

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

AGGRESSIVE (MIS)TRANSLATIONS OF THE QURAN TO ENSLAVE WOMEN

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This is a matter that is not so readily observable whilst reading translations and even to casual Arabic speaking readers. However, once one is alerted to the problem and cross-referencing is made, the problem is instantly recognised.

Regular commentaries (Tafsir) only accentuate the problem as they rely on traditions influenced by theology and bury the true essence of the Quranic passages. Only a good few commentators include supporting notes which alert the reader to the literal rendering of the Quranic passages.

(1) ENEMIES ARE FOUND AMONGST YOUR WIVES AND CHILDREN

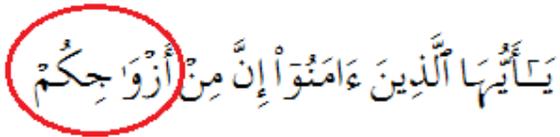
A female reader of the Quran may rightly question: What about husbands? Are they excluded from being enemies or problematic? Is it only wives that are enemies, problematic or unrighteous?

There are many traditions found in [Islamic secondary sources](#) that are derogatory and demeaning to women. Women are portrayed as those that can cause harm, will be the greater occupants of hell and can be enemies for men.

A supporting Quranic verse is sometimes cited to corroborate this position:

064.014

"O ye who believe! Indeed! **among your wives (Arabic: Azwajikum)** and your children there are enemies for you, therefore beware of them. And if ye pardon and overlook and forgive, then Indeed! God is Forgiving, Merciful"

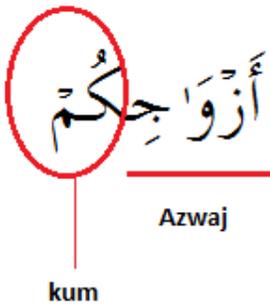


يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ

Azwajikum

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The word that is commonly mistranslated as 'wives' in this verse is Azwaj. This word is a plural noun and is masculine. Plural masculine nouns in classical Arabic can include **both** men and women. The word Azwaj means '**spouse**' and is **not** restricted to wives.



أَزْوَاجِكُمْ

Azwaj

kum

Illustration - Joseph Islam

'Azwaj' is a genitive masculine plural noun.

'kum' is a 2nd person masculine plural possessive pronoun

The root of the word 'Azواج' is **Zay-Waw-Jiim** which means to couple, join, pair, wed, unite, marriage, a pair or spouse.

Therefore, the context (much like English) determines the gender of the spouse. So if a man is being spoken to, his spouse would be 'female' and if a female is being spoken to, her spouse would be 'male'. A generic reference to spouse would include both males and females.

In this Quranic verse, the reference is to all believers and the Arabic word 'Azواجikum' is a reference to both **men** and **women**. Therefore, the verse informs the reader that amongst one's **spouses** (husbands and wives) and children, there will be those that one must remain vigilant of.

Restricting this to a reference to 'wives' is unwarranted by both the Arabic word usage and context.

(2) WOMEN SHOULD STAY FIXED AT HOME

There are many women that contribute to society and are righteous women. They work hard as professionals and at home. Some are doctors, nurses, teachers, helpers and those that spread the truth of God to people. Every day mothers move about freely transporting their children to school and fulfil all family obligations to maintain a crucial stability indicative of an efficient home. Even in ancient history, there have been women rulers that have reigned over the lands (Queen of 'Saba' (Sheba) 27:23)

These are responsible women whose contributions are a vital function of a healthy society.

Unfortunately, some passages of the Quran are mistranslated to prove that women should stay at home.

(i) SA'IHATIN - Move About or Fast?

Let us have a look at the word 'Sa'ihatin' in 66.5 and how it is used in a popular translation:

066:005

"It may happen that his Lord, if he divorce you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive to Allah (God), believing, pious, penitent, devout, **inclined to fasting (Sa'ihatin)**, widows and maids"

(Translation of Allah to God - Brackets mine)

مُسْلِمَاتٌ مُؤْمِنَاتٌ قَانِتَاتٌ تَائِبَاتٌ عَابِدَاتٌ سَائِحَاتٌ ثَيِّبَاتٌ وَأَبْكَارًا

Sa'ihatin

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Carefully note the word used for fasting (Sa'ihatin) which has been translated to represent its most restrictive metaphorical usage.

What may come as a surprise to many is that the word 'Sa'ihatin' in the Quran **literally** and **primarily** means:

To travel/journey/tour. Saihun means a devotee, wandering, one who travels freely.

This is also confirmed by classical usage which one can ascertain from the best lexicons.

