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**Alternative Readings of Daraja: Rendering the  
Meaning of Verse (2:228) in Selected English**

**Translations of the Qur'an**

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## INTRODUCTION

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  
 (228)

“Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three periods. And it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the Last Day. Meanwhile, their husbands have the better right to take them back, if they desire reconciliation. And women have rights similar to their obligations, according to what is fair. But men have a degree over them. God is Mighty and Wise.”  
 (Itani, 2012, p. 18)

The most controversial sentence in verse (2:228) has for long been been *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* (and men have a degree in comparison to them (feminine pronoun)). Hierarchal understandings of the ambiguous term *دَرَجَةٌ* (*daraja* / degree) in this verse is the main source of debate among scholars who enriched the literature with discussions of the matter over the years reaching different conclusions. Some view *daraja* as a superior and hierarchal rank divinely bestowed upon men over women while others challenge this interpretation. Translations produced by women or with contributions of women are those by: Umm Muhammad (2004), Laleh Bakhtiar (2009) and Mohamed Ahmed and Samira Ahmed (1995). The rest of the selected translations are done by Alexander Ross (1649), George Sale (1734), J. M. Rodwell (1915), Richard Bell (1937), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1937), Abdel Khalek Abu-Shabanah (1993), Muhammad Al-Hilali

and Muhammad Khan (1417 Hijri), M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2005) N. J. Dawood (2006), Usama Dakdok (2009), Talal Itani (2012), and Fazlollah Nikayin (2017)

**Key words:** Qur'an translations, rewriting, ideology, *daraja*

### **Aim of the study**

These men and women translators render *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* in an ideologically diverse manner, and their texts span over a period of 300 years. Thus, the objective of the study is to explore how the selected translators' gender, ideology and culture have inspired their translation choices. With this aim, the significance of this study lies in utilizing the rewriting theory to analyze the selected translations, which to the best of my knowledge, has never been the subject of any previous study. This theoretical framework serves to view the translations from five important perspectives, particularly ideology, patronage, poetics, universe of discourse and the differences between the source and target languages. These rewriting constraints give great insight into how and why the translators examined in this paper "rewrite" the verse in one way and not the other.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent do the selected translations reflect hierarchal readings?
2. Why do the selected translations present different interpretations of the degree in marital relations?

### **Literature Review of Commentaries on Verse (2:228)**

Classical commentators of the Qur'an, for the most part, interpret the degree as a higher rank men enjoy over women. Al Hafiz Ibn Kathir (2006), for example, explains the degree as a virtue of creation, manners, position, adherence to orders, spending, taking care of affairs, and supremacy both here in this worldly life and in the Hereafter (Vol. 1, p. 293). Similarly, Abi Abdullah Al-Qurtubi (2006) views the degree as a preference for men over women and a right

more mandatory on the part of a wife towards her husband than the reverse (Vol. 1, p. 54). The degree in Abd Al-Rahman Al-Saadi's opinion as well (1422 Hijri) is loftiness, presidency and an additional duty of wives towards their husbands (Vol. 1, p. 170).

In modern and contemporary times, this degree that husbands have over wives gradually started to acquire meanings challenging these hierarchal conceptions of the term. Muhammad Al-Sharawi (1991) explains it in the context of *qiwama*, which he defines as responsibility, neither authority nor control (p. 988). The Islamic feminist, Amina Wadud (1999), limits the degree to cases of divorce, in which the husband is granted the power to divorce his wife, while a wife cannot divorce her husband without a judicial intervention (p. 68). The contemporary scholar, Khaled Abou El-Fadl (2006), illustrates that *daraja* is referred to within the scope of the waiting period women have to bear before remarrying "to verify pregnancy and to leave open the opportunity for reconciliation (2:228)", which does not apply to men (p. 182). As Abou El-Fadl (2006) puts it "pregnancy and motherhood is an added burden upon women, . . . and men have a degree over women by the virtue of physiology" (p. 182). Along those lines, Abu Jafar Al-Tabari (1994) perceives *daraja* from a pro-women perspective. Although a classical exegetist, he explains *daraja* as a husband's overlooking and waiving some of his rights while performing all his duties towards his wife. Al-Tabari (1994) bases this reading of the verse on Ibn Abas's statement: "I don't like to exhaust all my rights over my wife" (p. 33). Al-Tabari (1994) states that "وإن كان ظاهره ظاهر الخبر، فمعناه معنى ندب الرجال إلى الأخذ على النساء" (Vol. 2, p. 33): "Though the apparent meaning appears to be a statement of fact, it really means urging men

to aspire to reach this level of extra virtue” (Abou-Bakr & Al-Sharmani, Trans., 2020, p. 43). Likewise, Fatma Al-Baguri (2022), a professor at Al-Azhar University, champions Ibn Abbas’s explanation of the degree, and accepts its interpretation as *qiwama* too (pp. 162-163).

