

“The Qur’an says...”: An Examination of the Selective Use of Translations of the Qur’an

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Abstract

The focus of this paper lies in an examination of the possibility of websites choosing specific English translations of the Qur'an that best express their individual views on Islam. The specific focus is the diverse translations of Qur'an 4:34, and it is argued that they exist as parallel discourses between their translators and readers, in effect each representing a unique 'Qur'an 4:34' to their English users. In an era of increased immigration and communication, these translations stand in for the original text of the Qur'an—here considered, from the Muslim perspective, as the ultimate discourse between God and man—not only for non-Muslims, but for those Muslims for whom classical Arabic is reserved for prayer and ritual. As such, these translations form an important link between the foundational text of Islam and Muslims and non-Muslims in the West, and the dissemination of differing discourses on a controversial verse opens up opportunities for those with disparate views on Islam to all claim 'the Qur'an says' as evidence in their favour.

In order to assess the prevalence of the selective use of English translations of Qur'an 4:34, 27 different English versions of it were analysed using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, with particular attention paid to the translation of '*idribuhunna*', the third recourse open to husbands dealing with insubordinate wives. Following this, the results of the analysis were used to sort the translations by the level of their implied physical violence, from non-physical recourses to those employing extremely violent measures. Following an internet search of the phrase 'Qur'an 4:34', the resulting list of websites was sorted by perspective on Islam—Islamic, neutral, anti-Islamic—and their 'type' of translation noted. It was found that while there was a tendency by sites with an Islamic or neutral perspective to use translations with lower *and* higher violence ratings, none of the anti-Islamic sites used any translation from the 2 lowest violence groups. It was concluded that although the majority of translations found on the websites from all perspectives were of a traditional nature, showing 'beat', 'scourge' etc. as the third recourse, websites of an Islamic or neutral nature also included translations which reflect a non-violent interpretation, such as 'go away from them' and 'turn them away from wrongdoing'. While this may reflect a greater knowledge of translation choices on the part of Islamic websites, it does suggest that non-traditional translations, in this case those evincing a non-physically violent recourse, may be specifically *not* chosen by anti-Islamic sites as they do not imply the 'otherness' which the more violent word choices do. This paper recommends a continued awareness of the implications of diverse—and often contradictory—translations of the Qur'an, and seeks to inform discussion on the ancient question of whether or not the Qur'an should be translated.

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my husband, Stewart Harrison, for more reasons than I can name.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>Dedication</i>	vi
I. Introduction	
A. <i>What does the Qur'an say?</i>	1
B. <i>The choice of Qur'an verse 4:34</i>	3
C. <i>Analysis of translation as discourse</i>	4
D. <i>Why analyse English translations of Qur'an 4:34?</i>	4
E. <i>Limitations of this project</i>	5
II. Literature Review	
A. <i>Introduction</i>	6
B. <i>Verse 4:34 in context</i>	6
i. <i>Historical Context</i>	6
ii. <i>Ongoing influence of Qur'an 4:34</i>	8
C. <i>Qur'an translation</i>	9
i. <i>Should the Qur'an be translated?</i>	9
ii. <i>Translators on translating the Qur'an</i>	10
iii. <i>Translators' notes on translating Qur'an 4:34</i>	12
D. <i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i>	14
i. <i>Fairclough on Critical Discourse Analysis</i>	14
ii. <i>Critical Discourse Analysis discussed</i>	16
III. Methodology	
A. <i>Introduction</i>	18
B. <i>Available English translations</i>	18
i. <i>Options</i>	19
ii. <i>On the shelf July, 12, 2013</i>	20

C. <i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i>	21
i. <i>5 Key framing words of 4:34</i>	22
ii. <i>Translations of idribuhunna</i>	24
D. <i>Web Search</i>	26
i. <i>Options</i>	27
ii. <i>Google.com search Aug 1-3, 2013</i>	28
IV. Findings	
A. <i>Translations of 4:34</i>	30
i. <i>Discussion of findings for the 5 key framing words</i>	31
ii. <i>Discussion of findings for the translation of idribuhunna</i>	34
iii. <i>Table of findings</i>	38
B. <i>Websites discussing 4:34</i>	41
i. <i>Discussion of findings</i>	41
ii. <i>Tables of findings</i>	42
V. Conclusions	
A. <i>Introduction</i>	48
B. <i>Summary of findings and conclusions</i>	48
Appendix	51
Bibliography	59

Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. (Qur'an 4:34, Shakir).

Translation is the most political art, all the more so when it involves representing a text held sacred by those with whom relations are not always friendly. (Elmarsafy 2009: ix).

Chapter 1: Introduction

A. What does the Qur'an say?

In Islam, the question 'What does the Qur'an say?' is one of overarching importance. The Qur'an serves the Muslim community as its wellspring, tangible source, and guide to both the rights and obligations of this world, and the existence of—and path to—the next. Its relevance is not relegated to a particular place, or class, or day of the week, nor is it confined to the spiritual realm of its followers. To those who believe the Qur'an to be a written record of the true words of God to the Prophet Muhammad, 'What does the Qur'an say?' is a request for entry into the flow of divine discourse.

The celebrated scholars of Qur'anic commentary and exegesis, from Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Ja'far al-Sadiq in the early Islamic period to the modern works of Abul Ala Maududi, Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, and Sayyid Qutb, spent much of their lives attempting to formulate answers to this central question. Countless scholars across the Muslim world, or *ummah*, have used such scholarship and/or their own interpretative power, *ijtihad*, to investigate, consider, and rule on questions of personal and community law, the role of the state in Islam, and the performance of prayer and ritual. That there have evolved differing law schools, and that 'Islamic government' is not a definitive term, point to the elusiveness of a consensus answer to 'What does the Qur'an say', due to the nature of the text and/or man's ability to comprehend it.

