

What does the Holy Qur'an say about the Ahlul Bayt

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Abstract

The Sunni and Shia have needlessly argued for centuries over matters that are at times wholly Indeterminate in the Holy Qur'an. Sometimes through ignorance of the Qur'anic text, and at other times by going to the partisan scribes of history based on their respective socialization biases. This report speaks to the former, ignorance of the Qur'anic text due to its careless reading, especially in translation, which needlessly creates an unbridgeable chasm in the understanding of the Qur'anic message between the two major sects of Islam. Verse 33:33 is among the most contentious verses in the Holy Qur'an between the Shia and Sunni; they each argue their own socialization biases without paying careful attention to what the Holy Qur'an itself states in that verse, and does not state. This report highlights that absurdity.

The Qur'anic phrase: أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ , *Ahlul Bayt*, is a proper noun. In the Qur'anic semantics, it specifically means the household of the family of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH). In Arabic vernacular of course, أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ is a common noun. It generally means *members of the household* of any person. Linguistically, it can be used to refer to anyone's household. It is customary to capitalize the phrase in English as *Ahlul Bayt* when the family of the Messenger of Islam is the explicit context.

Who precisely comprise the *Ahlul Bayt* is not made unambiguously clear in the Holy Qur'an. It remains a point of contention among the two main protagonist sects of Islam which virtually comprise nearly 99 percent of Muslims in the world today, the Sunni and the Shia. The contention is sometimes needlessly heated, and often based on outright ignorance and/or the socialized dogma that one grows up in. This article takes a look at what the Holy Qur'an itself says, and does not say, when it uses the phrase *Ahlul Bayt*, as in the famously contentious verse 33:33. Sometimes referred to as the *verse of purification*, it is among the most commonly misperceived verses of the Holy Qur'an, especially when read in translation. Both Shia and the Sunni have argued for over 14 centuries about the scope of its composition, namely, who is being referred to in this verse:

<p>“And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger.</p> <p>And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless.” (Surah Al-Ahzaab, 33:33)</p>	<p>وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبْرُجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ</p> <p>إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا</p>
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Caption Verse 33:33 Surah Al-Ahzaab – incredible verse that hides a wellspring of semantics by employing the gender sensitivity of Arabic grammar in its second person pronoun to describe the composition of *Ahlul Bayt*. Another reason for misunderstanding the Holy Qur’an – its sophistication of using the Classical Arabic language constructs to hide a wellspring of secrets that none among the ordinary people seeking guidance from it shall fathom except those who are capable of understanding *أولو الألباب* (see verse 3:7) and having command of its unsurpassed natural language of exposition *بلسان قومهم* (see verse 14:4)! Verse 33:33 is a categorical example of why the Holy Qur’an is simply untranslatable, even syntactically, let alone semantically! Even the “Orientalism” jaundiced West is reluctantly forced to admit this characteristic of the Holy Qur’an: *“The miraculous rhetorical quality that the Qur’an has for the reader is lost in translation, ... mistranslation usually occurs when translators retain Arabic terms or force a single meaning upon Arabic words.”* (tinyurl.com/Quran-Untranslatable-Harvard).

The following table captures the complete context of the topic under discussion in Surah Al-Ahzaab, verses 33:28-34, using Yusuf Ali's translation.