Omaima Abou-Bakr and Mulki Al-Sharmani (2020) as well support Al-Ṭabari’s explanation, affirming that the degree is not an inherent superior trait, but a moral standard reached by behaving in a certain way (p. 43). They believe in “the verse’s ethico-egalitarian intentions”, meaning that the ethical and egalitarian objective of the verse “centres on fairness (*bi’l-ma’rūf*) and moral reciprocity” (p. 44). That is, as the verse states “the rights of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands’] rights with regard to them” (cited in Abou-Bakr & Al-Sharmani, 2020, p. 43).

Seeking such justice-based readings of the verse, Rim Hassen (2012) proposes that *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* be rendered into “And husbands *have an advantage in comparison with wives*” (p. 221, emphasis in original). To avoid generalizations in the relation between men and women, she stresses that the words *husbands* and *wives* be used instead. Also, her choice of *in comparison with* rather than *over* and *above* is intended to prevent hierarchal conceptions of the degree.

As this discussion demonstrates, *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* has embraced different meanings endorsed by scholars with diverse ideological backgrounds. The analysis is therefore done with the aim of finding out in what ways the selected translators perceive *daraja* in the relation between husbands and wives in the Muslim society, and to what extent the translations are influenced by culture with the passage

of time. In fact, society and culture can have an impact on translators' ideology, and consequently on how they understand the very nature of this *daraja*. That is to say, the selected translations which cover a period of over 300 years can be viewed from a cultural and ideological viewpoint. In a broad sense, this is termed the cultural turn in translation studies, which gave birth to Lefevere's rewriting theory (1992a).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (1990) concentrate on the constraints culture imposes on translation, paying attention to issues of context, history and customs (p. 11, Enani, 2003, p. 240). Here, culture is perceived as the literary system environment (Lefevere, 2014, p. 226), and there are five constraints affecting how translators render texts as Lefevere (1992a) determines them.

Rewriting constraints are ideology, poetics, patronage, differences between source and target languages and the universe of discourse. Lefevere (1992a) sees poetics as "literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols" as well as the role literature plays in the social system (p. 26). Translators could abide by the prevalent poetics or work beyond its constraints (p. 13). For patronage, it can be in the form of individuals or institutions, and has the power to champion or challenge given translations (Lefevere, 1992a, p. 15). Patronage is fundamentally ideological, meaning that patrons examine translators' ideologies (Hatim and Munday, 2004, p. 101) so as to ensure that translated products align with their views. When it comes to ideology, Lefevere (1992a) defines it in the same manner as Fredrick Jameson does (1974): "that grillwork of form, convention, and belief which orders our actions" (p. 16). Ideology can be the translator's ideology or the patron's (Lefevere, 1992a, p. 41).

The universe of discourse refers to the “concepts, ideologies, persons, and objects”, which belong to a certain culture (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1992, p. 35). The universe of discourse is also the cultural script, particularly the behavior the target readers are inclined to accept (Lefevere, 1992a, p. 87). What is exclusive to translation in the rewriting theory is the difference between the source and target languages (Chesterman, 2016, p. 77).

These rewriting constraints essentially question the pursuit of equivalence between the source and target texts. Lefevere (1992b) found that equivalence was mainly focused on the word level (p. 7). The concept of adequacy, in contrast, when compared with the high standards of equivalence, refers to a relation between the source and target texts that is looser and not as absolute (Shuttleworth and Cowie, 2014, p. 5). On this view, a translation may be adequate, even if it does not reproduce the original’s lexemes. An example given by Muhammad Enani (2005) is the translation of “رحم الله شوقي إذ قال” into “How right Shawqi was to say” (p. 289). Here, adequacy replaces equivalence (Enani, 2003, p. 137). That is to say, within the rewriting theory, functioning outside equivalence boundaries produces a text rewritten in a way reproducing the sense rather than the terms under the rewriting constraints.

Lefevere’s rewriting theory is one consequence of revisiting equivalence, with ideology being its fundamental constraint that guides the translation process. Knowing that translation is basically an interpretation of the original, its ideological value can normally be questioned. The same holds true for the translation of the Qur’an, which is an interpretation based on a specific understanding that carries with it a certain ideological stance (Baker & Saldanha, 2011, p.



227). The Qur'an has terms with no corresponding equivalents in English (Enani, 2000, p. 18), and communicating the meaning may transfer with its ideological currents. Ideology might as well play a part in the translation process even when equivalent terms for *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* exist in the target language, but the translator rejects them using others instead. This is investigated in the analysis and discussion of the following translations.

### Analysis and Discussion of the Translated Texts

[ سورة البقرة ٢٢٨ ] ﴿وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ﴾

#### Ali's Translation (1937)

“And women shall have rights

Similar to the rights

Against them, according

To what is equitable,

But men have a degree

(Of advantage) over them<sup>255</sup>” (p. 90)

#### Footnote

“255 The difference in economic position between the sexes makes the man's rights and liabilities a little greater than the woman's. Q IV 34 refers to the duty of the man to maintain the woman, and to a certain difference in nature between the sexes. Subject to this, the sexes are on terms of equality in law and in certain matters the weaker sex is entitled to special protection” (p. 90)