The strongest uniting factor among the differing streams of Islam is the recognition of the Qur'an, in its original Arabic, as the authentic and unchanged words of God.¹ While there is continuing disagreement and dialogue on the meanings of certain words and phrases, in both *muhkam* and *mutashabih*—i.e. clear or ambiguous—verses, such discourse takes place relative to the same literal words and phrases. The question among such circles is, therefore, not ‘What does the Qur'an say?’, as much as ‘What do the words of the Qur'an *mean*?’. In the case of translations of the Qur'an, in this case English translations, the question subtly shifts to ‘What do the words of the Qur'an mean *in English*?’.

With the expansion of the Islamic community and message beyond the Arabic speaking world, translations of the Qur'an came first into Persian, eventually branching out until by 1993 the Qur'an, in part or whole, was available in 114 distinct tongues (Rana 1993). With translation comes an amplification of the diverse meanings attributed to the original Arabic words and phrases.² For example, although translators A and B may find the same meaning for a particular Qur'anic word, they may use different words or phrases to portray that meaning in their target language. These words or phrases, in turn, will have differing implications, from subtle to overt, in the new language, and such implications will shift with the natural evolution of that language. Such differences increase geometrically, however, when translators echo scholars' conflicts over the meanings of the original Arabic words. In such a case, translators C and D provide their users with different words and phrases reflecting *differing* meanings, leading to an even wider and more varied answer to those who enquire, ‘What does the Qur'an say?’ regarding particular aspects of Islamic life. This widening pyramid of meaning and word choices provides a continuum of options to those wishing to present Islam in a particular light; politically speaking, this allows those who wish to steer the discourse on Islam to reflect the ‘Islam’ they wish the public to see, while claiming the Qur'an itself as their reference source.

In order to examine the diversity of choice available to those seeking to influence and/or inform the public on Islam, this project will focus specifically on a partial discourse analysis of

¹ With minor exceptions.

² For the purposes of this paper, ‘translation’ will be used also to include those English editions of the Qur'an which refer to themselves as transliterations, interpretations, meanings etc., since it is unlikely that their Western readers view them as anything other than ‘translations’ of the original Arabic text.

twenty-seven English translations of Qur'an verse 4:34, and an examination of their use on internet sites having a clearly perceived perspective on Islam.

B. The Choice of Qur'an verse 4:34

Qur'an verse 4:34 was chosen as the focus of research for three main reasons. First, as the verse reflects on the status of women in marriage, in a culture which strongly encourages marriage (Bakhtiar 2007: lii), it reflects on Islam as a whole. It is, therefore, pivotal in how Islam is perceived. How this verse is interpreted, and whether or not it is seen as portraying a lower status for women than men in Islam, is of concern to both those within Islam, for whom it serves as part of their societal ideal, and those assessing it from the outside. The status of women is a commonly held indicator of where a culture stands with relation to modernity, and any appearance of foundational acquiescence to what is now termed domestic violence may well bar 'the West' from any view of Islam other than 'other'. Specifically, Qur'an 4:34 outlines methods of discord resolution within marriage, and the paths available to husbands in dealing with what might generally be termed insubordinate wives. The most controversial aspect of this verse is the nature of what many interpreters see as a decidedly physical component to the disciplining of wives. As will be shown, the English words chosen to describe the participants, their relationship, and the recourses available within that relationship, can present Islam, to a contemporary English speaking audience, as being anything from inherently violent and misogynist to strikingly modern.

The second reason this verse was chosen is the multiplicity of translation choices found in its English translations. In 2004, there were over 60 available English translations of the Qur'an (Qara'i 2004: ix), and in the twenty-seven analysed plus others referred to on websites, no two were exactly alike. Although greater emphasis will be placed on what may be termed the third disciplinary option, differences in the names of the parties involved, the role of the men with regard to the women, and the nature of the cause of the discord will also be examined for their impact on the perception of the scope of—and rationale behind—that option. Finally, Qur'an 4:34 was chosen for analysis as it regularly appears on anti-Islamic sites as evidence that

the Qur'an—and Islam as a cultural entity—condones and even recommends domestic violence against women.

C. *Analysis of translation as discourse*

If, as Muslims believe, the Qur'an is a text with divine origin, then it stands as an example of the highest order of discourse between man and God. It was felt appropriate, therefore, that the verse in question be examined through the light of discourse analysis and, to that end, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (hereinafter termed CDA) was employed as the methodological framework. More specifically, CDA was used to analyse the *translations* of Qur'an 4:34, with the discourse under consideration being that between the translator and reader.

By isolating and analysing what will be called 'the 5 key framing words' in the translations generally, and 1 of those words, the translations of *idribuhunna* specifically, the differences between the translations will be highlighted, and the implications of the word choices made clearer. Having sorted the translations into categories based on the severity of punishment which the translation of *idribuhunna* implies, the results will be charted against the viewpoints—Islamic, neutral, or anti-religion/anti-Islamic—of the websites which use them. In this way, if patterns of use are found specific to websites with particular viewpoints, it would point to the practice of website translation choices based on agenda.