<p>O Prophet! Say to thy Consorts: "If it be that ye desire the life of this World, and its glitter,- then come! I will provide for your enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner. (28)</p>	<p>يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزُوجِكُنَّ إِن كُنْتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا فَتَعَالَيْنَ أُمَتِّعْكُنَّ وَأُسْرِحْكِنَّ سَرَاحًا جَمِيلًا</p>
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<p>But if ye seek Allah and His Messenger, and the Home of the Hereafter, verily Allah has prepared for the well-doers amongst you a great reward, (29)</p>	<p>وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُرِيدُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَالْآخِرَةَ الْآخِرَةَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْمُحْسِنِينَ مِنْكُمْ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا</p>
<p>O Consorts of the Prophet! If any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct, the Punishment would be doubled to her, and that is easy for Allah. (30)</p>	<p>يٰۤاَيُّهَا النِّسَاءُ الَّذِيَّاتُ مَنِ يَأْتِ مِنْكُمْ بِفُحْشَةٍ مُّبِينَةٍ يُضَعَفْ لَهَا الْعَذَابُ ضِعْفَيْنِ ۗ وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا</p>
<p>But any of you that is devout in the service of Allah and His Messenger, and works righteousness,- to her shall We grant her reward twice: and We have prepared for her a generous Sustenance. (31)</p>	<p>وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ مِنْكُمْ بِلَهِّ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا نُؤْتِهَا أَجْرَهَا مَرَّتَيْنِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهَا رِزْقًا كَرِيمًا</p>
<p>O Consorts of the Prophet! Ye are not like any of the (other) women: if ye do fear (Allah), be not too complacent of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just. (32)</p>	<p>يٰۤاَيُّهَا النِّسَاءُ الَّذِيَّاتُ لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ ۗ إِنْ اتَّقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا</p>
<p>And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger.</p> <p>And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless. (33:33)</p>	<p>وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ ۗ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ</p> <p>إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمْ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا</p>

And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the Signs of Allah and His Wisdom: for Allah understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). (Surah Al-Ahzaab, 33:34) (Tr. Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

وَأَذْكُرَنَّ مَا يُنْتَلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ
مِنَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا

Caption Surah Al-Ahzaab, verses 33:28-34 – An illustrative case of how a translation fails to capture the semantics of the Qur'anic Arabic grammar accurately due to language limitations of English which does not have gender-specific second person pronouns and possessive pronouns. In this instance, it leads to the misperception that the interspersed verse fragment purifying the *Ahlul Bayt* in 33:33 is referring to the Messenger's wives just because the wives are being addressed by the Author earlier in that verse, and also in the preceding verses, and in the succeeding verse! This switch in topic for the *verse of purification* cannot be captured in a translated language which does not have gender-specific 2nd person pronoun with the same semantics as the Classical Qur'anic Arabic does, without explicit elaboration.

The following table completely decomposes verses 33:33 and 33:34 word by word. Please take a few minutes to study the switch in pronoun from 2nd person feminine plural possessive pronoun when referring to the houses of the wives, to 2nd person masculine plural object pronoun when referring to the *Ahlul Bayt*, and back to 2nd person feminine plural possessive pronoun when referring again to the houses of the wives in 33:34:

- **2nd person feminine plural possessive pronoun**

- (33:33:3) **بُيُوتِكُنَّ** buyūtikunna your houses

- **2nd person masculine plural object pronoun**

- (33:33:20) **عَنْكُمْ** ankumu from you,
- (33:33:24) **وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ** wayuṭahhirakum And to purify you

- **2nd person feminine plural possessive pronoun**

- (33:34:5) **بُيُوتِكُنَّ** buyūtikunna your houses

The significance of this switch in pronouns is striking. But what is even more striking is how little attention is paid to this switch by those who argue needlessly about the semantics without due

diligence to the Arabic language syntax that is expressing the semantics. The 2nd person masculine pronoun كُمْ “kum”, and 2nd person feminine pronoun كُنَّ “kunna”, unambiguously represent the following semantics in order to be grammatically correct in their usage:

- “kum” when used with a plural object or possessive case represents a composition that must contain at least one or more males, and may contain zero or more females (it is equivalent of 2nd person pronoun “you”, “ تم ” and “vous” in gender neutral English, Urdu, and French respectively) ;
- “kunna” represents an all female composition (it has no equivalent in English, Urdu, French, et. al.; consequently, the same 2nd person pronoun “you”, “ تم ” and “vous” are respectively re-used causing a loss in semantics in translation).