Unlike the Qur'anic choice, the translator uses *but* instead of *and* to render the conjunction *و* (and) in *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ*. This communicates a contradiction between his translation of *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ*: “And women shall have rights Similar to the rights Against them,

according To what is equitable” and his translation of *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ* *دَرَجَةٌ*: “But men have a degree (Of advantage) over them”. The two words *similar* and *equitable*, emphasize similarity of rights, and put men and women on an equal footing, with neither partner having an advantage over the other. Nevertheless, the use of *but* shows that this egalitarian view is negated by “But men have a degree (Of advantage) over them”. Furthermore, rewriting *عَلَيْهِنَّ* into *over* in “But men have a degree (Of advantage) over them” carries a hierarchal conception of the degree. These translation choices can be accounted for in light of what Ali mentions in the introduction when it comes to word choices. He holds that “[i]n choosing an English word for an Arabic word a translator necessarily exercises his own judgment and may be unconsciously expressing a point of view, but that is inevitable” (p. v). This indicates that it is not the rewriting constraint of the matter of difference between the source language and the target language, but it is the rewriting constraint of ideology that controlled Ali’s rewritten text.

Ali’s ideology is apparent in the translation of *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* into “But men have a degree (Of advantage) over them”, which accentuates the degree referred to in the verse. Ali visibly intervenes in the text inserting *Of advantage* between parentheses to underscore the degree men enjoy over women, and to suggest that men are more privileged than women.

The translator then mediates again to add a footnote clarifying his conception of *daraja*. One meaning that draws the most attention is how Ali interprets the degree in the footnote, not as many more

responsibilities only, but as many more rights granted to men. He attributes this to the difference in financial status between men and women. He holds that “[t]he difference in economic position between the sexes makes the man’s rights and liabilities a little greater than the woman’s” (p. 90). This makes an assumption that men’s financial state is typically higher than women’s, a privilege, affording men extra responsibilities but entitling them to more rights.

In the same footnote, the translator clarifies what he means by “[t]he difference in economic position between the sexes” through his reference to verse (4:34), which he maintains that it “refers to the duty of the man to maintain the woman”. He then mentions that “the weaker sex is entitled to special protection”. This shows that Ali interprets *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ* in light of *وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ*, which he renders into “Men are the protectors And maintainers of women” (p. 113). Hence Ali’s rendition of *وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ* fits in Al-Sharawi’s (1991) and Al-Baguri’s (2022) interpretation of *daraja* as *qiwama*.

On a patronage ground, Saudi Arabia awarded Ali’s translation patronage, which resulted in its extensive accessibility and adherence to the interpretation broadly accepted in Saudi Arabia (Mohammed, 2005, pp. 58-71). Since patronage is essentially ideological, it might be assumed that Ali’s conception of the nature of the relation between men and women in Islamic cultures complied with the ideology prevalent in Saudi Arabia at the time of the production of the translation in 1937. To conclude, both ideology and patronage have influenced Ali’s rendition. On that note, Ali’s translation has, in turn, inspired Nikayin’s Translation.

### Nikayin's Translation (2017)

“And there are rights for women similar  
To those that seem against them, and there is  
For men a certain rank above them;<sup>128</sup>”

#### Footnote

“128. Perhaps the difference in economic position makes the man's responsibilities, liabilities and rights a little greater than woman's. The two sexes are on terms of equality in Law, but in certain matters, the weaker party is entitled to special protection (Yousuf Ali)”.

Nikayin translates *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ* into “For men a certain rank above them”. He quotes part of Ali's footnote, but differs in the rendition of *دَرَجَةٌ*. Nikayin's translation of *دَرَجَةٌ* into *a certain rank* does not specify what this rank exactly is, and the omission of the reference to verse (4:34) in Ali's footnote eliminates an essential aspect, namely husbands' financial responsibility towards their wives. On an ideological basis, by opting for the lexical items rank and above, Nikayin delineates a hierarchy. That is, according to Merriam-webster dictionary, rank is “a grade of official standing in a hierarchy”, and it is “a degree or position of dignity, eminence, or excellence : **DISTINCTION**” (emphasis in original). Also, in Cambridge dictionary, rank denotes “a position in an organization, such as the army, showing the importance of the person having it”. Above means “superior to (as in rank, quality, or degree)” (Merriam-webster dictionary). Instead of above, Hassen (2012) recommends using in comparison with to avoid “a hierarchal ranking in English” (p. 221). Thus, Nikayin's choices of rank and above put men and women in his translation in a ranking system like that embraced in an

army or an organization, as the dictionary meanings suggest, with men on the top of the scale.

These choices of certain and rank may also be explained in poetical terms. Nikayin's translation, Quran: A poetic translation from the original, focuses mainly on its poetic style. Although the translator makes use of Ali's interpretative approach, he criticizes Ali's translation for being boring and prosaic. Nikayin states that he endeavors to conform to the poetics of the target culture, particularly the iambic, and to function beyond the original's stylistics, since they are not applicable in English (forward).

Within this framework, Nikayin may have added the word certain which does not exist in the original in order to keep the rhythm in his translation: "And there are rights for women similar To those that seem against them, and there is For men a certain rank above them". Likewise, Nikayin may have opted for the word rank in "For men a certain rank" to keep the rhythm in "their husbands would do better, To take them back", his translation of *وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ*. In brief, poetics is one of the main factors that controls Nikayin's translation. Like Nikayin's translation, Bell's translation opts for rank, but the prevalent rewriting factor is ideology.

