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Wasatiyyah as Translational Practice: Ideology and Gender in Shihab's Qur'anic Translation

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite extensive scholarship on Quraish Shihab's gender hermeneutics in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, little attention has been given to his 2013 standalone translation *Al-Qur'an dan Maknanya* (QM) as an independent ideological text. This study investigates whether and how Shihab's declared principle of *wasatiyyah* (Islamic moderation) is consistently manifested in his translation of gender-related Qur'anic verses. **Design/methodology/approach** – The study employs a qualitative textual analysis combining Lefevere's rewriting theory, Baker's narrative theory, and Von Flotow's feminist translation strategies. Using close reading, paratextual analysis, and cross-translation comparison, ten verses representing five contested gender clusters – creation ontology, male authority, violence against women, polygamy, and women's testimony – are examined. **Findings** – The analysis demonstrates that *wasatiyyah* is operationalised through three interrelated translational mechanisms: hermeneutically open lexical choices, ideologically calibrated parenthetical additions, and contextual footnotes. These mechanisms appear consistently across all five verse clusters, albeit with varying intensity. Their most explicit manifestation occurs in the polygamy verses, where a footnote characterises polygamy as a “narrow door accessible only to those in extreme need.” Their most subtle application appears in creation ontology, where the translation of *nafs wahidah* preserves interpretive openness and avoids both patriarchal and liberal-feminist extremes. **Research implications/limitations** – The study focuses exclusively on selected gender-related verses in QM and does not examine the translation's broader theological or socio-political dimensions. Future research may extend the framework to other thematic domains and Qur'anic translations. **Originality/value** – The study establishes *wasatiyyah* as a verifiable translational practice rather than a mere discursive claim, bridging ideology-based Qur'anic translation studies and Islamic gender hermeneutics while offering a methodological model for evaluating moderation ideologies in Islamic textual production.

Keywords: *Wasatiyyah*; Qur'anic translation ideology; Islamic gender hermeneutics; paratextual analysis; Indonesian Islam.

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Introduction

Qur'anic translation has never been a linguistically neutral act. Since the cultural turn in translation studies announced by Bassnett and Lefevere in the 1990s, scholars have increasingly recognised that every act of translating the sacred text is simultaneously a cultural and ideological practice shaped by the translator's power relations, value orientations, and social context [1], [2]. This recognition carries particular urgency when the verses being rendered are gender verses – passages that for centuries have formed the contested terrain between patriarchal-textualist readings and Islamic feminist hermeneutics. Burohaima et al. [3] demonstrate empirically that the textual and discursive strategies of a male Qur'anic translator can significantly reshape the representation of women in the translated text, aligning it with egalitarian principles that transcend mere linguistic preference. Elewa [4] extends this finding by showing that individual translations, including those by men with no explicit feminist commitment, often achieve higher degrees of egalitarianism than collective or female-authored translations. The question of how a Qur'anic translator renders gender verses is therefore not simply linguistic; it is ideological, with wide-ranging theological and socio-political implications.

Within the landscape of Indonesian Qur'anic translation, *Al-Qur'an dan Maknanya* (QM 2013) M. Quraish Shihab occupies a uniquely strategic position. Shihab is the most influential Muslim exegete in contemporary Indonesia, the author of the monumental *Tafsir Al-Mishbāh*, and a translator who explicitly declares *wasatiyyah* (Islamic moderation) as the epistemological foundation of his entire intellectual project [5]. This declaration is significant: Shihab is not a translator who conceals his ideological commitments behind claims of objectivity; he makes his moderating ideology an open working principle that is, in principle, empirically testable. The problem, as Syamsuni [6] reminds us, is that *wasatiyyah* in Indonesia is a concept that is discursively contested and constructed by multiple social actors. A translator's claim to *wasatiyyah* must therefore be verified through his concrete textual choices rather than accepted as an authentic self-declaration. The critical question then becomes: does the *wasatiyyah* that Shihab declares truly manifest – and does it do so consistently – in his translational strategies for QM's most controversial gender verses?

Existing studies focus almost entirely on *Tafsir Al-Mishbāh* as the primary corpus, not on QM as an independent translation text. Anshori [7] found that Shihab builds a tafsir approach that seriously considers social context in responding to gender verses; Wartini [8] concluded that it constructs a gradual bridge toward gender sensitivity without explicit rejection of tradition; Ichwan and Amin [9] concluded that Shihab positions himself as a moderate exegete who

understands gender equality proportionally; and Hasan et al. [10] affirm that differences between men and women in Shihab's framework lie only in biological aspects and degrees of piety, not principial rights. On specific issues, Khafsoh et al. [11] find agreement on strict conditionality of polygamy and differences on practical acceptance; Stiawan [12] finds that Shihab's resolution of *nusyūz* still contains gender bias in permitting striking under certain conditions. Comparative studies across the Nusantara tafsir tradition further enrich this picture [13], [14], [15], [16]. Behind this body of scholarship, however, lies a structural limitation: all studies are based on *Al-Mishbāh*, not on QM as a translation text with its own distinct paratextual architecture. Translation is a genre distinct from tafsir: it operates through lexical choices, bracket additions, and footnotes – each an independent ideological decision [2], [17]. Gunawan [18] has demonstrated that a Qur'anic translator's ideology can be traced empirically through micro-level technique analysis; Syihabuddin and Aryanti [19] confirm that the translation of women-related Qur'anic vocabulary cannot be separated from the translator's underlying ideology. Sideeg [20], Hassen [21], Jaoudi [22], and Aldeeb [23] each identify concrete mechanisms through which gender ideology is expressed in Qur'anic translation. Yet none of these frameworks has been applied to QM with *wasatiyyah* operationalised simultaneously as declared ideology and evaluative criterion.

