rather than merely a legal allocation.

Al-Hilali's rendering, while philologically faithful and jurisprudentially clear, reflects classical legal orthodoxy and speaks more directly to traditionalist readerships concerned with doctrinal exactitude. Its strength lies in legal precision, but its tone is less dialogic with modern equity-based discourse.

### Critical Synthesis

This comparison demonstrates that translation is an interpretive act that mediates between scripture and readership. Through ethical foregrounding and audience-sensitive phrasing, Asad positions the verse within a universal moral framework that resonates strongly with contemporary debates on women's rights. Al-Hilali, by contrast, preserves the authoritative legal register of classical tafsir, reinforcing continuity with traditional jurisprudence. The divergence illustrates how translation strategies significantly shape modern perceptions of Qur'anic gender justice and the perceived compatibility of Islamic inheritance law with present-day equity frameworks.

### 5. Marriage and Consent (chapter 4, verse19):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرِثُوا النِّسَاءَ كَرِهًا وَلَا تَعْضَلُوهُنَّ لِنَدَاهُنَّ لَبِئْسَ مَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّ بِفَحْشَةٍ مُبَيَّنَةٍ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُنَّ شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا<sup>43</sup>

**Comparative Translations:**

<b>Al-Hilali</b>	<b>Asad</b>
O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will; and you should not treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the Mahr you have given them, unless they commit open illegal sexual intercourse; and live with them honourably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings through it a great deal of good. <sup>44</sup>	O YOU who have attained to faith! It is not lawful for you to [try to] become heirs to your wives [by holding onto them] against their will; and neither shall you keep them under constraint with a view to taking away anything of what you may have given them, unless it be that they have become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct. And consort with your wives in a goodly manner; for if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something which God might yet make a source of abundant good. <sup>45</sup>

**Comparative Analysis and Critical Discussion**

The comparison of Asad and Al-Hilali's translations of Qur'an 4:19 reveals significant differences in how marital consent, women's autonomy, and ethical responsibility are framed for readers. Both translators accurately convey the Qur'anic prohibition against inheriting women against their will and the command to treat wives honorably; however, their linguistic and interpretive choices produce distinct ideological resonances.

Asad's rendering foregrounds the ethical and relational spirit of the verse. His phrasing such as "it is not lawful for you [to try] to become heirs to your wives against their will" and "consort with your wives in a goodly manner" emphasizes moral accountability, mutual respect, and the human dimension of marriage. By avoiding heavily juridical terminology and instead employing morally textured language, Asad highlights women's consent and dignity as central Qur'anic concerns. This reflects what Chesterman (1997) terms semantic and pragmatic explicitation combined with cultural filtering, whereby the translator makes implicit ethical meanings more accessible to the target audience.

**Modern-Day Perspective**

Asad's strategy aligns the verse with contemporary discourses on gender ethics and marital partnership, making his translation particularly resonant for 21st-century readers. In contrast, Al-Hilali's translation adopts a more formal and jurisprudential tone. Expressions such as "you should not treat them with harshness" and the explicit reference to recovering part of the Mahr situate the verse within a legal-regulatory framework. His rendering reflects what Chesterman would classify primarily as a literal (syntactic)

strategy with limited explicitation, prioritizing doctrinal precision and fidelity to classical exegetical tradition. While accurate, this approach foregrounds rule compliance rather than the broader ethical philosophy of the verse, thereby reinforcing a more hierarchical marital structure consistent with traditional jurisprudence.

### Analytical Perspective

From a contemporary analytical perspective, Asad's translation appears more closely aligned with present-day audiences, particularly those engaged in global conversations on women's rights, consent, and ethical marriage. His reformist orientation bridges Qur'anic guidance with modern human rights language without abandoning textual fidelity. Al-Hilali's version, however, remains valuable within conservative and jurisprudential contexts where legal exactness and continuity with classical tafsir are prioritized.

Overall, this comparison demonstrates that translation is not merely linguistic transfer but an interpretive act that shapes how Qur'anic teachings on marriage and women's rights are understood in the modern world. Through differing applications of Chesterman's strategies, Asad constructs a morally dialogic and contemporary reading, whereas Al-Hilali preserves a traditional legalistic framework. The verse thus exemplifies how translational choices mediate the intersection of faith, gender, and authority in twenty-first-century Qur'anic reception<sup>46</sup>

### 6. Divorce and Mahr (*marital gift*) (chapter 4, verse 20):

وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ اسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَّكَانَ زَوْجٍ وَءَاتَيْتُمْ إِحْسَانًا فَتُبَوَّأَ فَلَا تَأْخُذُوا مِنْهُ شَيْئًا أَتَأْخُذُونَ بِهِنَّ وَإِنَّمَا مَيْبَأٌ

#### Comparative Translations:

Asad	Al-Hilali
But if you desire to give up a wife and to take another in her stead, do not take away anything of what you have given the first one, however much it may have been. Would you, perchance, take it away by slandering her and thus committing a manifest sin? <sup>48</sup>	But if you intend to replace a wife by another and you have given one of them a <i>Qintar</i> (of gold i.e. a great amount as <i>Mahr</i> ) take not the least bit of it back; would you take it wrongfully without a right and (with) a manifest sin? <sup>49</sup>