#### **Bell's Translation (1937)**

"Divorce ; possibly of same date as 224 f."

"Divorced women wait by themselves three courses, nor is it permissible for them to conceal what Allah hath created in their wombs,<sup>1</sup> if they have believed in Allah and the Last Day. Their husbands have the best right to restore them within that period, if they wish to set things right, and in reputable dealing they have the same right as is exercised over them,<sup>2</sup> though the men have a rank above them ; Allah is sublime, wise." (Bell, 1937, p. 32)

**Footnote**

“<sup>1</sup> If they are pregnant.”

“<sup>2</sup> The intention would appear to be that the spouses should mutually for three months keep the way open for the resumption of marital relations.” (p. 32)

Similar to Nikayin, Bell settles on *a rank* to render دَرَجَةٌ. His translation, “though the men have a rank above them” is offered with no clarification in a footnote, though. Likewise, in his discussion of the verse in his book *Introduction to the Qur’an*, Bell (1953) mentions nothing about the meaning of *daraja*, but states that “the [l]egislation of II, 228 ff. left the *right* [emphasis added] of divorce in the hands of the man, but was intended to secure adequate time for reflection and fair treatment of the women if divorce should be ultimately resolved upon” (p. 169). In this commentary, Bell talks about men’s right to divorce their wives, showing that it is in the best interest of women.

After discussing in his book a man’s right to divorce his wife, Bell tackles the chances of reestablishing spousal relations. He mentions that during the three-months waiting period, reconciliation may take place (p. 169). This meaning is similar to the interpretation he supplies in a footnote for his translation of a sentence in the verse under analysis: وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ. He renders it into “Their husbands have the best right to restore them within that period, if they wish to set things right, and in reputable dealing they have the same right as is exercised over them”, inserting the footnote: “[t]he intention would appear to be that the spouses should mutually [emphasis added] for three months keep the way open for the resumption of marital relations” (p. 32). Here, Bell

maintains that both a husband and his wife are to reciprocally allow for reconciliation.

This is followed by the translation of *وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ* into “though the men have a rank above them”. Using though to link the two ideas, mutual contribution to reconciliation and men’s rank, may mean that while a couple should together consider reconciliation, the decision to revoke divorce is only in the husband’s hands. Based on this argument, Bell’s translation of *دَرَجَةٌ* into rank may be a reference to a husband’s exclusive right to retract divorce and get back together with his wife, especially that in his book, Bell (1953) holds that the woman may be taken back if [emphasis added] the husband relents” (p. 169).

All in all, the main rewriting constraint in Bell’s translation is ideology. Although Bell opts for a word that has hierarchal connotations, it may only be an allusion to a husband’s right to rescind divorce, as his translation and his book suggest. Bell’s limitation of daraja to divorce complies with Wadud’s (1999) interpretation, where she holds that “the advantage men have is that of being individually able to pronounce divorce against their wives without arbitration or assistance (p. 68). Abou El-Fadl (2006) as well explains daraja in divorce cases, but restricts it to “the waiting period imposed upon women to verify pregnancy and to leave open the opportunity for reconciliation” (p. 182). Abdel Haleem’s translation, in a similar manner, puts the degree in the context of divorce, but the translator also interprets the term as qiwama.

#### **Abdel Haleem’s Translation (2005)**

“Wives have [rights] similar to their [obligations], according to what is recognized to be fair, and husbands have a degree [of right] over them.” (p. 26)

Abdel Haleem renders *وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ* into “and husbands have a degree [of right] over them”, with no further information in a footnote about what this right is. However, he explains it in two ways in the introduction to his translation and in his book, *Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Styles* (2001).

Abdel Haleem’s insertion of of right between brackets in his translation “and husbands have a degree [of right] over them” conveys the meaning that husbands have one more right over wives, a mediation that may not be seen as pro-women. Nevertheless, in the introduction to the translation, Abdel Haleem explains that misinterpretations of this verse lower the position of Muslim women compared to men, while in fact the verse addresses husbands and wives, particularly in the context of divorce (p. xxv). As a consequence, the translator uses the words husbands and wives, avoiding the general terms men and women, just as Hassen (2012) recommends, but he did not illustrate exactly what degree of right husbands have in instances of divorce. Abdel Haleem’s narrowing down of the meaning of *daraja* to the question of divorce is in line with Abou El-Fadl’s (2006) and Wadud’s (1999) explanation of *وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ*.

Seen from a different angle, in his book, *Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Styles*, Abdel Haleem (2001) states that the degree refers to the role of *qiwama*, which he defines as “the husband’s responsibility to maintain and look after his wife” (p. 50). This understanding is also endorsed by Al-Baguri (2022) and Al-Sharawi (1991). Overall, Abdel Haleem’s goal is to subvert misconceptions associated with the interpretations of verse (2:228) by restricting the



degree to marital life and divorce. In a similar fashion, Al-Hilali and Khan's translation limits the degree to a man's responsibility in spousal relations, but does not regard interpretations pertaining to divorce.