This article fills that gap. It pursues three objectives: *first*, to identify the translation strategies Shihab employs in QM across five gender-verse clusters; *second*, to interpret the ideological implications of each strategy using Lefevere [17], Baker [2], and Von Flotow [24]; and *third*, to evaluate the consistency of these strategies with Shihab's declared *wasatiyyah* – particularly his avoidance of *guluww* and his principle of comprehensive textual understanding guided by *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* [5]. Methodologically, the study operationalises *wasatiyyah* as a verifiable standard rather than an untested normative claim. Substantively, it produces an empirically verified assessment of the consistency and limits of Shihab's moderation when confronted with the most contested gender verses. And in terms of field contribution, it bridges two traditions rarely in systematic dialogue: ideology-based Qur'anic translation studies and Islamic gender hermeneutics.

Method

This study is qualitative, employing a translation theory-based textual analysis design that integrates three analytical procedures: close reading grounded in Lefevere's [17] rewriting theory and Baker's [2] narrative theory; analysis of gender translation strategies using Von Flotow's [24] framework; and paratextual analysis of footnotes and bracketed explanations as ideological

instruments [3]. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the object of study contains ideological and hermeneutical dimensions that resist reduction to numerical data and require interpretation sensitive to linguistic, discursive, and intertextual context [25], [26].

The primary data is the translated text of *Al-Qur'an dan Maknanya* [27], selected as Shihab's most recent independent translation representing his hermeneutical position in his final intellectual phase, addressed to the general Indonesian public. Secondary data encompass *Tafsir Al-Mishbāh* [28] as an intertextual source; Shihab's expository works [5], [29]; and two comparison translations – the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya* (QT) editions of 2002 [30] and 2019 [31], and Bakhtiar's *The Sublime Quran* [32] – to contextualise QM within a wider ideological spectrum. The analytical corpus was selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: thematic relevance (the most contested gender-issue clusters in contemporary Islamic gender discourse per Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Duderija, 2015; Al-Sharmani, 2024) and informativeness (verses containing gender terminology with ideologically meaningful translational options per Patton, 2015; Aldeeb, 2023). This yielded five thematic clusters across ten verses: creation ontology (QS. 4:1, 6:98, 7:189, 39:6); male authority (QS. 4:34, 2:228); violence against women (QS. 4:15, 4:34); polygamy (QS. 4:3); and women's testimony (QS. 2:282).

The selection of these verses rests on three considerations. First, the five clusters are the canonical axes around which contemporary Islamic gender debate is organised – the ontology of creation, marital authority (*qiwāmah*), the disciplining of wives, polygamy, and women's legal testimony – so that a translator's posture across them indexes his stance on the field as a whole [33], [34], [35]. Second, each verse was chosen for its translational diagnosticity: it carries a contested term or construction whose rendering forces an ideologically consequential decision – *nafs wāḥidah*, *qawwāmūna*, *waḍribūhunna*, the conditional structure of QS. 4:3, and the substitution clause of QS. 2:282 – rather than one in which gender is merely thematic [23], [36]. Third, the selection reached interpretive saturation: further verses raising the identical problem, such as the other occurrences of *nafs wāḥidah*, only reproduced the documented pattern. The corpus is thus representative through its concentration of the most ideologically revealing translational choices rather than through statistical breadth.

To make Von Flotow's [24] categories operationally identifiable rather than impressionistic, each was assigned explicit textual indicators applied uniformly across the corpus. Supplementing was coded wherever the translation introduces semantic material absent from the Arabic source – chiefly through bracketed insertions (for example, '(husbands)' or '(if that has not deterred them)') that narrow, condition, or reframe the literal proposition without

replacing its lexis. Prefacing and footnoting was coded wherever Shihab uses paratext – footnotes or glosses – to state a position, define a term, or redirect intertextual reading. Hijacking was reserved for a lexical choice that departs from the dominant semantic range of the source term to carry meaning beyond the literal, the diagnostic being a rendering the term’s attested lexicography cannot readily support [22], [23]. Each instance was checked against the Arabic lemma, its attested meanings, and the comparison translations, so that a strategy was recorded only where these indicators converged – a protocol that keeps the attribution replicable and guards against reading ideology into merely conventional choices [18].

Data analysis proceeded through five sequential steps adapted from Burohaima et al. [3]: (1) identification of translation techniques at lexical, syntactic, and paratextual levels using Von Flotow’s [24] categories; (2) interpretation of ideological implications using Baker’s [2] mechanisms of selective appropriation, framing, and labelling; (3) assessment of *wasatiyyah* consistency by verifying whether Shihab’s declared ideology [5] manifests in concrete translational choices; (4) cross-translation comparison to identify convergences and divergences [18]; and (5) contextualisation within the spectrum of Islamic gender hermeneutics [33], [34]. Validity is ensured through source triangulation, theoretical triangulation across Lefevere’s and Baker’s frameworks simultaneously, conceptual member-checking against Shihab’s explicit statements in his own works, and thick description including original Arabic text, full QM translations, and comparison translations as open verification bases [25].

These validity procedures were implemented concretely rather than invoked nominally [37]. *Source triangulation* read each translational choice against several evidentiary layers – the Arabic text and its lexicography, QM’s brackets and footnotes, the intertextual evidence of *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh*, and Shihab’s expository works – and corroborated it against three comparison translations (QT 2002, QT 2019, and Bakhtiar), so that no claim rests on a single witness. Theoretical triangulation interrogated each datum through Lefevere’s rewriting theory and Baker’s narrative theory at once, retaining only interpretations stable under both lenses. Conceptual member-checking, lacking a living interview subject, instead confronted every imputed ideological intent with Shihab’s own explicit self-statements, so that an attribution was admitted only when his documented position licensed it. Thick description supported these procedures: the original Arabic, the full QM rendering, and the comparison translations are reproduced as an open verification base, allowing readers to audit each inference themselves [25], [37].