D. *Why analyse English translations of Qur'an 4:34?*

The value of this research lies in its use of CDA to examine translations of a verse of the Qur'an as discourse, thereby highlighting what the English words *imply* to the reader, rather than what the Qur'an literally says in the Arabic of its time.³ As Islam expands into non-traditionally Islamic areas, more and more people will be studying, converting, or trying to counter Islam in English or other non-traditional languages. With the growing reliance on internet sources for

³ There is, of course, no consensus on the exact meaning of every word of the Arabic either but, in its original written form, there is a consistent context and the same literal words to work from.

information, it is important that there be an academic awareness of how the diversity of available translations of the Qur'an may allow for the furtherance of a number of equally diverse political agenda. This project has value, therefore, as another path from which to approach the study of Islam and the West, in this case by utilising a Western method of discourse analysis to delve into the English—aka Western—interpretations of the foundational source of Islam.

E. Limitations of this project

This project is limited in scope due to its length, which precludes adding a survey of individual's reactions to the translations discussed. While researching, it was noted that some friends and family members who glanced at the work had strong visceral reactions to particular translations, and a systematic examination of such reactions would be a welcome addition at a later date. While assigning expected reader inferences based on dictionary definitions and my own sense of generalised Western word usage rather than impartial survey, I tried not to fall prey to Poole's criticism that "in reporting his own reactions, Fairclough appears to accord them special status" (Poole 145). Also of interest would have been the inclusion of information linking translations relative to the viewpoint of the translators themselves, which in the case of Rodwell, for example, makes fascinating reading.

A further limitation to the project is its author's regrettable lack of proficiency in Qur'anic Arabic, which precludes a more informed analysis of the interpretive choices available to translators. While this limits such an analysis, it can however, also be seen as a benefit, since it prevents an assumption that any one translation is the 'correct' one based on personal analysis of the text in its original language. This allows for an interaction with the texts which, in one aspect, mirrors that of the target audience of websites; the texts were approached through the lenses of translators.

Chapter II: Literature Review

A. Introduction

This project is centred on examining English translations of Qur'an verse 4:34 through the framework of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. Therefore, in making a review of the relevant literature, 3 main literature grouping were consulted:

- 1: Works on Qur'an verse 4:34 itself.
- 2: Works on the translation of the Qur'an, both in general and relative to individual translations.
- 3: Works on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, by Fairclough and others.

Having reviewed the literature on Qur'an 4:34, it was noted that the scholarship on this verse comes from a number of academic fields, most notably feminist and women's studies, traditional Islamic scholarship, Islamic studies, law and anthropology. This is not surprising considering both the place of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims, and the nature of the verse itself, with its themes of marital and gender relationships, rebellion and discipline.

B. Verse 4:34 in context

i: *Historical context of 4:34*

Manuela Marin's article, "Disciplining Wives: A Historical Reading of Qur'an 4:34", looks to place the verse in its historical context, and discusses the circumstances under which this verse was said to have been revealed to Muhammad. She notes that although there are a number of *ahadith* which are viewed as outlining possible occasions of revelation for this verse, the general consensus is that it was occasioned by a disagreement between a husband and wife, generally referred to as Sa'd b. al-Rabi and his wife Habiba bt. Zayd b. Abi Hurayra (Marin 2003: 9ff). Muhammad was advising the wife, who had been struck by her husband, that she

could retaliate, but he “then received the revelation: ‘Men are the managers of the affairs (*qawwāmūn*) of women’” (Marin 2003:9-10).

In interpreting the meaning of Qur’anic verses, the actions and words of Muhammad, as Prophet, hold a great deal of weight, and Marin notes that there are conflicting reports on whether or not Muhammad himself allowed violence against women within his own household. She writes of reports that when Muhammad’s daughter, Fatima, appeared to have been beaten by her husband, ‘Ali, he had her return to her husband, stating “a woman cannot be held to be virtuous unless her husband asks anything extraordinary from her” (Marin 2003:12). Contrary to this, in the editor’s footnote to Qur’an 4:34 in the 11th edition of A. Y. Ali’s translation, it is noted that his own choice for the translation of *idribuhunna* is ‘stay away from’ based on “the fact that the Prophet never battered or spanked any wife and detested any such action” (Ali, A.Y. 2006: 195, n547A). In Tabataba’i’s commentary, *Tafsir Al-Mizan*, he also notes concerning this verse that “countless such statements” by Muhammad such as “What! does one of you hit the woman and then goes embracing her?”, give the “Islamic views on this subject” (Tabataba’i n.d.). It should be noted that in Ali’s translation proper, he uses “spank them (lightly)” (Ali, A.Y. 2006: 195), Tabataba’i uses ‘beat’ in the formal translation at the beginning of his commentary on that section, and ‘slapping’ in the commentary itself. Tabataba’i also notes that Abu Ja’far wrote that “*beat them*, means hitting her with tooth brush” [italics in original] (Tabataba’i n.d.). Marin herself speculates that reports on violence between Muhammad’s daughter and her husband, which were referred to in early texts only, may have fallen out of use as “the historical process of sanctification experienced by ‘Ali and Fatima filtered out any items of information that could cast their married life under an unfavourable light” (Marin 2003:13).

In her discussion on the occasion of revelation of Qur’an 4:34, Lisa Hajjar notes that this verse may have been revealed as a limitation to the prevailing social norm in Arabia at the time of Muhammad, “because beating women was quite common in that place and time” (Hajjar 2004: 10-11). She believes this is more amenable to “the Qur’anic ideal of marital relations as companionable and mutually supportive”, and functions as a restriction of violence rather than an endorsement (Hajjar 2004: 11). This is in line with what Amira Mashhour has written concerning the Qur’an’s view of polygamy, noting that “establishing a limit at the time was a progressive development” (Mashhour 2005: 588).

ii: *Ongoing influence of Qur'an 4:34*

Mohamed Mahmoud writes that the 'beating' part of Qur'an 4:34 "has been met with moral unease and resistance by many authorities both past and present...one of those rare instances when a believer feels that he/she stands on a different and higher moral plane than that which the sacred scripture prescribes" (Mahmoud 2006: 537). As will be seen in the discussion of translator's notes, this unease continues today, and has ramifications in the present.