**Al-Hilali and Khan's Translation (1417 Hijri)**

“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.” (p. 49)

Al-Hilali and Khan translate *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* into “but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them”. In order to determine what the degree men have over women is, the translators intervene in the text with a comment in parentheses, particularly “(of responsibility)”. Leaving this responsibility open to interpretation without specification generalizes the meaning and its application in marital relations. However, it can be deduced that one aspect of this responsibility covers providing financially for women. To illustrate, From Al-Hilali and Khan's translation of *وَلَهُنَّ* in a preceding part of the same verse into “And they (women) have rights (over their husbands as regards living expenses)”, it appears that the degree of responsibility is partly of a financial nature.

The translators' use of but to translate *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* in “but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them” shows that men have more responsibilities than just the finances. The very nature of this responsibility becomes clearer when seen in light of Al-Hilali and Khan's translation of *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ* *وَيَمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ* in verse (4:34) into “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel

the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means” (p. 113). This translation defines a husband’s responsibility towards his wife to mean protection and financial provision. The similarity between the translations of the two verses (2:228) and (4:34) indicates that the translators may have intended to put the degree in the context of qiwama.

This view of the degree as qiwama matches Al-Sharawi’s (1991) and Al-Baguri’s (2022) explanation of *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ*. This understanding may also be representative of the ideology that was dominant in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the time of the production of the translation because Al-Hilali and Khan’s translation was awarded the patronage of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da’wah and Guidance in Saudi Arabia (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1417 Hijri, p. II). The rewriting factors in this translation are hence patronage and ideology. In the case of Abu-Shabanah’s translation, it is chiefly patronage that affected the perception of the degree as responsibility.

#### **Abu-Shabanah’s Translation (1993)**

“And women have as much rights as they have of obligations in equity, and men are a step higher than they are in the scale of responsibility,” (p. 52)

Abu-Shabanah’s rendition of *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* into “and men are a step higher than they are in the scale of responsibility” is inspired by the interpretation offered in *Al Montakhab fi tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Karim* (1993). This is the tafsir authored by the Committee of the Qur’an and Sunna in the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Egypt to be translated (Al-Bayyomi, 2017, pp. 114-115). In the

introduction to the translation, Muhammad Mahgoob (1993) asserts that the translation is based on the tafsir, and is not left to the translator's own ideological views (p. 15). The interpretation the tafsir provides reads: "وللرجال عليهن درجة الرعاية والمحافظة على الحياة الزوجية وشئون الأولاد" (p. 53): (men have a degree over women of care and protection of matrimonial life and children's affairs).

Under the influence of the patronizing organization, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, both Al Montakhab's interpretation and Abu-Shabanah's translation show that daraja is read within the framework of responsibility. The tafsir revolves around a husband's caring, protecting and shouldering the responsibility of his wife and children. Abu-Shabanah addresses this point of responsibility too, but the way he words the translation comes out a little as an establishment of a hierarchal construct of liabilities. What colors this image in his translation, "and men are a step higher than they are in the scale of responsibility", is the choice of a step higher, and the scale of responsibility.

This idea of responsibility is also found in Abu-Shabanah's translation of الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ in verse (4:34): "Men are the tutelary guardians of women's interests and welfare". The translation is influenced by the tafsir Abu-Shabanah translates as well, which interprets the expression as "الرجال لهم حق الصيانة والرعاية للنساء والقيام بشؤونهن" (p. 116): (Men are entitled to maintain and care for women, in addition to taking care of their affairs). Thus, both qiwama and daraja are perceived as responsibilities men should afford. Generally, Abu-Shabanah's translation does not present husbands as superior to their wives, but principally focuses on husbands' roles and responsibilities, and is principally done in this manner owing to the

rewriting constraint of patronage. Umm Muhammad's translation, on the other hand, understands the degree as responsibility and authority too.

### **Umm Muhammad's Translation (2004)**

“And due to them [i.e., the wives] is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable.<sup>76</sup> But the men [i.e., husbands] have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority].” (p. 33)

### **Footnote**

<sup>76</sup>“The wife has specific rights upon her husband, just as the husband has rights upon her” (p. 33).

Umm Muhammad incorporates husbands' liabilities and authoritarian position over their wives into her “rewritten” verse. This is done with clear visibility and intervention in the text via a bracketed commentary in her translation: “But the men [i.e., husbands] have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]”. In order to negate the conception that all men have a degree above all women, the translator narrows down the meaning of men to husbands by bracketing husbands after men: “the men [i.e., husbands]”.

Nevertheless, Umm Muhammad's use of but in “But the men [i.e., husbands] have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]” opposes the meaning set up earlier in her translation of *وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْنَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ*. This expression is rendered as “And due to them [i.e., the wives] is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable”, with a footnote: “The wife has specific rights upon her husband, just as the husband has rights upon her” (p. 33). After establishing this egalitarian view of gender, the translator decides to challenge it and advocate male superiority and conservative

patriarchal interpretations in “But the men [i.e., husbands] have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]”.