Word by Word Decomposition of Surah Al-Ahzaab 33:33-34

Translation	Arabic word	Syntax and morphology
(33:33:1) <u>waqarna</u> And stay		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) V – 2nd person feminine plural imperative verb PRON – subject pronoun الواو عاطفة فعل أمر والتاء ضمير متصل في محل رفع فاعل
(33:33:2) fī in		P – preposition حرف جر
(33:33:3) <u>buyūtikunna</u> your houses		N – genitive masculine plural noun PRON – 2nd person feminine plural possessive pronoun اسم مجرور والكاف ضمير متصل في محل جر بالاضافة
(33:33:4) walā and (do) not		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) PRO – prohibition particle الواو عاطفة حرف نهي

(33:33:5) <u>tabarrajna</u> display yourselves		V – 2nd person feminine plural (form V) imperfect verb, jussive mood PRON – subject pronoun فعل مضارع مجزوم والتاء ضمير متصل في محل رفع فاعل
(33:33:6) <u>tabarruja</u> (as was the) display		N – accusative masculine (form V) verbal noun اسم منصوب
(33:33:7) <u>l-jāhiliyati</u> (of the times of) ignorance		PN – genitive feminine proper noun → <u>Al-Jahiliyah</u> اسم علم مجرور
(33:33:8) <u>l-ūlā</u> the former.		N – nominative feminine noun اسم مرفوع
(33:33:9) <u>wa-aqim'na</u> And establish		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) V – 2nd person feminine plural (form IV) imperative verb PRON – subject pronoun الواو عاطفة فعل أمر والتاء ضمير متصل في محل رفع فاعل
(33:33:10) <u>l-salata</u> the prayer		N – accusative feminine noun اسم منصوب
(33:33:11) <u>waātina</u> and give		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) V – 2nd person feminine plural (form IV) imperative verb PRON – subject pronoun الواو عاطفة فعل أمر والتاء ضمير متصل في محل رفع فاعل
(33:33:12) <u>l-zakata</u> zakah		N – accusative feminine noun اسم منصوب
(33:33:13) <u>wa-ati'na</u> and obey		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) V – 2nd person feminine plural (form IV) imperative verb PRON – subject pronoun الواو عاطفة فعل أمر والتاء ضمير متصل في محل رفع فاعل

(33:33:14) <u>I-laha</u> Allah	 PN	PN – accusative proper noun → <u>Allah</u> لفظ الجلالة منصوب
(33:33:15) <u>warasūlahu</u> and His Messenger.	 PRON N CONJ	CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) N – accusative masculine noun PRON – 3rd person masculine singular possessive pronoun الواو عاطفة اسم منصوب والهاء ضمير متصل في محل جر بالاضافة
(33:33:16) <u>innamā</u> Only	 PREV ACC	ACC – accusative particle PREV – preventive particle <i>mā</i> كافة ومكفوفة
(33:33:17) <u>yurīdu</u> Allah wishes	 V	V – 3rd person masculine singular (form IV) imperfect verb فعل مضارع
(33:33:18) <u>I-lahu</u> Allah wishes	 PN	PN – nominative proper noun → <u>Allah</u> لفظ الجلالة مرفوع
(33:33:19) <u>liyudh'hiba</u> to remove	 V PRP	PRP – prefixed particle of purpose <i>lām</i> V – 3rd person masculine singular (form IV) imperfect verb, subjunctive mood اللام لام التعليل فعل مضارع منصوب
(33:33:20) <u>'ankumu</u> from you	 PRON P	P – preposition PRON – 2nd person masculine plural object pronoun جار ومجرور
(33:33:21) <u>I-rij'sa</u> the impurity,	 N	N – accusative masculine noun اسم منصوب
(33:33:22) <u>ahla</u> (O) People	 N	N – accusative masculine noun اسم منصوب
(33:33:23) <u>I-bayti</u> (of) the House!	 N	N – genitive masculine noun اسم مجرور

(33:33:24) <u>wayutahirakum</u> And to purify you		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) V – 3rd person masculine singular (form II) imperfect verb, subjunctive mood PRON – 2nd person masculine plural object pronoun
(33:33:25) <u>tathīran</u> (with thorough) purification.		N – accusative masculine indefinite (form II) verbal noun اسم منصوب
(33:34:1) <u>wa-udh'kur'na</u> And remember		CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) V – 2nd person feminine plural imperative verb PRON – subject pronoun
(33:34:2) mā what		REL – relative pronoun اسم موصول
(33:34:3) <u>yut'lā</u> is recited		V – 3rd person masculine singular passive imperfect verb, subjunctive mood فعل مضارع مبني للمجهول منصوب
(33:34:4) fī in		P – preposition حرف جر
(33:34:5) <u>buyūtikunna</u> your houses		N – genitive masculine plural noun PRON – 2nd person feminine plural possessive pronoun اسم مجرور والكاف ضمير متصل في محل جر بالاضافة
(33:34:6) min of		P – preposition حرف جر
(33:34:7) <u>āyāti</u> (the) Verses		N – genitive feminine plural noun اسم مجرور
(33:34:8) <u>l-lahi</u> (of) Allah		PN – genitive proper noun → <u>Allah</u> لفظ الجلالة مجرور