While many scholars reflect on the overarching issues raised in Qur'an 4:34—gender in Islam, women in Islam etc.—others write on the ongoing influence of Qur'an 4:34 in the daily lives of Muslims across the globe. Murray Last, for example, notes that in the African Hausa community, the verse is used as permission for a man to beat not just his wife, but others under his authority, as "this verse, by analogy, applies to the rest of the man's household" (Last 2000: 373). Similarly, Clarissa Adamson, in her discussion of women's rights in Java, states that Qur'an 4:34 "is cited in Indonesia and throughout the Muslim world to evince women's subordinate status to men" (Adamson 2007: 14). Interestingly, the verse has also been used in the decidedly un-Islamic German law courts. In 2007, a judge ruled that a Muslim woman who had been abused and threatened with death by her Muslim husband did not qualify for an expedited divorce, with one rationale being that "wife beating is common in Moroccan culture and therefore did not constitute an 'unreasonable hardship' for the woman" (Dunn and Kellison 2010: 11-12). The judge's other—and complimentary—ruling was based on Qur'an 4:34 itself, as she noted that "the woman's 'western lifestyle' constituted just the sort of dishonor to her husband that would allow for beating, according to a traditional understanding of this verse" (*ibid.*).

Qur'an 4:34 is, therefore, not a verse shrouded in antiquity or an historical curiosity, but a clear influence in the modern Islamic world. For this reason, its translations are worthy of study as to *their* influence in interpreting its meanings.

C. *Qur'an translation*

i. *Should the Qur'an be translated?*

This study deals with one small section of the Qur'an in its English translated form, an entity which is the Qur'an, but not, if you will, *the* Qur'an. Elmarsafy writes that such a work constitutes, literally, a “trans-lation, the carrying over, of the language of the Qur'an” (Elmarsafy 2009: ix), and by examining the translations of this one small section, it will be clear that the Arabic words have been ‘carried over’ in a wide variety of ways. That the Qur'an is translated in the first place has been a contentious issue to some since Islam spread beyond the Arabic speaking community, with Abdul-Raof noting that “the translation of the Qur'an has been traditionally rejected by Muslim scholars...[who] only allow exegetical translation which is based on commentary and explication of the Qur'anic text” (Abdul-Raof 2001: 40). While such rejection is largely based on the belief in the Qur'an's unique and divine nature, others avoid translation for aesthetic reasons. The term ‘lost in translation’ has been applied to the innate qualities of one language and its native writers that cannot be replicated effectively in another language. With reference to the text of the Qur'an, Ingrid Mattson notes that “to translate the Qur'an to another language is to lose the powerful aural effects of the rhymes, assonance, and other harmonious and poetic aspect of the Arabic words” (Mattson 2008: 137).

This is not surprising, as Abdul-Raof notes that “the Natural Semantic Metalanguage....suggests that only about fifty per cent of words have translation equivalents in all or almost all of the languages of the world” (Abdu-Raof 2001: 9). The reality of the non-equivalence of languages takes on a more pointed meaning when the translation is of a text deemed to be of divine origin, when translation would necessitate interpretation since not all words would have equivalents in the target language. As al-Amri cautions, “Qur'an translation, as of any text, necessarily involves exegetical interventions” (al-Amri 2010: 81). So that Muslims interact with the exact text rather than with ones overlaid with such human interventions, the Arabic of the Qur'an remains the language of Islamic prayer and recitation, even though, “likely...within two centuries of the rise of Islam, the majority of Muslims were

non-Arabic speakers” (Mattson 2008: 137). This trend has continued, and Khaleel Mohammed notes that “since fewer than 20 percent of Muslims speak Arabic, this means that most Muslims study the text only in translation” (Mohammed 2005). That the expansion of Islam has led to an expansion of translations, was seen in 2010, at Tehran’s 18th International Qur’an Exhibition, where 358 publishers showcased the Qur’an in 112 different languages from 25 nations (Hurriyet Daily News 2010). It is evident, therefore, that outside of ritual usage, the language of the Qur’an for countless Muslims across the globe is the language of translation.

The question remains, how does the Islamic community spread the message of the Qur’an without altering what are seen as the exact words of God? Tibawi sums up to these seemingly contradictory goals by noting that “to the jurists, commentators, theologians and others of the classical period, the question of translation touched fundamental beliefs, which include the belief in the universal character of Muhammad's mission and the belief that the Qur'an is both eternal and immutable” (Tibawi 1962). These questions are still valid in an age when global communication and instant downloads make ‘the Qur’an’ in all its diverse forms—books, pdfs, sound files, interactive web experiences—so easily accessible. In his discussion of Sale’s early English translation of the Qur’an, Elmarsafy notes that Sale avoided Marracci’s error of “failing to trust the text that he is translating except insofar as doing so will enable him to indulge his militaristic whims and ‘kill Muhammad with his own sword’” (Elmarsafy 2009: 47). It is fair to say that the wealth of translation options in our time could allow those who wish to follow Marracci’s lead to pick and choose selections from those translations considered the most inflammatory in their own language.

ii: *Translators on translating the Qur’an*

At this point, it is useful to read what translators themselves write about the process of Qur’anic translation. In the introduction to his translation, Colin Turner writes that although there is an “unwritten decree that prohibits the reading and study of God’s Word in any language other than the original Arabic”, that decree has been “universally ignored...[and] one might even say was meant to be broken” (Behbudi and Turner 1997: ix-x). He also draws his reader’s attention to the idea that although “the general consensus among Muslim scholars—including those who have attempted translation of the Quran into other languages—is that the Quran is ultimately untranslatable...is not to say that it should never be translated” (Behbudi and