#### Comparative Translation Analysis

The translations by Asad and Al-Hilali reflect different emphases and strategies. Asad renders the verse in a moral and relational tone, stating, "by slandering her and thus committing a manifest sin," which foregrounds the ethical and relational implications of reclaiming a wife's gift. His translation humanizes the injunction, highlighting justice, fairness, and moral accountability, making it relatable to contemporary ethical discourse. In contrast, Al-Hilali employs a literalist and legalistic approach, phrasing the

instruction as “take not the least bit of it back; would you take it wrongfully without a right and (with) a manifest sin?” This emphasizes rule-based compliance, rights, and legal authority, reflecting a traditional jurisprudential focus rather than relational or moral nuance.<sup>50</sup>

### Translator Strategies

Asad's translation uses an explicative strategy, clarifying the moral implications of the verse, while Al-Hilali adopts a formal literalist strategy, prioritizing fidelity to classical legal interpretation<sup>51</sup>. Asad elaborates on the relational dimension, highlighting women's protection and ethical accountability, whereas Al-Hilali foregrounds legality, obedience, and the formal consequences of wrongful actions.

### Relevance to Contemporary Audiences

Asad's translation is more closely aligned with 21st-century perspectives on gender equity, ethical treatment in marriage, and women's autonomy. By framing the verse as a matter of moral responsibility and protection of women's rights, it resonates with modern discourses on justice, ethics, and social responsibility. Al-Hilali, while doctrinally precise, maintains a traditional, law-centered approach, reflecting classical jurisprudence but offering less interpretive engagement for modern ethical concerns.

### Critical Synthesis

A comparative reading of these translations illustrates how translator choices shape the perception of women's rights and ethical responsibilities. Asad's humanized and morally-inflected translation renders the Qur'anic guidance applicable to contemporary social and ethical frameworks, emphasizing relational justice and fairness. Al-Hilali, in contrast, emphasizes legal fidelity and obedience, demonstrating that classical interpretations often prioritize doctrinal clarity over moral or relational nuance. This analysis underscores the importance of translation strategy in mediating the Qur'an's relevance for modern readers, particularly in the context of gender equity, ethical treatment, and marital ethics.

### 7. The Treatment of Women in War Contexts (chapter 9, verse 24):

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسْكَنٌ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرٍ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ<sup>52</sup>

### Comparative translations:

Asad	Al-Hilali
Say: "If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your spouses and your clan, and the worldly goods which you have acquired, and the commerce whereof you fear a decline, and	Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight

<p>the dwellings in which you take pleasure [if all these] are dearer to you than God and His Apostle and the struggle in His cause, then wait until God makes manifest His will; and [know that] God does not grace iniquitous folk with His guidance<sup>53</sup>."</p>	<p>are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His Cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment). And Allah guides not the people who are <i>Al-Fasiqun</i> (the rebellious, disobedient to Allah).<sup>54</sup></p>
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### Critical Discussion

The comparison of Asad and Al-Hilali's translations of Qur'an 9:24 highlights notable differences in tone, interpretive nuance, and ethical emphasis regarding worldly attachments including family, spouses, and material possessions in the context of religious duty and conflict.

Asad presents the verse in a reflective, morally oriented style, emphasizing personal accountability and ethical reasoning. His translation "the struggle in His cause" and "wait until God makes manifest His will; and [know that] God does not grace iniquitous folk with His guidance" foregrounds humanized, morally conscious language. Asad's approach interprets attachment to family, wealth, or comfort as subordinate to devotion to God and adherence to ethical principles. This exemplifies Chesterman's<sup>55</sup> strategy of explicitation and pragmatic strengthening, where the translator elucidates implicit moral dimensions in the source text, making them accessible and relevant to modern readers. For contemporary audiences, this translation aligns with present-day concerns regarding ethical decision-making, prioritization of responsibilities, and gender-sensitive reflection in conflict or high-stakes situations.

### Critical Point of View

In contrast, Al-Hilali employs a formal, doctrinal style, emphasizing obedience, consequence, and divine authority. His phrasing "striving hard and fighting in His Cause... until Allah brings about His Decision (torment)" and "Al-Fasiqun (the rebellious)" underscores compliance and hierarchical order. Al-Hilali primarily uses a literal and syntactic strategy, prioritizing juridical fidelity and classical tafsir interpretations, reflecting traditional jurisprudential norms. While doctrinally precise, this approach centers on punishment and hierarchical moral authority rather than ethical deliberation or personal reflection.

### Modern Discourse

From a 21st-century perspective, Asad's translation is more accessible and meaningful for readers interested in ethical reasoning, moral accountability, and the nuanced roles of women and families in contexts of

conflict. It humanizes the guidance, emphasizing choice, responsibility, and prioritization of ethical obligations. Al-Hilali's version, while accurate and faithful to traditional jurisprudential interpretations, reinforces a classical, rule-based understanding of obedience, divine authority, and hierarchical moral structures. This comparison demonstrates how translation strategies directly shape modern understandings of women's rights, familial responsibilities, and moral agency in the Qur'an<sup>56</sup>.