(33:34:9) <u>wal-hik'mati</u> and the wisdom.	وَالْحِكْمَةِ N CONJ	CONJ – prefixed conjunction <i>wa</i> (and) N – genitive feminine noun الواو عاطفة اسم مجرور
(33:34:10) inna Indeed,	إِنَّ ACC	ACC – accusative particle حرف نصب
(33:34:11) <u>-laha</u> Allah	اللَّهِ PN	PN – accusative proper noun → <u>Allah</u> لفظ الجلالة منصوب
(33:34:12) <u>kāna</u> is	كَانَ V	V – 3rd person masculine singular perfect verb فعل ماضٍ
(33:34:13) <u>latīfan</u> All-Subtle,	لَطِيفًا N	N – accusative masculine singular indefinite noun اسم منصوب
(33:34:14) <u>khabīran</u> All-Aware.	خَيْرًا ADJ	ADJ – accusative masculine singular indefinite adjective صفة منصوبة

Caption Surah Al-Ahzaab, verse 33:33-34 Word by Word syntactical decomposition.

(Arabic syntax and grammar courtesy of corpus.quran.com/documentation/grammar.jsp ;
corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=33&verse=33)

The following table captures some prominent English and Urdu translations of verse 33:33. It can be seen that all of them, without exception, spectacularly fail to capture the gender switch of the 2nd person pronoun from feminine to masculine form of the original verse in Arabic when referring to the *Ahlul Bayt*. Whether or not this translated language limitation is footnoted in the original printed editions by their respective translators to draw attention to the significance of this switch in pronouns, is not known.

And stay in your houses and do not display your finery like the displaying of the ignorance of yore; and keep up prayer, and pay the poor-rate, and obey Allah and His Apostle. Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying. (Muhammad Ali Habib Shakir, House of Habib, Pakistan)

And stay in your houses and do not display your finery like the displaying of the ignorance of yore; and keep up prayer, and pay the poor-rate, and obey Allah and His Apostle; Allah only desires to take away the uncleanness from you, O people of the household! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying. (Maulana Muhammad Ali MMA 1917 PDF)

And stay in your houses. Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizenment of the Time of Ignorance. Be regular in prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey Allah and His messenger. Allah's wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O Folk of the Household, and cleanse you with a thorough cleansing. (Marmaduke Pickthall)

Remain in your houses; and display not your finery, as did the pagans of old. And perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and obey God and His Messenger. People of the House, God only desires to put away from you abomination and to cleanse you. (Arthur John Arberry)

Stay at home, and do not deck yourselves with ostentation as in the days of paganism; fulfil your devotional obligations, pay the zakat, and obey God and His Apostle. God desires to remove impurities from you, O inmates of this house, and to cleanse and bring out the best in you. (Ahmed Ali)

And stay in Your houses. and display not yourselves! with the display of the times of former Paganism; and establish the prayer and give the poor-rate and obey Allah and His apostle. Allah only desireth to take away uncleanness from you, people of the house-hold, and to purify you with a thorough purification. (Abdul Majid Daryabadi)

And abide quietly in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as they used to flaunt them in the old days of pagan ignorance; and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Apostle: for God only wants to remove from you all that might be loathsome, O you members of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you to utmost purity. (Muhammad Asad)

And stay in your homes and do not go about displaying your allurements as in the former Time of Ignorance. Establish Prayer, give Zakah, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah only wishes to remove uncleanness from you, O members of the (Prophet's) household, and to purify you completely. (Abul Ala Maududi)