Turner 1997: xiii). In discussing the early translations of the Qur'an by Maracci, du Ryer, Sale and Rodwell, Turner highlights one reason for the necessity of, in particular, competing translations by Muslims, citing the “the amount of damage done—wittingly or otherwise—by these non-Muslim translators to the image of Islam” (Behbudi and Turner 1997: xii). This idea is echoed in Irving's introduction to his own translation, when he writes that “any accurate version [or the Qur'an] is really a *tafsir* or commentary written in the target language, and it is important for us to have a trustworthy one with Islamic views” (Irving 1985: xxi), and A. Yusuf Ali adds that Muslims began their own translations when faced with “the amount of mischief done by...versions of non-Muslims and anti-Muslim writers” (Ali, A.Y. 2006: xxii). In Aziz's preface to the 2010 edition of Maulana M. Ali's 1917 translation, he writes that Ali's was “the first English translation and commentary by a Muslim to be generally available in the world” (Ali, M. 2010: 1-1). He continues by noting specifically that “it was done to refute the vast mass of misrepresentations of Islam by its Western critics” (*ibid.*).

In the preface to his translation, entitled ‘Problems of Translation’, Tarif Khalidi writes of the conflicting needs of the translator to make the Qur'an accessible in another language, without changing it. He writes that he “attempted a balance between the familiarly modern and the alienating archaic, while preferring at all times as literal a rendering as possible” (Khalidi 2008: xxi). He notes, however, that no translation is perfect, “since all translation is in essence a Sisyphean activity” (Khalidi 2008: xxii), and Irving echoes that belief, writing that “translation is literally impossible because interpretation in another language is an on-going process” (Irving 1985: xxiv). Bell is more blunt in his assessment of this issue, writing that to consider that the problems in Qur'an translation “have now been solved...would require the confidence of ignorance” (Bell 1937: v).

Some translators provide their readers with detailed information on their translation processes, influences, and sponsors. Laleh Bakhtiar, in her translation *The Sublime Quran*, writes that “the method used by English translators of the Qur'an to date is to start at the beginning of the sacred text and work through translating until the end” (Bakhtiar 2007: xli). Believing that this method did not adequately differentiate between similar Arabic words, she first, through a transliteration system, “found a viable English equivalent that I would not repeat for another Arabic word” (Bakhtiar 2007: xlii). Nikayin informs his reader that he has chosen to

translate the Qur'an "in the iambic, the majesty of the English poetry...at the service of more fluency in communicating the Message" (Nikayin 2000: xii). Haleem writes that he limited his use of explanatory footnotes to those times it was "absolutely necessary to clarify meaning and context" (Haleem 2010: xxxv). He adds that when such information concerns ambiguous sections, he referred to 12th and 14th century commentaries by al-Razi, Abu Hayyan and Baydawi (*ibid.*). On the opening page of his translation, in the section titled "Some Notes for the First Edition of the Tajwidi Qur'an", Malik describes the work as "the transliteration into Latin characters and the transfer into an approximate meaning in American English" (Malik 1997: n.pag.). He continues by noting that "this work is not sponsored or paid for by any government or anonymous charitable society" (*ibid.*). In a similar vein, Zayid writes that he has "not allowed any 'sectarian' interpretations whatsoever to creep into my translations" (Zayid 1980: xi).

In some ways, al-Hilali and Khan sum up many of the translator's comments, when they write that their translation "must fall short of conveying the wealth of meaning that the miraculous text of the original conveys; and that the meaning conveyed by the translation is only the sum total of what the translator has understood from the text" (al-Hilali and Khan: III). Pickthall adds that "the Koran cannot be translated...that is the belief of old-fashioned Sheykhs and the view of the present writer" (Pickthall 1930: vii). In short, translators of the Qur'an spend tremendous time, energy and scholarship in trying to translate the untranslatable.

iii. *Translators' notes on translating Qur'an 4:34*

In this study, which analyses the impact of a translator's specific word choices, it is helpful that many translators provide notes concerning their translations of Qur'an 4:34 in general, and *idribuhunna* in particular. Evidence of the controversy concerning the translation of this verse can be seen in Malik's translation, where he takes the unusual step of listing Ahmed Ali's translation of *idribuhunna* under his own, contrasting his "strike them [gently, if you must]" with Ali's "go to bed with them [when they are willing]" (Malik 1997: 132). In his own footnotes to this verse, Ali notes that of the diverse possible interpretations of *idribuhunna*, his choice was "strengthened by the Prophet's authentic *hadith* found in a number of authorities, including Bukhari and Muslim: 'Could any of you beat your wife as he would a slave, and then

lie with her in the evening?’” (Ali, A. 2006: 79). Tariq, on the other hand, chooses a sort of middle ground, and translates *idribuhunna* as “punish”, which could imply a number of scenarios (Tariq 1966: 68). In a footnote to this verse, however, presumably part of the revision by Gilani, the word choice is clarified: “that is, punish them by having no contact and relationship with them” (Tariq 1966: 68, n.3). In turn, Nikayin, in a footnote to his translation “scourge her slightly”, cautions that “any harsh beating, hurt, or injury is subject to the Law of Talion” (Nikayin 2000: 123, n.2).