This struggle between advocating women’s rights and subscribing to the idea of a husband’s authoritarian behavior towards his wife can be accounted for in light of Umm Muhammad’s identity suppression and invisibility as the translator of Saheeh International, which was granted the patronage of a conservative entity. To illustrate, Rim Hassen (2012) maintains that the translator is an American woman revert who rendered the Qur’an under the pseudonym Umm Muhammad (p. 79). On patronage basis, Saheeh International was granted the patronage of AI-Muntada al-Islami Trust, a conservative religious organization that embraces the “principles of Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamah [followers of the Sunnah]” (pp. 113-116). This conception of daraja as authority is also advocated in some of the classical exegeses of the Qur’an. In sum, the power of patronage, together with Umm Muhammad’s ideology, may have impacted the translation choices and led to a patriarchal version of the verse. For Sale’s translation, it is sheer ideology, both of Sale and classical exegetists, that led to a text disseminating an understanding of the degree as a superiority.

#### **Sale’s Translation (1734)**

“The women ought also to behave towards their husbands in like manner as their husbands should behave towards them, according to what is just: but the men ought to have a superiority over them.” (pp. 26-27)

Sale directly affirms male supremacy with his translation of **وَالرِّجَالُ** **عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ** into “but the men ought to have a superiority over them”. His use of but instead of and presents this phrase as a contradictory statement to what precedes it: “The women ought also to behave

towards their husbands in like manner as their husbands should behave towards them, according to what is just” (1734, pp. 26-27; emphasis in original). Following this translation of *وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ* by “but the men ought to have a superiority over them” communicates the meaning that while spouses should behave justly towards each other, men have the permission to behave in a superior manner.

Sale’s vision of Muslim spousal relations is reflected in the same manner in his rendition of *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ*. He “rewrites” this first segment of verse (4:34) into “Men shall have the pre-eminence above women, because of those advantages wherein GoD hath caused the one of them to excel the other” (1734, p. 65; emphasis in original). In addition to the choice of excel, advantages and pre-eminence: “the quality or state of being preeminent: **SUPERIORITY**” (Merriam-webster dictionary; emphasis in original), Sale adds a footnote stressing the same idea he adopts in his translation of *وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ*. His footnote under verse (4:34) reads:

Because of those advantages wherein GoD hath Caused the one to excel the other;] Such as superior understanding and strength, and the other privileges of the male sex, which enjoys the dignities in church and state, goes to war in defence of GoD’s true religion, and claims a double share of their deceased ancestors estates (1734, p. 65; emphasis in original)

This footnote which numerates reasons for why the male gender is more superior than females is taken, as Sales mentions, from tafsir Al Beidawi (p. 65). In fact, to justify his translation choices. Sale, in the introduction to his translation, holds that he relies on the most trusted

exegeses of the Qur'an, quoting them mostly in their own words (p. vii). This indicates that the translation Sale presents for **وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ** with its hierarchal meaning is not to be blamed only on Sale's ideology or how he perceives the universe of discourse of the source text, but on traditional patriarchal interpretations circulated in some of the classical tafsirs as well. Dakdok's hierarchal translation, on the other hand, springs mainly from his antagonistic attitude to Islam.

#### **Dakdok's Translation (2009)**

"And they have rights similar to the one over them in fairness. And to the men, a higher degree than them".

In his translation of **الرِّجَالِ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ** in verse (4:34), Dakdok adds the subheading: "**Men are superior to women**" (emphasis in original), and advises his readers to link verse (4:34) to verse (2:228), the one under study. Along similar lines, in their interpretation of the notion of qiwama in verse (4:34), "jurists expanded the concept through linking it to darajah (degree) in Qur'anic verse 2:228 and selected ahadith", with the result of constructing hierarchy, patriarchy and men's superiority over women (Abou-Bakr, 2015, p. 86).

Adopting a similar point of view, Dakdok renders **وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ** into "And to the men, a higher degree than them". With the insertion of the word higher whose Arabic equivalent does not exist in the verse, the translator amplifies the degree, adding a hierarchal perspective to the term. Dakdok's intervention in verse (2:228) affirms the superiority of men to women as the subheading of his translated verse (4:34) states. These translation choices arise from Dakdok's anti-Islam ideological position that he openly declares in the introductory pages to his translation and in his numerous YouTube videos. The same notion of superiority is presented in verse (4:34) in

Rodwell's translation, which gives insight into his rendition of verse (2:228).

### **Rodwell's Translation (1915)**

“And it is for the women to act as they (the husbands) act by them, in all fairness; but the men are a step above them.” (p. 362)

In Rodwell's translation: “but the men are a step above them”, the word step could be deemed a literal translation of *دَرَجَةٌ*. Yet, its combination with above and but rather than and may carry a hierarchal understanding of *daraja*, especially when considered with the translation of *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ*. Rodwell “rewrote” this part of verse (4:34) in a manner showing that men are naturally superior to women: “Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other” (p. 415). This conception of gender relations is in fact propagated in traditional exegetical literature which construct hierarchal gender rights (Abou-Bakr & Al-Sharmani, 2020, p. 23). To sum up, Rodwell's lexical choices together with the translation of verse (4:34) seem to indicate that ideology and subjective perception of the universe of discourse of the original have come into play. Similarly, Dawood's interpretation of *qiwama* as authority sheds light on how he perceives the degree.