Stay in your houses and do not display your finery with the display of the former [days of] ignorance. Maintain the prayer and pay the zaka ۞ t and obey Allah and His Apostle. Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification. (Ali Quli Qara'i)

اپنے گھروں میں ٹک کر رہو اور سابق دور جاہلیت کی سی سچ دھج نہ دکھاتی پہرو نماز قائم کرو، زکوٰۃ دو اور اللہ اور اس کے رسول کی اطاعت کرو اللہ تو یہ چاہتا ہے کہ اہل بیت نبی سے گندگی کو دور کرے اور تمہیں پوری طرح پاک کر دے
(Abul Ala Maududi)

اور اپنے گھروں میں بیٹھی رہو اور گزشتہ زمانہ جاہلیت کی طرح بناؤ سنگھار دکھاتی نہ پہرو اور نماز پڑھو اور زکوٰۃ دو اور اللہ اور اس کے رسول کی فرمانبرداری کرو اللہ یہی چاہتا ہے کہ اے اس گھر والو تم سے ناپاکی دور کرے اور تمہیں خوب پاک کرے
(Ahmed Ali)

اور اپنے گھر میں بیٹھی رہو اور پہلی جاہلیت جیسا بناؤ سنگھار نہ کرو اور نماز قائم کرو اور زکوٰۃ ادا کرو اور اللہ اور اس کے رسول کی اطاعت کرو - بس اللہ کا ارادہ یہ ہے اے اہل بیت علیہ السلام کہ تم سے ہر برائی کو دور رکھے اور اس طرح پاک و پاکیزہ رکھے جو پاک و پاکیزہ رکھنے کا حق ہے
(Syed Zeeshan Haider Jawadi)

اور اپنے گھروں میں قرار سے رہو اور سابقہ زمانہ جاہلیت کی طرح اپنی آرائش کی نمائش نہ کرتی پہرو (باہر نہ نکلا کرو) اور نماز قائم کرو اور زکوٰۃ ادا کرو اور اللہ اور اس کے رسول کی اطاعت کیا کرو۔ اے اہل بیت! اللہ تو بس یہی چاہتا ہے کہ تم سے ہر قسم کے رجس (آلودگی) کو دور رکھے اور تمہیں اس طرح پاک و پاکیزہ رکھے جس طرح پاک رکھنے کا حق ہے۔
(Ayatollah Muhammad Hussain Najafi)

Caption various translations of Surah Al-Ahzaab verse 33:33 into English and Urdu, the non-gender sensitive languages, all spectacularly failing to capture the semantics

created due to the gender change from feminine to masculine form of the 2nd person pronoun when referring to the *Ahlul Bayt*. (Translations are from the electronic versions at tanzil.net/trans/ ; MMA 1917 PDF courtesy of aaail.org ; Ali Quli Qara'i courtesy of islamawakened.com/Quran/33/33/default.htm)

In French, which is more gender sensitive than either English or Urdu but less so than Classical Arabic, the translation of verse 33:33 is given below. The 2nd person pronoun “vous” in French, like its Urdu and English 2nd person pronoun counterpart “تم” and “you” respectively, including the possessive case variations thereof, are unfortunately gender neutral and unable to distinguish between singular and plural object, leading to the same loss in semantics.

Restez dans vos foyers; et ne vous exhibez pas à la manière des femmes d'avant l'Islam (Jâhiliyah).
Accomplissez la Salât, acquittez la Zakât et obéissez à Allah et à Son messager. Allah ne veut que vous débarrasser de toute souillure, ô gens de la maison [du prophète], et veut vous purifier pleinement. (verse 33:33 Tr. Muhammad Hamidullah)

Caption Translation of verse 33:33 into French. The second person pronoun *vous* is gender neutral just like in Urdu and English, despite French being more gender sensitive than either English or Urdu, therefore leading to the same loss in semantics.

In Spanish however, the matter is salvaged. Spanish enables expressing gender sensitivity of the object by addition of either “os” or “as” to the verb. Therefore, a correct semantic translation of verse 33:33 from Arabic into Spanish is possible by reflecting the 2nd person plural gender sensitivity of the pronoun in Arabic, to the correct conjugated form of the verb expressing the gender and plurality of the object. So, if “*gente de la casa*” (*Ahlul Bayt*) was referring to only the wives of the Messenger, the grammatically correct verb conjugation of the root verbs 'librar' and 'purificar' in Spanish would have been “libraras” and “purificaras” instead of “*libraros*” and “*purificaros*”.