Rashad Khalifa, whose translation of Qur’an 4:34 includes “you may (as a last alternative) beat them”, titles the section in which this verse is written “Do not beat your wife” (Khalifa 1992: 535). In the accompanying footnote, he explains the seemingly contradictory title by noting that “God prohibits wife-beating by using the best psychological approach”, namely showing the other alternatives as preferable to beating (*ibid.*, n.*). He finds that this relates better to the overarching topic of Chapter 4, which he sees as “defending the women’s rights and countering the prevalent oppression of women” (*ibid.*, n.*).

The most attention paid to this verse by the translators surveyed, however, is by Laleh Bakhtiar, who notes in her introduction that “while this translation differs in multiple ways from previous English translations...it is in the interpretation of the word “to beat” in 4:34 that this translation challenges” (Bakhtiar 2007: lii). She notes that her translation, *The Sublime Quran*, is “the first critical English translation of the Quran by a woman” and points to what she believes is “a lack of internal consistency in previous English translations and failure to pay attention to women’s points of view” (Bakhtiar 2011: 431). She raises many issues of grammar and syntax, but relies on two main points. First, in following the *Sunnah*, or actions of Muhammad who, she writes, “never beat his wives clearly having understood the word in another sense”, she believes any translation reflecting violence is tantamount to going against the *Sunnah* (Bakhtiar 2007: lv). Secondly, she notes that the Qur’an instructs men not to harm a wife seeking divorce, and therefore, if *idribuhunna* is translated as ‘beat’, it makes divorce more attractive than marriage (Bakhtiar 2007: liv). In her words, “what woman would choose to stay married and be beaten rather than be divorced and unharmed?” (*ibid.*).

An interesting point in Bakhtiar’s influential work is that she first finds that “clearly the intention of the Quran is to see man and woman as complements of one another, not as superior-

inferior” (Bakhtiar 2007: xliii). This is her premise, and believing that ‘beat’ cannot be right without violating that premise, she directs her efforts towards what she feels is a more logical translation, not at odds with the *Sunnah* or other sections of the Qur’an itself. This is reminiscent of the stages in Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis methodology for righting social wrongs: “Step 1: Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect...Step 2: Identify obstacle to addressing the social wrong...Step 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles” (Fairclough 2010: 235). Bakhtiar addresses the issue of Qur’an 4:34 because it is “frequently mobilized in support of attempts to render women subservient to men on the one hand and, on the other, as a major criticism of Islam on the grounds that it is against human rights and is sexist”, both of which Bakhtiar clearly views as social wrongs (Bakhtiar 2011: 432). From her writings, it is also clear that the obstacle was traditional male translations, and the way past it was a new translation, informed by the ideal of gender compatibility in Islam. In her essay, “Understanding a Difficult Verse, Qur’an 4:34”, however, Kecia Ali writes of the division between the traditional translations and those like Bakhtiar’s, and notes that “however convincing one finds the progressive arguments that a man’s striking his wife is not permitted by Q. 4:34, it is impossible to remove all difference or hierarchy from this verse without doing violence to the Qur’anic text itself” (Ali, K. 2003).

D. *Critical Discourse Analysis*

i: *Fairclough on Critical Discourse Analysis*

The majority of the scholarship on Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis consists of his own writings and other academics’ analysis and reviews of his books and essays. Much of Fairclough’s writing examines discourse as a means of gaining power or fighting against it, and he begins the preface of the 2nd edition of his appropriately named *Language and Power*, by noting that his book “is about how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society” (Fairclough 2001: viii).⁴ In their discussion of Fairclough’s

⁴ An interesting example of his use of CDA in analysing discourses of power is his examination of the political discourse of Margaret Thatcher, found in his *Language and Power*, 2nd ed. pp 140ff.

CDA methods, Titscher et al write of his belief that “social control and power are exercised with increasing frequency by means of texts, so text analysis becomes an important part of critical discourse analysis” (Titscher et al 2000: 152-153). Of particular interest to this study is his awareness of the rising significance of the internet as a mode of discourse, which he believes “has led to a certain optimism about power inequalities, because it is freely accessible to those who have the necessary technology” (Fairclough 2001: ix). Therefore, to Fairclough’s view, discourse analysis as a whole deals with the analysis of the ebb and flow of power, as witnessed and aided by textual discourse. As the nature of text has adapted to technological change, the internet has become a prime source for discourse and its analysis. One might say that from a discourse analysis perspective, the Qur’an could be viewed first as a long running episodic oral discourse to Muhammad, then an organised and formalised written discourse in the form of the written Qur’an, then as a series of parallel written ‘Qur’ans’ in different languages, and now as the original and translated ‘Qur’ans’ existing in whole and in part as digital images on electronic screens.

With regard to the ‘critical’ dimension of his theory, Fairclough writes that “critical social research aims to contribute to addressing the social ‘*wrongs*’ of the day...by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them” [italics in original] (Fairclough 2010: 231). With reference to a foundational religious text which, depending on the translation one uses, may appear to endorse beating one’s disobedient wife—a generally agreed upon ‘social wrong’ in the West and elsewhere—such an analysis method seems applicable. Although this paper does not concern itself with the Arabic text or with an analysis of practices which it may be seen to condone, many of the translations of the relationship words between the parties in Qur’an 4:34, and the ‘crime and punishment’ elements between them, are a textual representation of an exercise of the power of one party—or class—over another.

Writing in *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*, Chouliaraki and Fairclough note that “what differentiates CDA from some Foucaultian versions of discourse analysis used by social scientists is that...it anchors its analytical claims about discourse in close analysis of texts” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 152). CDA, therefore, allows for discourse to be analysed down to its most basic building blocks, individual words.