Theoretical Framework

This study rests on three mutually reinforcing theoretical layers. At the first level, translation ideology theory – grounded in Lefevere [17] and Baker [2] – frames QM not as linguistic transfer but as an ideological practice open to empirical examination. At the second level, gender translation strategies provide the analytical instruments for identifying the concrete mechanisms through which that ideology is expressed in the text. At the third level, Shihab's *wasatīyyah* functions as the translator's declared ideology – the standard against which translational claims to moderation are tested.

Lefevere [17] argues that translation is rewriting – a rewriting of the source text controlled by patronage (external forces such as institutions and religious authorities) and poetics (internal conventions that determine what is permissible). Ideology operates as the content that determines the direction of manipulation: rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, so every translational choice carries an ideological dimension. Baker [2] deepens this through narrative theory, showing how translators manipulate the circulation of narratives through framing, labelling, and selective appropriation. In the QM context, Shihab's choices – from lexical selection to bracket additions to footnotes – are all readable as ideological mechanisms. Gunawan [18] confirms this at the empirical level by demonstrating that the ideology of Indonesian Qur'anic translators is traceable through micro-level technique analysis; Syihabuddin and Aryanti [19] confirm that translations of women-related Qur'anic vocabulary directly reflect the translator's underlying ideology.

At the operational level, this study draws on Von Flotow's [24] three gender translation strategies: supplementing (adding content to compensate for linguistic differences and recover gender perspectives); prefacing and footnoting (using prefaces and footnotes to state the translator's position and insert interpretive context); and hijacking (appropriating the text to insert ideological purposes beyond the literal source meaning). In QM, supplementing through parenthetical additions and footnoting through contextual footnotes are the dominant strategies. Aldeeb [23] confirms that footnotes and bracket additions in Qur'anic translation are ideologically significant instruments; Hassen (2014) demonstrates that linguistic compensation strategies represent ideological decisions that determine the degree to which gender-sensitive meaning is preserved; and Jaoudi [22] shows how key terms in Surah an-Nisā' – including *qawwāmūna* – can be substantially reframed through choice of translation strategy.

Shihab's *wasatīyyah* enters the framework as the translator's declared ideology – not an external analytical tool but the value framework he explicitly

claims as his working principle [5]. This functional distinction is essential to avoid circular reasoning: the study does not assume moderation because Shihab claims it, but tests analytically whether the claim is textually substantiated [38], [39]. In the Qur'an, *wasat* and its derivatives appear five times, all conveying the sense of 'between two extremes'; QS. al-Baqarah [2]:143 describes the Muslim community as *ummatan wasatan* – translated by Shihab as 'a middle, moderate, and exemplary community' [27]. Shihab defines *wasatiyyah* as 'balance in all matters of worldly and spiritual life, accompanied by efforts to always adapt to the situations encountered based on religious guidance and objective conditions' [5] – an active rather than passive moderation that neither collapses into relativism nor rigidifies into fundamentalism [38], [39], [40].

It is therefore necessary to keep two senses of *wasatiyyah* analytically distinct throughout this study. In the first sense, *wasatiyyah* is Shihab's declared ideological orientation: the self-ascribed working principle he openly professes as the epistemological foundation of his project [5], and as such it is part of the object under examination, not a warrant for any conclusion. In the second sense, *wasatiyyah* functions as the researcher's evaluative framework: a set of verifiable criteria – avoidance of *guluww* at either pole and a *maqāṣid*-guided, non-atomistic reading distinguishing *al-ṣawābit* from *al-mutaḡayyirāt* – against which the translational choices are independently tested. The distinction matters because conflating the two would render the analysis circular, treating Shihab's claim to moderation as its own proof. By holding them apart, the study can reach a genuinely falsifiable verdict: the declared orientation is corroborated only where the translational evidence satisfies the evaluative criteria, and any divergence between profession and practice – over-textualism or over-liberalisation – would count as disconfirmation [38], [39]. *Wasatiyyah* thus operates simultaneously as datum and as measure, but never as both at the same analytical moment.

Of *wasatiyyah*'s six principal characteristics, two carry the most direct relevance for translating gender verses. The third – avoidance of *guluww* (extremism) – establishes that *wasatiyyah* refuses both the patriarchal-textualist position (absolutising role differentiation as divine will beyond question) and the liberal-feminist position (radically deconstructing the text beyond the bounds of scriptural authority) [5]. The fifth – comprehensive textual understanding guided by *maqāṣid al-syari'ah* and the distinction between *al-ṣawābit* (the unchanging) and *al-mutaḡayyirāt* (the changeable) – establishes that gender verses must be read in relation to the Qur'an's overarching message about justice, welfare, and human dignity rather than atomistically and literally [5]. Together these two characteristics define a normative space within which a *wasatī* translator can negotiate contested gender verses without falling to either extreme. Operationally, *wasatiyyah* manifests in the translated text through three verifiable

mechanisms: lexical choices that avoid absolute connotations at both ends; parenthetical additions that contextualise verses within specific relational or historical frames; and footnotes that define normative implications and direct intertextual reading. Shihab is closest to the third current of contemporary Islamic gender hermeneutics – contextual-ethical hermeneutics [33], [34], [35] – an effort to find gender equality from within Islam’s own sources without abandoning textual authority and without silencing the demands of justice.