¡Quedaos en vuestras casas! ¡No os acicaléis como se acicalaban las natiguas paganas! ¡Haced la azalá! ¡Dad el azaque! ¡Obedeced a Alá y a Su Enviado! Alá sólo quiere libraros de la mancha, gente de la casa, y purificaros por completo. (verse 33:33 Tr. Julio Cortes)

Caption Translation of verse 33:33 into Spanish. The loss of semantics in translation is prevented by reflecting the 2nd person plural masculine pronoun of Arabic on the

correct selection of masculine or feminine verb conjugation, since both choices are available in Spanish to indicate object composition and its plurality.

That language limitation conundrum disclosed above is an obvious source of misunderstanding the Holy Qur'an – when studying it in translation! The Holy Qur'an is simply untranslatable, in almost any language. Which is why the famous translator Arthur J. Arberry, in deep humility, called his excellent rendition into English: “The Koran Interpreted”. Even the “Orientalism” jaundiced West is reluctantly forced to admit this characteristic of the Holy Qur'an: “*The miraculous rhetorical quality that the Qur'an has for the reader is lost in translation, ... mistranslation usually occurs when translators retain Arabic terms or force a single meaning upon Arabic words.*” (see tinyurl.com/Quran-Untranslatable-Harvard).

Furthermore, a translation also lends itself easily to both Machiavellian as well as inadvertent perception management of the public mind (see tinyurl.com/Making-the-public-mind). We can see this pernicious cognitive infiltration in the contemporary English translation of the Holy Qur'an titled: *The Sublime Quran* (see tinyurl.com/Critique-Laleh-Bakhtiar-Zahir).

To this day, countless generations of Muslims growing up in non Arabic speaking Muslim countries do not perceive what has so straightforwardly been demonstrated above, as the sophistication of the classical Arabic language to mask its secrets from the unwary by something so elegant as simply a gender change in its 2nd person pronoun. The syntactic as well as semantic limitations of any translation language in comparison to the intrinsic richness and succinctness of Qur'anic Arabic requires much reframing for the target language in order to preserve both literal as well as semantic accuracy, which, as in the case of verse 33:33, simply cannot be maintained without additional footnotes and parenthetical annotations. (See a detailed examination of the translation issue in: [Critique: Laleh Bakhtiar and The Sublime Quran](#), Ibid.)

These language limitations naturally create additional motivation to seek sources of explanation and exegeses outside of the pages of the Holy Qur'an, called “tafsir”, especially for those who do not speak Arabic, which is approximately 90 percent of the 1.6 to 2 billion Muslim public spread throughout the world in many different cultures and civilizations. That fact automatically leads to the paradox: fallible hands, fallible minds, and fallible hearts, some clean and some unclean, some competent and some incompetent, none of them categorically known to be among the “Ar-Rasikhoon-fil-ilm” (الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ) of verse 3:7 of the Holy Qur'an, exposing the pristine text of the Holy Qur'an according to their own perception and socialization bias – rather than the Word of its own Author explain itself.

At least with respect to this verse fragment 33:33, the native Arabic speaker has a leg-up on the non Arabic speaker. The former knows that *Ahlul Bayt* is being referred to with a masculine pronoun and therefore its composition, by definition, comprises one or more males, and cannot

comprise only females, and therefore the verse fragment 33:33 is not necessarily referring to the wives, or even just the wives alone. If that verse fragment was indeed referring to only the wives, an all female group, then the feminine form of the pronoun would have been used to refer to the *Ahlul Bayt* as is done when referring to the houses of the wives before and after that *verse of purification*.