The analysis becomes not ‘what does this verse say to its reader’, or ‘what does this phrase imply’, but ‘what does this one single word say to its reader, and what in turn does that say to the reader about the text’s adherents’. In light of the present study, Fairclough’s belief that “interpretations are generated through a combination of what is in the text and what is ‘in’ the interpreter” (Fairclough 2001:118), can be seen to inform the discussion of translators’ word choices and their implications.

ii: *Critical Discourse Analysis discussed*

Poole, in his discussion of Fairclough and CDA, writes that Fairclough intends his analytic method to be “a resource for people who are struggling against domination and oppression in its linguistic forms” (Poole 2010: 142), but he questions whether CDA might take “too deterministic a view of the effect on readers of particular textual features (Poole 2010: 152). Leistyna, in her review of Chouliaraki and Fairclough’s *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*, writes that the authors “insist that a critical perspective of language and its inextricable relations to power and authority should be central to any study of society” (Leistyna 2001: 188-189). This aspect of CDA is of interest to this project as it aids in the search for evidence of websites attempting to sway their target audiences by using particular translations of Qur’an 4:34 over others, i.e., using their power to ‘broadcast’ the textual messages which best fits the ethos of their overall discourse.

Leistyna makes an interesting comment when she notes that that CDA “by contextualizing the historical and political relationships within which discourse manifests... represents a major step forward in the decolonization of language and representation” (Leistyna 2001: 184). When, for example, modern Westerners approach the Qur’an, they find themselves in the middle of a discourse that took place in the full context of a different time, place, and linguistic setting. By using CDA to analyse what ‘modern Westerners’ would read into pieces of that text, disjointed from both the work in its entirety and its original contextual setting, it becomes clear how such bits of texts could be used to sway readers to a particular point of view.

In his discussion of CDA, Scheuer notes what he sees as Fairclough’s persistence in “relating the text to SOCIAL PRACTICE in order to address political or societal issues” [capitals in original] (Scheuer 2003: 144). In Scheuer’s opinion, Fairclough does so without

detailing “what social theory lies behind the concept of social practice, or how text-external data should be incorporated in the analysis” (*ibid.*) This is a valid question, since Fairclough deals in discourses of politics and political struggle, and Scheuer warns that “CDA is in danger of insisting on political agendas without simultaneously offering methods that adequately justify the analysis, independent of its political agenda” (*ibid.*).

Bloome and Talwalkar, in what might be called a mass book review, examine the core concepts found in 4 of Fairclough’s books relating to CDA. They write that Fairclough’s method is designed “to explore and articulate how language and power are related” (Bloome and Talwalkar 1997: 105) and note that in his work, “power is defined primarily as a negative, emphasizing control, coercion, exploitation, etc.” (Bloome and Talwalkar 1997: 111). The authors note, however, that other scholars see positives in power under some circumstances, providing the example of Street’s view that “power can also be seen as transformative” and Nodding’s that “power with others...[may] transform inequitable situations for mutual benefit” (*ibid.*).

It is clear that there are a number of academic approaches to Qur’an translation in general, and to the interpretation, ramifications and translation of Qur’an 4:34 in particular. The following chapter provides a methodology for approaching this verse through CDA.

Chapter III: Methodology

A. Introduction

The methodology for this project was straightforward, and comprised of four distinct phases:

- 1: The collection of a large number of *available* English translations of Qur'an verse 4:34.
- 2: The general analysis of the '5 key framing words' in the English translations, followed by the specific analysis of the translation of the *particular* Arabic word *idribuhunna* in each of those translations.
- 3: The collection of data from a *series* of web sites posting and/or discussing this verse online.
- 4: The creation of tables allowing the analysis of any *correlation* between word or phrase choices in the translations and the perspectives of websites which chose to use them.

B. Available English translations of the Qur'an.

Prior to beginning the data collection for part one, it was necessary to focus on what 'available' means. Does it mean, for example, every English translation every completed, and does it include unpublished, narrowly published, or partially translated editions? As it was anticipated—and later shown—that the websites surveyed in part 2 of the data collection would represent everything from personal screeds to measured academic neutrality, there was a case to be made for such an exhaustive search, but this was considered unreasonable given the time allowed and the nature of the project. More importantly, such a data collection would presuppose that websites which discuss this verse have, as a group, the time and desire to go to such lengths. Availability, therefore, became an important feature, and the following sources of translated Qur'ans were considered.

i: *Options*

a: *Mosques and their libraries*

Although mosques are certain to have Qur'ans, it was expected that besides having strong preference for the original Arabic text, they would favour sectarian translations and those which more closely reflect their leaders' views on traditional versus non traditional translations. For example, one might not expect to find Qur'ans produced by the King Fahd printing complex in Medina in a Shi'a mosque, nor a copy of *The Sublime Qur'an* in a conservative Sunni one. As well, as will be shown, many of the websites using Qur'an 4:34 in English translation are non-Muslim, and their information gatherers may not necessarily feel comfortable in a mosque.

b: *Islamic bookstores*

This choice was considered, as such stores would be inclined to carry a wide range of translations to suit the tastes of their varied clientele. Like mosques, however, they may be overtly sectarian in nature, and lean toward one type of translation over another. As well, such establishments would be infrequent in towns and cities without a significant Muslim population.

c: *Secular and non-Islamic religious bookstores*

Secular bookstores such as Indigo in Canada and Barnes and Noble in the United States carry various translated editions on line, but retail shelf space limits their in store inventory to far fewer. A search could be initiated in such stores, but in stock items may well represent only those translations which are regular sellers or have been recently published and reviewed, and therefore overly represent traditional translations and new and/or controversial ones.