### **Dawood's Translation (2006)**

“Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a status above women.” (p. 35)

Dawood chooses to render *دَرَجَةٌ* into a status. Status is “your social or professional rank or position, considered in relation to other people (Longman dictionary). Although in the introduction to his translation



Dawood (2006) asserts that Allah orders people to practice kindness with widows (p. x), the combination of although, status and above in his “rewritten” verse: “although men have a status above women”, transfers a sense of a superior state conferred upon men met by a level of inferiority on the part of women.

This conclusion is supported by reading his translation of الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ in verse (4:34) into “MEN HAVE authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other” (p. 83). In this translated verse, Dawood portrays men as authoritarian. This interpretation reflects some of the classical exegetists’ patriarchal construct of qiwama and daraja. Ibn Kathir (2006), for instance, explains الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ, stating that a husband is the judge, president and discipliner of his wife (vol., p. 532). He also interprets وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ as a virtue of manners, status, creation, compliance to orders, maintenance, caring for affairs, and supremacy in this life and in the Hereafter (vol., p. 293).

The translator’s choice of uppercase letters, however, in MEN HAVE is just a poetics approach Dawood typically adopts in the first lines of verses that begin the pages of his translation, and therefore cannot be explained on ideological foundations. Overall, Dawood produces a translation under the effect of the rewriting constraints, ideology and the universe of discourse of the original as he views it. In the case of Ross’s translation, ideology too plays a role, but not Ross’s own ideological stand as much as it is Sieur du Ryer’s (1647) ideology that is embedded in his French translation of the Qur’an which Ross renders to English.

**Ross's Translation (1649)**

“They ought to honour them, and their husbands likewise ought to honour them, but the husbands have a degree of advantage above them,” (p. 21)

The addition of of advantage in Ross's translation of وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَيْهِمْ دَرَجَةٌ in “but the husbands have a degree of advantage above them” shows that men have more privilege than women or enjoy a more advantageous position. Yet, this is not a rendition of the source text, but a literal translation of Sieur du Ryer's (1647) translation of the verse, “mais les maris ont l'avantage d'un degré sur elles” (p. 34). In fact, Ross's translation is based on du Ryer's French translation of the original, which is directly stated in the title of Ross's translation: The Alcoran of Mahomet, translated out of Arabique into French; by the Sieur Du Ryer, lord of Malezair, and resident for the king of France, at Alexandria. And newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities. Hence, in addition to Ross's ideological position against the Qur'an as the title of his translation indicates, the rewriting constraint of language, being an indirect translation with linguistic, ideological and cultural mediations has led to the translation of دَرَجَةٌ into “a degree of advantage”. The rewriting factor, the difference between the source language and the target language also controls Ahmed and Ahmed's translation although the translators render the verse from the original Arabic to English.

**Ahmed and Ahmed's Translation (1995)**

“And for them (F) similar/equal\* مثل what (is) on them (F) with the kindness/generosity\* بالمعروف , and to the men a step/stage/grade درجة on them (F),” (p. 19)

Ahmed and Ahmed's use of three synonymous terms "a step/stage/grade" in addition to the Arabic term *درجة* places an emphasis on the concept in question, and reflects a concern over the exact meaning the source text provides. This strategy, where the source term is used with its translation, has ideological implications, as Pym (1992) affirms; this indicates that the value of the original lexical item is higher than the translation (p. 76, as cited in Chesterman, 2016, p. 92). What this may show is that Ahmed and Ahmed feel the need to add the original term to their three translation choices, communicating to their audience that no matter how many words they can use, the original Arabic remains of an intrinsic value that denotes meanings the English language may not be capable of transferring.

On the level of poetics, this translation defies the prevalent poetics followed in prior English translations of the Qur'an, being a translation done by a man and a woman translators. According to Hassen (2020), the translators Mohamed Ahmed and his daughter Samira Ahmed are the first to use gender marking letters to indicate the gender of the term that precedes them (p. 503). In the verse under study, Ahmed and Ahmed insert the letter (F) following the pronoun them to clarify that the reference is to the feminine gender in "and to the men a step/stage/grade *درجة* on them (F)". This act of mediation serves to emphasize the message of the verse and accentuate the "step/stage/grade *درجة*" men have over women. Briefly, poetics and the difference between the Arabic and English languages have shaped the translation, and led the translators to render the term in question into more than one lexical item. Yet, in spite of Ahmed and Ahmed's reliance on literal translation as the title of their translation shows, *The Koran القرآن : Complete dictionary & literal translation*, they do not

include the term degree as one of the lexical items offered in the translation of *درجة*. This literal translation choice, degree, is opted for by Bakhtiar and Itani.

### **Bakhtiar's Rewriting (2009)**

“and for them (f)

the like of what is on them (f)

as one who is honorable;

and men have a degree over them (f);” (p. 40)

Bakhtiar literally renders *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* into “and men have a degree over them (f)”, adopting the strategy of adding gender markers in the target text following Ahmed and Ahmed; she inserts (f) after the pronoun them to highlight the feminine gender. Supplementing the text with these markers is done under the influence of the translators' women-cautious perspective. That is to say, Bakhtiar's work mainly revolves around the position of Muslim women (Hassen, 2020, p. 502), and her translation is the first English text rendered by an American woman who affirms women viewpoints in verses addressing gender (Bakhtiar, 2009, p. xvii).