But that's also where the native Arabic speaker's advantage over the non-speaker ends. Neither knows the actual composition of the *Ahlul Bayt* beyond that *prima facie* information contained in that sequence of verses 33:28-34 reproduced above, that it is a Household of the Prophet, and comprises one or more males, and zero or more females, and it may or may not contain the wives of the Prophet, irrespective of the fact that the verse fragment is interspersed in between where the Author of the Holy Qur'an is commanding the wives of the Prophet of Islam what they are supposed to do. Whereas, in the *purification* fragment of verse 33:33, the Author declares what He Himself intends to do to the *Ahlul Bayt*. That change of "actor" from the wives to the Author and back to the wives is most conspicuous in the verse. In that interspersed switch, the Author pledged some abstract "perfect purification" to the *Ahlul Bayt*. What that "perfect purification" means remains as foreign to the native speaker of Arabic as to the non-speaker. It requires for both to indulge in much due diligence to uncover.

There are numerous other places in the Holy Qur'an where the family of the Prophet of Islam is referenced, but with different indirection nouns, which though not explicit, from the context of the verse itself clearly only mean the Messenger's family, his progeny, or his kin, as the case may be.

For instance, the phrase *فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ*, *fil-qur-ba*, as in verse 42:43, which obviously means those near of kin to the Messenger:

<p>'Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin.'" (Surah Ash-Shura 42:23)</p>	<p>قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ</p>
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Or the word *الْكَوْثَر*, *Kausar*, in verse 108:1, which the full context of Surah Al-Kausar and the verse following it, 108:3, make amply clear means the Messenger's posterity, the Prophet of Islam's progeny from his only seed, his daughter Fatima (as):

<p>Surely We have given you Kausar, (108:1)</p>	<p>إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحَرْ</p>
<p>Therefore pray to your Lord and make a sacrifice. (108:2)</p>	<p>إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ</p>
<p>Surely your enemy is the one who shall be without posterity, (Surah Al-Kausar 108:3)</p>	

Caption Surah Al-Kausar, translation by Shakir

This is an amazing Surah of the Holy Qur'an. Because, to the enemies of Islam, its prophecy provides an easy touchstone upon which to falsify the Holy Qur'an and consequently the Divine claims for the religion of Islam. But we see today, nearly fifteen centuries later, that the Prophet of Islam's progeny is ubiquitous, known as the "Syeds" and "Syedas", whom all Muslims revere. The most famous among them is the famous Aga Khan, the *Hazir Imam* of the Ismaili Muslim sect whose followers revere him as per his claim of being the direct descendant of the only seed of the Prophet of Islam. But no trace is known of the Prophet's enemies' progeny as vouchsafed by the Holy Qur'an. Syeds and Syedas today are found among both the Sunni and the Shia sects and their subsects wherever Muslims live on earth. And they are treated with general reverence by the Muslim public across the board. Where did they spring from? Only from the singular source: the marriage union of the daughter of the Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Fatima (as), from his first wife Hazrat Khadija (as), with Hazrat Ali (as).

As we can see in Surah Al-Kausar, the Holy Qur'an once again does not directly mention the offspring of that first Prophetic seed by name who is to be the only source of fulfillment of the prophecy of verse 108:3. But it is also self-evident. And the offspring directly comprises the Messenger's *Ahlul Bayt*, by definition. Therefore, without any controversy or conjecture, the prima facie fulfillment of the prophecy of verse 108:3 is a direct reference to the Messenger's household, his *Ahlul Bayt*, the only source from whence that prophecy can ever be fulfilled. Subsequently, by logical inference, the word "Kausar" in verse 108:1, in the context of verse 108:3, refers to the endless abundance of the Messenger's progeny being granted by Allah. Only when we venture into documented history do the names of the Messenger's offspring become known when we discover that the Messenger's only seed was his daughter Hazrat Fatima (as), from his first wife Hazrat Khadija (as). Arguably therefore, the word "Kausar", in context of verse 108:3, inter alia refers to Fatima (as), the singular member of the Messenger's *Ahlul Bayt* through whom his seed was "not cut off", الْأَبْتَرُ , to make the prophecy of Surah Al-Kausar perpetually true.