Result and Discussion

Creation Ontology: Gender Equality through Productive Ambiguity

The question of the ontological origin of the first human being touches the most fundamental issue in Islamic gender discourse: women’s primordial standing. The primary verse of reference is QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:1, which uses *nafs wāḥidah* as the starting point for human creation – a phrase contested for centuries between two interpretations with different ideological implications: Adam (patriarchal-textualist) and a single human essence (contextual-egalitarian). Ghozali and Nadia [41] confirm that the identification of *nafs wāḥidah* with Adam is an ideologically produced mechanism, not the sole textually valid reading. Shihab’s translational decision over this phrase is the most revealing entry point into his ideological position.

Shihab translates *nafs wāḥidah* across QS. 4:1, 6:98, and 7:189 as *diri yang satu* (‘a single self’) – a choice that is strategically neutral and hermeneutically open. He does not render it as ‘Adam’ – which would lock the translation into a patriarchal reading – nor as ‘the same human essence’, which would overstep conventional textual limits toward liberal-feminist territory. ‘A single self’ is linguistically close to the Arabic yet semantically open enough to accommodate both readings. Per Lefevere [17], every lexical choice is an ideological act; here, the deliberate linguistic neutrality is itself an ideological decision – actively refusing to close the interpretive space available in the text. Von Flotow [24] reads this as supplementing in the lexical dimension: producing a semantic space broader than the literal text without radically manipulating meaning.

Table 1. Comparison of Translations of *nafs wāḥidah* across Qur'anic Translations

Surah	QT 2002	QM 2013 (Shihab)	QT 2019	Bakhtiar
QS. an-Nisā' [4]:1	<i>diri yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single self (Adam)"	<i>diri yang satu</i> "a single self"	<i>diri yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single self (Adam)"	a single soul
QS. al-An'ām [6]:98	<i>diri yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single self (Adam)"	<i>diri yang satu</i> "a single self"	<i>diri yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single self (Adam)"	a single soul
QS. al-A'rāf [7]:189	<i>dari jiwa yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single soul (Adam)"	<i>diri yang satu</i> "a single self"	<i>jiwa yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single soul (Adam)"	a single soul
QS. az-Zumar [39]:6	<i>diri yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single self (Adam)"	<i>diri yang satu (Adam as.)</i> "single self (Adam as.)"	<i>jiwa yang satu (Adam)</i> "a single soul (Adam)"	a single soul

Source: compiled from primary translation texts.

Table 1 reveals a consistency alongside an ideologically informative exception. In three of the four surahs, Shihab maintains 'a single self' without addition – allowing productive ambiguity to remain open. In QS. az-Zumar [39]:6 alone, he adds '(Adam as.)' in brackets. This second *wasatiyyah* mechanism – the use of brackets – is not a doctrinal closure of the ambiguity but a contextual acknowledgement: in this verse, where individual creation is foregrounded, the majority scholarly view identifying Adam is textually relevant. By withholding the addition in the other three surahs using the identical phrase, Shihab implicitly signals that identification with Adam is not the sole valid reading. This pattern of contextual differentiation reflects the fifth characteristic of *wasatiyyah* – comprehensive, non-atomistic textual understanding distinguishing a verse's specific context from doctrinal generalisation [5] – and what Baker [2] calls selective appropriation: choosing which contexts require explanation and which are left open in accordance with the translator's narrative orientation. In the translation text of QM, Shihab also employs the third mechanism by using footnotes to redirect focus from the historical question (who is *nafs wāḥidah*?) to the normative implication: that husband and wife should unite as a single soul, for they originate from a single self [27]. This deliberate shift – from a divisive ontological debate to a relational-ethical meaning – directs readers toward an inclusive understanding without abandoning textual authority. Positioned within the spectrum mapped by Al-Sharmani [33] and Duderija [34], Shihab's creation cluster belongs squarely to the third current – contextual-ethical hermeneutics – exploiting the hermeneutical space available within the tafsir tradition itself, through the views of Abū Muslim al-Aṣṣfahānī, al-Qaffāl, Rasyīd Riḍā, and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, to produce a gender-sensitive translation without leaving the frame of textual authority [28].

Male Authority: Lexical Reconstruction as Ideological Movement

QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34 on *qawwāmūna* is the most debated gender verse in the Qur'an. Aidil et al. [42] confirm that the traditional interpretation is replete with patriarchal bias rooted in male dominance in classical tafsir, and that a more inclusive reading requires understanding *qiwāmah* as conditional relational responsibility rather than absolute hierarchy. Sideeg [20] demonstrates from the translation studies side that choices in translating key terms of QS. 4:34 are discursive interventions shaped by the translator's theological and gender commitments, not neutral linguistic decisions.

Shihab translates *qawwāmūna* as *pemimpin dan penanggungjawab* ('leaders and those who bear responsibility') – a double formulation that avoids both extremes. The translation 'leaders' alone absolutises gender hierarchy; the translation 'supporters' (Bakhtiar) eliminates the authoritative dimension entirely [23]. 'Leaders and those who bear responsibility' occupies a productive middle: 'leaders' acknowledges the functional reality the text indicates, while 'those who bear responsibility' shifts the connotation from authority to obligation. This is the first *wasatiyyah* mechanism – lexical selection – working not by rejecting textual meaning but by contextualising it through a synonym pair that carries a different ethical orientation. The second mechanism – brackets – reinforces this: by adding '(husbands)' for *al-rijāl* and '(wives)' for *al-nisā'*, Shihab contextualises the verse within the specific domain of marital relations, reframing male authority from a universal gender hierarchy to a conditional household responsibility. Baker [2] calls this reframing; Von Flotow [24] identifies it as supplementing.