#### 8. The Duty to Avoid False Accusations and Slander (chapter 24, verse 4):

وَالَّذِينَ يَزْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا يَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً  
وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ (Qur'an, 2020)

#### Comparative translations:

Asad	Al-Hilali
And as for those who accuse chaste women [of adultery], and then are unable to produce four witnesses [in support of their accusation], flog them with eighty stripes; and ever after refuse to accept from them any testimony - since it is they, they that are truly depraved! <sup>57</sup>	And those who accuse chaste women, and produce not four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes, and reject their testimony forever. They indeed are the <i>Fasiqun</i> (liars, rebellious, disobedient to Allah). <sup>58</sup>

#### Comparative Analysis

The comparison of Asad and Al-Hilali's translations of Qur'an 24:4 highlights differences in tone, interpretive focus, and ethical emphasis regarding false accusations and the protection of women's honor.

Asad translates the verse in a humanized and morally reflective style, rendering phrases such as "truly depraved" to describe those who falsely accuse chaste women. This choice foregrounds the ethical and social consequences of slander, emphasizing moral accountability alongside the legal prescription. By framing the guidance in terms of justice and protection for women, Asad's translation makes the verse accessible to contemporary readers concerned with human rights, gender justice, and ethical responsibility. His approach reflects Chesterman's (1997) strategy of explicitation and pragmatic adaptation, where the moral and relational dimensions of the text are clarified for modern audiences, emphasizing ethical reasoning rather than purely legal compliance.

#### Critical Discussion

Al-Hilali, in contrast, employs a formal, literal strategy, prioritizing juridical and doctrinal accuracy. His translation "Fasiqun (liars, rebellious,

disobedient to Allah)" focuses on religious categorization and legal consequence rather than moral reflection. This approach maintains fidelity to classical interpretations and emphasizes obedience to divine law and hierarchical religious authority. While precise, it does not foreground ethical or social considerations, framing punishment as a matter of legal compliance rather than moral deliberation.

### **Today's Perspective**

From a 21st-century perspective, Asad's translation is more resonant for modern readers because it highlights women's protection, ethical accountability, and social responsibility, making the verse relevant for contemporary discussions on gender justice and human rights. Al-Hilali's translation, while accurate and doctrinally faithful, reinforces traditional hierarchical and rule-based norms, offering less engagement with the ethical and moral reasoning emphasized in modern scholarship. This comparison demonstrates how translators' choices between explication and literal fidelity shape the contemporary understanding of women's rights and social ethics in the Qur'an<sup>59</sup>.

### **Discussion**

The comparative analysis of Asad and Al-Hilali's translations demonstrates that translation is not a neutral act but a site where ideology, ethics, and law intersect. Asad's reformist approach emphasizes moral responsibility, ethical reasoning, and gender equity, presenting women as active moral agents whose rights are protected through justice and dignity. In contrast, Al-Hilali's literalist and legalistic rendering prioritizes classical jurisprudential norms, highlighting obedience, hierarchical structures, and the formal application of law. These differences reveal how translation shapes readers' understanding of women's roles, rights, and responsibilities in both personal and social contexts. For contemporary audiences, especially in the global discourse on gender justice, translations like Asad's make the Qur'an's ethical teachings more accessible, while Al-Hilali reinforces traditional patriarchal frameworks. This underscores that translators function as interpreters of authority, whose choices influence the social perception of divine guidance and women's legal and moral status.

### **Findings**

- The study finds that translation significantly affects perceptions of women's rights and agency in the Qur'an.
- Asad consistently foregrounds moral equality, fairness, and ethical accountability, framing men and women as partners bound by justice, while also highlighting personal responsibility in marriage, inheritance, and social conduct.

- Al-Hilali, though faithful to classical jurisprudence, emphasizes male authority, legal prescriptions, and hierarchical norms, portraying women's rights within the limits of traditional law.
- The comparative analysis shows that even when both translations convey the same legal content, the framing, tone, and lexical choices either enhance women's autonomy and dignity or reinforce patriarchal norms.
- This indicates that translation is a powerful mediator between the Qur'an's ethical spirit and contemporary understandings of gender justice.

### Significance of the Study

This study contributes to global gender justice discourse by demonstrating how Qur'anic translations shape perceptions of women's rights in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts. By comparing Asad and Al-Hilali, it shows that translational choices can either empower women and reflect ethical principles or reinforce patriarchal hierarchies. The research highlights translation as an essential factor in mediating Qur'anic meaning, authority, and social understanding, thereby filling a scholarly gap in gender-focused translation studies. It underscores the need for critically aware translations that honor the Qur'an's legal framework while promoting justice, dignity, and equity, providing both scholars and readers with tools to engage with Islamic texts responsibly in the modern world.

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