Since one person is not sufficient to continue the line of progeny, it takes two, a husband and a wife, Hazrat Ali (as) comes into the picture as being half the source of the abundance promised to the Prophet of Islam. It is historically self-evident, and without any doubt, that it was Hazrat Ali's marriage union with Hazrat Fatima (as) that became the *wassilah* (means) for the fulfillment of this Divine prophecy in Surah Al-Kausar! Hazrat Ali (as) is the genetic grandfather of the millions of genuine Syeds and Syeddass in existence today, and Hazrat Fatima (as) the genetic grandmother – the *never ending abundance*, الْكُوْثَرُ , promised by Allah to the Prophet of Islam. Without these two souls, the Holy Qur'an Surah Al-Kausar would have been falsified!

Just contemplating the remarkable fulfillment of this prophecy of the pithy Surah Al-Kausar – especially for those who are aware of Muslims' early history and the extraordinary calamities that had befallen the family of the Prophet of Islam whereby every effort was made by the Muslim rulers for over 200 years to wipe them out – is sufficient to fill a Muslim mind and heart with enormous awe and spiritual wonderment! No follower of any of the other great religions of the world has such a unique heritage. The very existence of their prophets is at times argued as mythical by their antagonists. No such charge can be laid at the doorsteps of the Messenger of Islam – the empirical evidence still continuing, fifteen centuries and some 50 or so generations later. But the effort to wipe out the progeny of the Messenger also continues to this very day. Surah Al-Kausar is the divine guarantee as a continuing prophecy that such effort will never succeed. And not only will it never succeed, but that no trace shall be left of those who persist in such enmity. It is a perpetual testament to the veracity of the Holy Qur'an. If anyone wishes to falsify it – there is the open challenge by the Author of the Holy Qur'an!

These are some of the more explicit and obvious places in the Holy Qur'an where the Messenger's family is mentioned. If one ventures to sources outside the pages of the Holy Qur'an, as for instance to the exegeses of the Holy Qur'an, or to narratives of history, a few more verses from the Holy Qur'an are identified by the scribes of history as being about specific members of the Prophet's Household, his wives, his companions, or the specific events involving these personages. These specifics are not deducible or inferable directly from the Holy Qur'an as the local context for the verses is not contained within the pages of the Holy Qur'an. Since this article is only about what the Holy Qur'an itself clarifies, or does not clarify, we refrain from exiting the pages of the Holy Qur'an. And as far as this scribe in his grossly abbreviated and wholly inadequate study has been able to ascertain, **the exact identity of the composition of the Ahlul Bayt is Indeterminate in the Holy Qur'an**. One has to venture to the pages of history to fill in those **Indeterminates**. While some facts are empirical and remain historically incontrovertible, such as whether or not the Prophet of Islam existed, who his daughter was, who she married, who their children were, whom did the Messenger marry, what battles he fought, and so on so forth, each sect nevertheless fills the many **Indeterminates** of the Holy Qur'an according to their own sect's sacred books, dogmas, interpretations, and base misconceptions.

Often times, both ignorance and careless reading of the Qur'anic text itself are the primary cause for basic misconceptions. The latter, careless reading, has been amply demonstrated in this article. The former, ignorance of how to study the Holy Qur'an, subsequently adds to the reinforcement of incorrect parsing. If one were to categorize this class of misconceptions by way of nomenclature, it would rightly be classed under **Aliasing error**, meaning, proper nouns of the Holy Qur'an aliased as common nouns; their meanings looked up in the Arabic language dictionary instead of in the Holy Qur'an itself. We can now clearly perceive that indeed this is what has happened in this specific instance of incorrectly parsing the proper noun *Ahlul Bayt* which has led some Muslim scholars to insist that it refers to the wives of the Messenger.

Another example of this basic class of **Aliasing error** can be found in this scribe's critique of the much hyped English translation of the Holy Qur'an by the American woman Laleh Bakhtiar, who, brazenly enough, has even proclaimed that she endeavors to **"bring reform to Islam"** (Ibid.)

This article is based on the author's book: **Hijacking The Holy Qur'an And Its Religion Islam – Muslims and Imperial Mobilization**, abbreviated to **Hijacking Holy Qur'an And Islam**

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Most (not all) English translation of Qur'an verses are by Yusuf Ali, Shakir, and Pickthall, acquired 8/13/2011 from <http://tanzil.net/trans/> (archived [Yusufali](#), [Shakir](#), [Pickthall](#)).

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