Table 2. Comparison of Translations of *qawwāmūna* (QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34) across Qur'anic Translations

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
Ayah (Arabic)	الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ	
QT 2002	<i>Laki-laki (suami) itu pelindung bagi perempuan (istri)... "Men (husbands) are protectors for women (wives)..."</i>	Moderate-protective – emphasises protective function
QM 2013 (Shihab)	<i>Para lelaki (suami) adalah pemimpin dan penanggungjawab atas wanita-wanita (istri)... "Male persons (husbands) are leaders and those who bear responsibility over women (wives)..."</i>	Wasatiyyah – acknowledges authority while foregrounding obligation
QT 2019	<i>Laki-laki (suami) adalah penanggung jawab¹⁵⁴ atas para perempuan (istri)... "Men (husbands) are those responsible for women (wives)..."</i>	Moderate-relational – emphasises accountability over hierarchy

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
	Fn: As heads of household, husbands are responsible for protecting, nurturing, managing, and promoting the family's welfare	
Bakhtiar	Men are supporters of wives	Liberal-feminist - eliminates the authoritative dimension

Source: compiled from primary translation texts.

The third mechanism - footnotes - operates at the translation of *darajah* (degree) in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:228, where Shihab defines the 'degree' of husbands as 'the degree of leadership grounded in the husband's magnanimity in lightening some of the wife's obligations and in treating their wives with admirable conduct' [27]. This redefines *darajah* from structural superiority - the patriarchal reading - to an ethically conditioned responsibility grounded in magnanimity and admirable conduct, coherent with *maqāsid* principles of family welfare [5]. Notably, the evolution of Kemenag's official translation over three decades - from 'leaders' (1990) to 'protectors' (2002) to 'those who bear responsibility' (2019) - converges substantially with QM's choices, confirming that the ideology of Islamic moderation consistently produces a recognisable family of translational choices across different production contexts [18]. This position aligns with Widodo and Zakaria's [43] thematic tafsir finding that the Qur'an affirms ontological-spiritual equality while acknowledging functional differentiation in household responsibilities - a differentiation that ought to be framed as a moral order based on justice and reciprocity, not as theological hierarchy.

Violence against Women: Contextualised Literalism

This cluster addresses two sub-verses: the command to detain women who commit *al-fāḥisyah* in QS. an-Nisā' [4]:15, and the command *waḍribūhunna* ('strike them') in QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34. Both present the same methodological dilemma: literal translation preserves textual authority but risks legitimising violence against women; contextual-interpretive translation may better serve gender justice but crosses the line from translation to tafsir. Al-Tarawneh [44] confirms that many Qur'anic translations fail to represent women fairly precisely because they use literal approaches that ignore the linguistic and paralinguistic context of the source. The way Shihab navigates this dilemma constitutes a genuine test of *wasatiyyah* in practice.

In QS. 4:15, Shihab translates *fa'msikūhunna fī al-buyūt* as *tahanlah mereka dalam rumah* ('detain them in their homes') - choosing 'detain' (*tahan*) over 'confine' (*kurung*) used by QT 2002. In Indonesian, 'confine' connotes repressive,

degrading punishment; ‘detain’ is preventive and conditional. Shihab supplements this with bracketed definitions of *al-fāḥisyah* and the four-witness requirement – together constructing a shift from a punitive to a procedural reading. Kemenag adopted the same shift in its 2019 edition, confirming convergence with the moderation ideology [18].

Table 3. Comparison of Translations of *fa’msikūhunna* (QS. an-Nisā’ [4]:15) across Qur’anic Translations

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
Ayah (Arabic)	فَإِنْ شَهِدُوا فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ فِي الْبُيُوتِ	
QT 2002	Apabila mereka telah memberi kesaksian, maka kurunglah mereka (perempuan itu) dalam rumah... “If they have testified, then confine them in houses...”	Repressive-punitive; connotes degrading punishment; harsher traditional approach.
QM 2013 (Shihab)	Lalu, apabila mereka telah memberi persaksian, maka tahanlah mereka dalam rumah... “Then, if they have given testimony, detain them in their houses...”	Preventive-conditional; temporary and procedural; humanistic moderate orientation.
QT 2019	Apabila mereka telah memberikan kesaksian, tahanlah mereka (para wanita itu) dalam rumah... “If they have provided testimony, then detain those women in their homes...”	Converges with QM; official shift toward moderate-procedural framing.
Bakhtiar	Then, if they bore witness to the affair, then, hold them (f) back in their houses...	Neutral and literal; reflects feminist-progressive perspective overall.

Source: compiled from primary translation texts.

The second sub-verse, *waḍribūhunna* in QS. 4:34, is the most challenging point in the entire cluster. Shihab chooses to translate it literally as *pukullah mereka* (‘strike them’) – unlike Bakhtiar who opts for ‘go away from them’ [23]. However, this literal choice is immediately surrounded by a two-layer bracket system: before ‘strike them’ comes ‘(if that has not deterred them)’, conditioning the act as a last resort after prior stages have failed; after ‘strike them’ comes ‘(in a manner that does not cause pain)’. These two layers collectively transform the pragmatic orientation of the sentence from authorising violence to severely restricting it. Baker [2] calls this selective framing; Von Flotow [24] identifies it as the most sophisticated form of supplementing in QM: an addition that actively reshapes meaning without replacing words. Footnote 120 further defines *nusyūz* as limited to the marital context rather than women’s obedience generally, and Shihab explicitly states in *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* that a husband who strikes without justification may be reported to a judge [28] – placing *waḍribūhunna* within an accountability framework consistent with the first characteristic of *wasatīyyah* regarding justice and balance [5].