Moreover, the translators' ideological stand is reflected in the cover of her translation, which she chooses to be adorned with red tulips (see appendix A). These red tulips symbolize martyrdom in Iranian culture (Abdel-El Hamid, 2022, p. 52), and the red color signifies rebellion, and “is used to announce a break with the dominant conservative discourse” (Hassen, 2012, p. 120). Nariman Abdel-El Hamid (2022) argues that Bakhtiar, through her paratextual and textual elements, seeks to emphasize her identity to socially and politically elevate her inferior position, being a non-Arab Iranian Muslim woman (p. 91-92). This is most apparent in her rejection of patriarchal and hierarchal

interpretations and translations of *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ* and *وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ* in verse (4:34), which she renders into “Men are supporters of wives” and “and go away from them” respectively (2009, p. 94; emphasis in original). However, despite Bakhtiar’s pro-women ideology, she prefers not to impose a certain understanding on her audience, letting the degree be read in different ways however the audience understands it.

### **Itani’s Translation (2012)**

“And women have rights similar to their obligations, according to what is fair. But men have a degree over them.” (p. 18)

Like Bakhtiar, Itani literally translates *دَرَجَةٌ* into a degree. According to Abou-Bakr and Al-Sharmani (2020), “the Qur’anic text does not flesh out the nature of this degree of precedence” (p. 44). Conforming to the original, Itani does not intervene in the text, allowing his readership to decipher this degree on their own. Nevertheless, in Itani’s translation, “But men have a degree over them”, the conjunction *و* (and) in *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* is rendered as but not and. As a result, the translation of *وَالرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ* stand in contrast to the translation of *وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ* into “And women have rights similar to their obligations”, emphasizing the idea of hierarchy.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Analyzing the 15 translations adopting the framework of Lefevere’s rewriting theory (1992a), the study concludes that ideology is the dominant rewriting factor that inspires most of the selected texts. Islamic Scholars’ controversial ideological stances on the meaning of *دَرَجَةٌ* are matched by parallel interpretations by the selected translators. Other rewriting constraints have also had a role in the rendition of the term. Nikayin’s translation is done mostly under the effect of the rewriting constraint of poetics. The difference between the source and

target languages is a controlling factor in Ross's and Ahmed and Ahmed's translations. The influence of patronage is most vivid in Abu-Shabanah's translation.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the way the translators perceive the universe of discourse of the source text has shaped their texts. Sale's, Umm Muhammad's, Dakdok's, Rodwell's and Dawood's translations fit in the scope of hierarchal traditional interpretations advocated by Ibn Kathir (2006), Al-Qurtubi (2006) and Al-Saadi (1422 Hijri) that affirm the superior and authoritarian position of the male gender. Wadud's (1999) and Abou El-Fadl's (2006) restriction of the concept to stances of divorce is seen in Bell's and Abdel Haleem's translation. Al-Sharawi's (1991) interpretation of daraja as qiwama is referred to in Ali's translation, and explained along this line in Al-Hilali and Khan's, Abdel Haleem's and Abu-Shabanah's translations. Al-Ṭabari's interpretation as well as Abou-Bakr and Al-Sharmani's (2020) conclusion about the degree being an extra virtue husbands should aspire to achieve were not observed in any of the selected translations. A case of concern over what the term daraja exactly means is noticed in Ahmed and Ahmed's translation that offer alternative lexical items alongside the Arabic term. Some translators, on the other hand, prefer to remain invisible silencing their voices with the choice of a literal translation without clarifications, such as Bakhtiar and Itani. Women translators' contributions to egalitarian readings of daraja are found minimal for ideological, patronage and linguistic reasons. From a diachronic perspective, the older the translation, the more hierarchal understandings are spotted. However, this result does not display a consistent or generalizable pattern in the selected translated texts. For a more profound understanding of the

translators' conception of gender roles in Islam, the study recommends that other Qur'anic verses tackling marital relations and women issues be studied within the same theoretical framework.

**Abstract**

This paper aims to explore how the term *daraja* in verse (2:228) is rendered into English in fifteen translations covering a period of over 300 years between 1649 and 2017. These translations are characterized by the ideological diversity of their translators, which provides a rich ground for discussing and analyzing their positions on the meaning of *daraja*. The research is based on the hypothesis that the translators “rewrote” the term under the influence of one or more of the rewriting constraints, namely ideology, patronage, differences between the source and target languages, poetics and universe of discourse, as André Lefevere specifies in his rewriting theory (1992a). Therefore, the analysis is conducted with a view to pinpoint cases of rewriting when rewriting constraints become a factor controlling the translation process. The study found out that controversy over *daraja* in classical and modern commentaries was mirrored in the selected translations, with the oldest presenting men as superior to women, but this did not show a consistent pattern. The study also revealed that women translators were not heedful of propagating egalitarian views of gender. Finally, the paper concludes that ideology was the predominant rewriting constraint that consolidated and subverted the hierarchy of the concept.



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