Root: Siin-Ya-Ha

surface of the earth. (S, A, Mgh, K.) — And hence, (TA,) سَاحٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ, (S, A, Mṣb,) aor. as above, (S, Mṣb,) inf. n. سَيَاحَةٌ, (A,) or سَيَّحٌ, (Mṣb,) or both, and سَيَّحٌ and سَيَّحَانٌ, (S, K,) said of a man, (A,) He went, or journeyed, through the land, or earth, (S, L, K, &c.,) for the purpose of devoting himself to religious services or exercises: (L, K:) or in this restricted

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

The root of this word is only found used in two other occasions in the Quran:

9.112 (Saihun - generic) and 9.2 (Fasihu).

009:112

“Those that turn (to God) in repentance; that serve Him, and praise Him; **that wander in devotion to the cause of God (Arabic: Sa'ihuna)**; that bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer; that enjoin good and forbid evil; and observe the limit set by God (These do rejoice). So proclaim the glad tidings to the Believers”

الْحَامِدُونَ السَّائِحُونَ الرَّاكِعُونَ الْأَمْرُونَ

Sa'ihuna

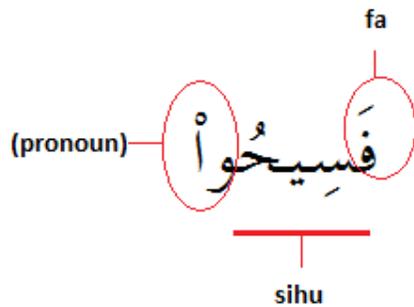
Illustration - Joseph Islam

009:002

“**Travel freely (Arabic: Fasihu)** in the land four months, and know that ye cannot escape God and that God will confound the disbelievers”

فَسِيحُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ

Fasihu



Illustrations - Joseph Islam

So what has happened and why is this term being mistranslated and / or restricted when it comes to women?

The linkage with fasting is only a metaphorical one as the earliest lexicons and good commentaries point out. It is **not** a literal meaning as the Quran confirms in other passages.

The expression 'As-Saihun' (those that wander) is attributed to 'As-Sa'imun' (those who fast) and is justified metaphorically by insinuating that those that fast deprive themselves of worldly enjoyments similar to one who wanders about the earth. However, early authorities did not necessarily agree with this rendering and other early authorities preferred the original significant meaning as those that wander about in the cause of God, which is consistent with the other usages found in the Quran.

This also raises the question that if verse 66:5 is a reference to the Prophet's wives but are being allowed to move about, then what about believing women who are not necessarily as restricted as the Prophet's wives?

(ii) STAY FIXED IN YOUR HOME?

Another aggressive rendering and supported by [later traditions and theology](#) is the rendering of the following Quranic verse:

033.033

“Stay (Arabic: Qarna) in your homes and do not display your finery as women used to do in the days of ignorance (pre-Islamic days); establish Prayer, pay Zakah, and obey God and His Messenger. O People of the House, God only intends to remove uncleanness from you and to purify you completely”

Firstly, the above passage is a reference particular to the Prophet's wives. If this is the case, a general reading of the above translation would cause conflict with the above word 'Sahitun' in verse 66.5, where righteous movement is clearly permissible.

Is it plausible to accept that the Prophet's wives were confined to their homes and did not travel or spread the word of Islam or for any other purpose? Does this aggressive rendering of the verse then conflict with 66.5?

The Arabic word used is 'Qarna'

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ
Qarna

[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

So what does the word 'Qarna' mean?

The word is made of the Root Q-R-R

Qaf-Ra-Ra = To remain quiet, be steadfast, be firm, refresh, be stable, affirm, agree, settle, last.
Qarar - stability, a fixed or secure place, depository, place ahead

This sense of stability and safe lodging is clear from a reading of the lexicons and its uses in the Quran. Let us see how this root Q-R-R is used in other Quranic passages:

023:013	Safe lodging of sperm
023:050	Safety and shelter for Mary and Prophet Jesus ^(pbut)
027:061	The earth as a place of residence
040:039	The hereafter as an enduring home
040:064	The earth as a resting place

Many commentators thus see this word not in its restrictive aggressive form to restrict complete movement but as one to settle down, live peacefully, sit with dignity, cause to rest and remain in a secure lodging. The aggressive rendering to restrict women completely and subject them to their homes completely is not warranted by the Quran.

FINAL THOUGHTS

One should remain vigilant with passages that seem to give a bias. There are numerous passages of the Quran that are misrepresented or worse still, mistranslated to give an extremely restrictive 'male-centric' view. The Quran appeals to both men and women and is a dialogue for all those that give ear. Unfortunately, much of theology has developed to support a male bias and the Quran is thus viewed from the eyes of (primarily ancient) men. In many passages, words become rendered to support these views.

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 4, Page 1482

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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