Table 4. Comparison of Translations of *waḍribūhunna* (QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34) across Qur'anic Translations

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
Ayah (Arabic)	وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۗ	
QT 2002	<i>Perempuan-perempuan yang kamu khawatirkan akan nusyuz, hendaklah kamu beri nasihat kepada mereka, tinggalkanlah mereka di tempat tidur (pisah ranjang), dan (kalau perlu) pukullah mereka...</i> "Women whose disobedience you fear – advise them, forsake them in bed, and (if necessary) strike them... "	Literal; no contextualising qualification on the striking; opens legitimising space for domestic violence.
QM 2013 (Shihab)	<i>Wanita-wanita yang kamu khawatirkan pembangkangan¹²⁰ mereka, maka nasihatilah mereka dan tinggalkanlah mereka di tempat-tempat pembaringan dan (jika itu belum membuatnya jera) pukullah mereka (dengan cara yang tidak menyakitkan)...</i> "Women whose defiance you fear – admonish them and leave them in their beds; and (if that has not deterred them) strike them (in a manner that does not cause pain)... " Fn 120: defiance against the rights that God has granted to husbands – disobeying the husband and neglecting marital obligations.	<i>Wasatiyyah</i> – retains the literal imperative while surrounding it with layered brackets and a footnote reframing the act as a highly restricted, conditional last resort.
QT 2019	<i>Perempuan-perempuan yang kamu khawatirkan akan nusyuz,¹⁵⁵ berilah mereka nasihat, tinggalkanlah mereka di tempat tidur (pisah ranjang), dan (kalau perlu,) pukullah mereka (dengan cara yang tidak menyakitkan)...</i> "Women whose disobedience you fear – advise them, forsake them in bed, and (if necessary,) strike them (in a manner that does not cause pain)... " Fn 155: <i>Nusyuz</i> refers to a wife's neglect of her marital obligations, such as leaving the home without her husband's consent.	Converges substantially with QM on the bracketed qualifier; moderate-procedural framing.
Bakhtiar	"And those females whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping places and go away from them (f) "	Liberal-feminist – replaces the imperative to strike with departure; not well supported by dominant lexical range of <i>qaraba</i> .

Source: compiled from primary translation texts.

Polygamy: Conditionality as Ideological Strategy

QS. an-Nisā' [4]:3 occupies the most distinctive position among the gender-verse clusters: simultaneously the verse most claimed as an absolute licence and most frequently deconstructed as evidence of androcentric bias. Mir-Hosseini [35] locates the tension in a shared hermeneutical failure to recognise that polygamy's permissibility is a legal construction, not a direct divine grant. Wadud [45] adds that classical discourse consistently ignores the verse's original

revelatory context – emergency protection of female orphans – misreading a limiting provision as an unconditional licence. Duderija [34] insists the verse must be read together with QS. 4:129 on the human inability to be perfectly just.

Shihab retains the literal translation without altering any single word of the Arabic text, but inserts one significant bracket: ‘from women (*others*)’ – where ‘others’ implicitly posits a first wife as the reference point, reframing the verse as regulation within an existing marital context rather than as a freely executable permission. The most decisive ideological movement, however, is in footnote 112 – the only footnote in the entire QM that directly declares the translator’s position on a disputed gender issue. Shihab writes: ‘This verse neither makes polygamy obligatory nor recommends it; it speaks only of its permissibility – and even that is a *narrow door accessible only to those in extreme need* and only under conditions that are far from light’ [27]. Von Flotow [24] identifies footnoting as the primary strategy through which gender translators explicitly state their interpretive position; here, the footnote redefines polygamy’s normative status from ‘recommendation’ to ‘highly restricted conditional permissibility’.

Table 5. Comparison of Translations of QS. an-Nisa’ [4]:3 (Polygamy) across Qur’anic Translations

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
Ayah (Arabic)	وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مِثْلَىٰ مَا نُكِّتُوا وَرُبِّعًا ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا	
QT 2002	<i>Dan jika kamu khawatir tidak akan mampu berlaku adil terhadap (hak-hak) perempuan yatim (bilamana kamu menikahinya), maka nikahilah perempuan (lain) yang kamu senangi: dua, tiga atau empat. Tetapi jika kamu khawatir tidak akan mampu berlaku adil, maka (nikahilah) seorang saja, atau hamba sahaya perempuan yang kamu miliki. Yang demikian itu lebih dekat agar kamu tidak berbuat zalim</i> “And if you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, then marry such women as seem good to you: two, three, or four. But if you fear you will not be just, then one, or what your right hands possess.”	Textual; does not make conditionality explicit; leaves wide room for permissibility.
QM 2013 (Shihab)	<i>Dan jika kamu takut tidak akan dapat berlaku adil terhadap wanita-wanita (apabila kamu menikahi mereka), maka nikahilah yang kamu senangi dari wanita-wanita (lain): dua, tiga atau empat.¹¹² Lalu, jika kamu takut tidak akan dapat berbuat adil, maka (nikahilah) seorang saja, atau hamba sahaya¹¹³ wanita yang kamu miliki. Yang demikian itu adalah lebih dekat kepada tidak berbuat aniaya</i> “And if you fear you will not be able to deal fairly with women (should you marry them), then marry what seems good to you from women (<i>others</i>): two, three, or four. Then, if you fear you	<i>Wasatiyyah</i> – preserves the literal text while reframing polygamy from open permission to highly restricted contingency through the translation’s most direct ideological footnote.

	<p>will not be just, then (marry) one, or a female slave that you own.”</p> <p>Fn 112: “This verse neither makes polygamy obligatory nor recommends it; it speaks only of its permissibility – and even that is a narrow door accessible only to those in extreme need and only under conditions that are far from light.”</p>	
QT 2019	<p><i>Jika kamu khawatir tidak akan mampu berlaku adil terhadap (hak-hak) perempuan yatim (bilamana kamu menikahinya), nikahilah perempuan (lain) yang kamu senangi: dua, tiga, atau empat. Akan tetapi, jika kamu khawatir tidak akan mampu berlaku adil, (nikahilah) seorang saja atau hamba sahaya perempuan yang kamu miliki. Yang demikian itu lebih dekat untuk tidak berbuat zalim</i> “If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls (should you marry them), marry women who seem good to you: two, three, or four. But if you fear you will not be just, (marry) one, or a female slave you own.”</p>	<p>Largely converges with QT 2002 in textual rendering; conditionality not foregrounded in footnotes.</p>
Bakhtiar	<p>“And if you feared that you will not act justly with the orphans, then, marry who seems good to you of the women, by twos, in threes or four. But if you feared you will not be just, then, one or what your right hands possessed.”</p>	<p>Feminist-oriented; translates from an advocacy perspective but does not foreground conditionality explicitly.</p>

Source: compiled from primary translation texts.

The phrase ‘narrow door accessible only to those in extreme need’ is a highly deliberate ideological formulation: it narrows the permissibility drastically through tiered conditionality language without closing the door, which would contradict the text. This position bears structural correspondence with Saprudin et al.’s [46] analysis of Syahrur’s hermeneutical reconstruction of QS. 4:3: through his theory of limits (*nazariyyat al-ḥudūd*), Syahrur effectively restricts polygamy to a very specific social condition. Although the hermeneutical routes differ, both Shihab and Syahrur operationalise strict conditionality as an instrument for distilling polygamy from general permission to a response to measured social need. The footnote also directs readers to QS. 4:129 with the instruction ‘See surah an-Nisā’ [4] verse 129’ – implementing Duderija’s [34] thematico-holistic mechanism: the two verses read together logically promote monogamy as the Qur’anicly consistent choice without explicitly prohibiting polygamy, precisely the position Wadud [45] reaches through a different route. The relevance of Shihab’s conditional approach receives empirical confirmation from Sereikaitė-Motiejūnė’s [47] study of women in online polygamous communities, which finds that women entering such marriages are generally motivated by specific strategic-social factors – widow status, economic pressure, or support-network needs – not by unconditional ideological acceptance of polygamy as universal norm, thereby validating the

sociological premise that polygamy is a contextual solution, not a normative ideal.

Women's Testimony: Functionalism as the Frame of Moderation

The final cluster concerns the evidentiary provision in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:282 requiring two female witnesses to substitute for one male witness – a provision carrying the dual risk of being read as confirmation of women's cognitive inferiority or being dismissed as historically irrelevant without textual grounding. Shihab navigates both risks through a functional-contextual argument that makes this cluster the most analytically illuminating expression of the fifth *wasatiyyah* characteristic: the balance of *al-sawābit* and *al-mutagayyirāt* guided by *maqāṣid*.

Table 6. Comparison of Translations of QS. al-Baqarah [2]:282 (Women's Testimony) across Qur'anic Translations

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
Ayah (Arabic)	<p>وَأَسْتَشْهِدُوا شَهِيدَيْنِ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتْنِ مِمَّنْ تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الْأُخْرَىٰ</p>	
QT 2002	<p>Dan persaksikanlah dengan dua orang saksi laki-laki di antara kamu. Jika tidak ada (saksi) dua orang laki-laki, maka (boleh) seorang laki-laki dan dua orang perempuan di antara orang-orang yang kamu sukai dari para saksi (yang ada), agar jika yang seorang lupa, maka yang seorang lagi mengingatkannya "Call to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if two men are not available, then a man and two women from those witnesses you approve, so that if one of the two women errs, the other will remind her."</p>	<p>Substitutive logic: women's testimony is an emergency replacement when male witnesses are unavailable; implicitly positions women as second-class witnesses.</p>
QM 2013 (Shihab)	<p>Dan persaksikanlah dengan dua orang saksi dari orang-orang lelaki di antara kamu. Jika bukan dua orang (saksi) laki-laki, maka (boleh) seorang laki-laki dan dua orang perempuan dari para saksi yang kamu ridhai, supaya (jika) seorang (dari saksi perempuan) lupa, maka yang seorang (lagi) mengingatkannya. "Call to witness two male witnesses from among you. If there are not two (witnesses who are) men, then one man and two women from among the witnesses you approve, so that (if) one (of the female witnesses) forgets, the other will remind her."</p>	<p>Conditional-equivalence logic: 'if not two men' (rather than 'if no men available') positions the alternative witness composition as a legitimate option, not an emergency measure; opens space for single female testimony in modern contexts.</p>
QT 2019	<p>Mintalah kesaksian dua orang saksi laki-laki di antara kamu. Jika tidak ada (saksi) dua orang laki-laki, (boleh) seorang laki-laki dan dua orang perempuan di antara orang-orang yang kamu sukai dari para saksi (yang ada) sehingga jika salah seorang (saksi perempuan) lupa, yang lain mengingatkannya "Ask for the testimony of</p>	<p>Converges structurally with QT 2002; substitutive framing retained.</p>

Translation Source	Translation	Ideological Implication
	two male witnesses from among you. If two men are not available, (then) one man and two women from among the witnesses you approve, so that if one of the female witnesses forgets, the other will remind her."	
Bakhtiar	And call two witnesses to bear witness from among your men. Or if there are not two men, then a man and two women , with whom you are well-pleased as witnesses, so that if one of them (f) goes astray, then, the other one of the two will remind her."	Liberal-feminist; uses 'goes astray' rather than 'forgets'; substitutive structure preserved.

Source: compiled from primary translation texts.

Table 6 reveals a lexical-syntactic difference of substantial ideological import. Shihab renders *fa'in lam yakūnā rajulayni* as *Jika bukan dua orang (saksi) laki-laki* ('If (the witnesses) are not two men') – while QT 2019 uses *Jika tidak ada (saksi) dua orang laki-laki* ('If two male witnesses are not available'). 'If not' constructs a conditional-equivalence logic: the alternative composition is a legitimate valid option. 'If not available' constructs a substitution logic: women are emergency replacements. Sideeg [20] shows that such lexical interventions always represent ideological commitments – here, one preposition shifts women's evidentiary position from 'emergency substitute' to 'equivalent alternative'. More hermeneutically progressive still is the way Shihab deconstructs the reason for requiring two female witnesses. Rather than reading it as confirmation of inherent cognitive weakness – the patriarchal tradition – Shihab shifts the basis from intellectual capacity to historical social experience: women in seventh-century Arabia were less familiar with commercial terminology and procedures, not inherently weaker in memory [28]. Crucially, Shihab then affirms – drawing on Ibn Qayyim and Abduh – that if changes occur in women's ability, experience, and social engagement, as in the modern context, the testimony of a single woman can be accepted [29]. This is one of the most progressive arguments Shihab makes explicitly in the entire QM corpus, opening the door to the provision in QS. 2:282 as contextual-historical rather than universal and permanent. Duderija [34] would identify this as comprehensive contextualisation – separating what the text confirms from its historical context from what represents a universal intended principle. What Shihab does in this cluster is maintain the contextual validity of the seventh-century provision while opening practical space for change as women's social conditions change – precisely the balance between *al-sawābit* and *al-mutagayyirāt* that Mir-Hosseini [35] describes as 'finding gender equality from within Islam's own sources' [5].

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Beyond the specific case of QM, these findings carry implications for three converging fields. For Qur'anic translation studies, the analysis demonstrates that a translator's ideology is legible not only in isolated lexical substitutions but in a coordinated system of lexical, parenthetical, and paratextual choices that operate with measurable consistency across thematically distinct verses; this extends the micro-level approach of Gunawan [18] and Sideeg [20] by showing that translational ideology has a recoverable architecture rather than a scattered footprint. For Islamic gender hermeneutics, the study supplies what the existing *Al-Mishbāh*-centred scholarship [7], [8], [9] has lacked: evidence that a moderate exegetical stance reproduces a recognisable family of choices even in the constrained genre of translation, where the translator cannot argue but only render. This locates Shihab firmly within the contextual-ethical current mapped by Al-Sharmani [33] and Duderija [34], while showing that the current can be sustained through translational technique alone.

For the broader discourse on *wasatiyyah*, the study offers a methodological contribution that exceeds its immediate object: it converts moderation from a self-validating slogan into a testable property of textual production, demonstrating that a declared ideology can be held to account against the concrete artefacts it generates. This responds directly to Syamsuni's [6] observation that *wasatiyyah* in Indonesia is a contested construct claimed by competing actors, by supplying a procedure for distinguishing substantiated moderation from rhetorical moderation. Practically, the findings bear on translation policy and religious education: they suggest that official translation projects, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs' successive editions [31], can be evaluated for ideological consistency through the same indicators, and that the bracket-and-footnote apparatus is a pedagogically powerful site where moderation is either enacted or quietly abandoned. For translators and revision committees, the study thus offers not merely a reading of Shihab but a transferable instrument for auditing the moderation that gender-verse translation so often claims.

Conclusion

This study set out to determine whether and how the *wasatiyyah* that Shihab openly declares manifests in his standalone translation *Al-Qur'an dan Maknanya*, examined as an independent ideological text rather than as an appendage to *Tafsir Al-Mishbāh*. The analysis of ten verses across five contested clusters shows that it does, and that it does so consistently: Shihab deploys three interlocking mechanisms – hermeneutically open lexical choices, ideologically calibrated parenthetical additions, and contextual footnotes – that operate with comparable intensity from creation ontology to women's testimony. The

contribution is twofold. Substantively, the study delivers the first systematic, empirically grounded assessment of QM as a *wasatī* translational practice, demonstrating that moderation here is not a discursive claim but a verifiable property of the text. Methodologically, by operationalising *wasatiyyah* simultaneously as Shihab's declared orientation and as an independent evaluative criterion, it bridges ideology-based Qur'anic translation studies and Islamic gender hermeneutics – two traditions that have rarely been brought into systematic dialogue.

These contributions must be read against the study's limitations. The corpus, though deliberately selected for its diagnostic value, comprises ten verses within five clusters; it captures the most ideologically revealing sites of gender translation but cannot claim to exhaust QM's treatment of gender, still less the Qur'an's. The findings therefore establish the consistency of Shihab's moderation across the contested core, not its universality across every gender-related verse, and they speak to a single translator working within a single linguistic and confessional context. Generalisation beyond these bounds – to other translators, languages, or genres – is consequently a hypothesis the present design can motivate but not confirm. The reliance on the translator's own expository works for conceptual member-checking, while necessary, also means that the study tests internal coherence between Shihab's stated principles and his rendering rather than the reception of that rendering among readers, which lies outside its scope.

Future research can extend the framework in several directions. The same three-mechanism protocol could be applied comparatively to other Indonesian and international translators who profess – or disavow – moderation, testing whether the architecture identified here recurs or fragments across ideological positions. It could be carried into other thematic domains where translation and ideology intersect, such as verses on warfare, interreligious relations, or apostasy, to ask whether *wasatiyyah* behaves uniformly across the textual field or varies by theme. Methodologically, the approach invites integration with reception studies and corpus-linguistic techniques, which would test whether the moderation legible in the apparatus is also perceived by readers and whether it leaves quantifiable traces across a translator's complete output. Pursued along these lines, the study's central move – treating a declared ideology as an empirically auditable practice rather than an unexamined self-description – may prove useful well beyond the translation of gender verses, wherever moderation is claimed for the rendering of a sacred text.

Author Contributions

Dede Rodin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Supervision. **Saiful Amar:** Writing – review and editing, Data curation. **M. Fachrur Rozy:** Investigation, Project administration. All authors approved the final version of the article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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