d: *Public libraries*

It has been the author's experience that public libraries tend to have donated copies of the Qur'an from particular groups within Islam. It is not unusual to find 40 copies of one edition throughout a system due to this practice. While the practice of book donation is laudable, it does not promote a varied collection. On the other hand, public libraries provide free access to their patrons, and may allow borrowing from other library systems.

e: *Internet sites specialising in Qur'an translations*

Websites such as *QuranSearch.com*, although specialising in providing a variety of translations, were considered unusable in this regard as they are among the websites from which the data for Part 3 was collected. As well, these translations do not normally include translators notes or explanatory footnotes, which were needed to inform the overall discussion.

f: Islamic schools and colleges

These sources are rarer in North America than the others, and would naturally concentrate more on the Qur'an in its original Arabic form than in translation. As well, access to the library would be reserved for students and faculty only.

g: University libraries

The appeal of a University library lies in its (presumably) broad, non-sectarian collection. Ideally able to accumulate its collections without religious pressure or the need for each volume to turn a profit, it is unlikely to advance one translation over another. There is an advantage over public libraries in that holdings are held in limited locations rather than spread out across a wide system. Although access to such a library is generally limited to students, alumni and faculty—which in some instances amounts to a vast number of people—many universities allow books to be borrowed by the general public through interlibrary loans, and /or through the purchase of an annual library pass.

ii On the Shelf, July 12, 2013: Available translations

The conclusion was made that the best access to the widest variety of translations at any given time would most likely be at or through a university library. The idea of the search was to reflect the normal lengths that a person or interest group might logically go to when trying to understand a verse of the Qur'an, particularly when their intent is to post their view online for wide consumption. This is not to say, of course, that they would all do this, but that it would be a logical search venue for those wishing to be informed on the verse in question.

Ultimately, the main Library at the University of Toronto (formally known as 'The John P. Robarts Research Library') was chosen, a large North American (i.e. Western) library, but not

a specialised religious/Islamic one. As a Torontonionian, it was the logical venue for this research, but in the wider view it serves as somewhat of a middle ground for Western libraries, situated politically, if not geographically, between Britain and the United States. It is, therefore, very much in the middle of the English speaking West, the expected ultimate end users of English translations of the Qur'an. Therefore, the 'availability' criterion for this project consisted of that part of the collection of English translations of the Qur'an in The John P. Robarts Research Library which were found on the shelf in the stacks on July 12, 2013.⁵

The translations of Qur'an 4:34, plus any applicable translators' and editors' notes, were scanned until there were 26 unique translations. Information was not taken from volumes which used the exact wording of one already noted, were simple reissues of the earlier work of others, or where the only changes were minor updates with no impact on the verse in question.⁶ Part one, therefore, consisted of finding and noting 26 English editions of the Qur'an, each presenting a different translation of Qur'an 4:34. For the present project, this is considered representative of what a person looking for examples of a verse of the Qur'an in English translation might find on a given day. It is interesting to note, as will be seen in Table IVa, that the volumes represent both old and new translations, such as Sale and Bakhtiar, 'best-sellers' such as A.Y. Ali and Pickthall, but also lesser publicised editions such as Fakhry and Gohari, and controversial ones such as Khalifa. It also contained two of the editions which I owned for student work, A.Y. Ali and Haleem, but did not contain the third, that by Malik. It was decided that Malik should be included, as representative of the serendipitous nature of where and how one gains information, in other words, of the copy of the Qur'an one might borrow from a neighbour.

C. Critical Discourse Analysis

Having collected 27 different English translations of Qur'an 4:34, the next stage involved a partial Critical Discourse Analyses of select portions of the verse. The first analysis was general in nature, and concerned what might be called 'the bones' of the verse, what is here

⁵ Access was gained through a family member's library card.

⁶ Whether or not this is typical of the 'on-the-shelf' collection at this library year round or at similar universities in North America is unknown, but would perhaps be an interesting study.

referred to as the ‘5 key framing words’. The second analysis was a more focused look at the English words used to translate the Arabic word *idribuhunna* in this verse. It is this analysis which highlights what may arguably be called the point of greatest controversy in the verse, although, as shall be shown, the more general analysis will be used to inform the more specific one.

For the purpose of analysis, Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis was chosen as the methodological framework for both general and specific analyses. Generally speaking, his method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), deals with the meanings which readers attach to words, and the power which those word choices have on those readers. In his own words, Fairclough, in his book *Language and Power*, writes that the main impetus behind the creation of his method was “to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others” (Fairclough 2001:1). If, as Adamson writes, “many parts of the Muslim world rely on An’Nisa ‘34 to assert men’s superiority over women” (Adamson 2007: 15), then an analytic tool created specifically to trace the usage of language in the holding of power by one group over another is an apt choice.

i: 5 Key framing words of Qur’an 4:34

Muslims believe the Qur’an to be the record of the divine discourse to Muhammad, and although the revelations are said to have been delivered piece by piece over a period of years, the text of the Qur’an constitutes one single discourse, that of God to humanity. The English translations of the Qur’an, however, constitute multiple parallel discourses of that one singular discourse. The translations, in a sense, are secondary or subsidiary discourses to that event, each one forming its own distinct communication to its reader.

In examining the English translations of Qur’an 4:34, it was found that they were built upon 5 key framing words. These words frame the translations and give the reader the main characters and actions of which the verse is concerned. The sequence of words and phrases analysed depict the following pattern: **A** has **B** relationship with **C**. If **C** commits—or it is feared may commit—**D**, **A** may use recourse **E** in relation to **C**. Using the Shakir translation shown on Page 1 as an example, this would give the sequence **Men (A)** [are the] **Maintainers**

(**B**) [of] **Women** (**C**) [who if they commit] **Desertion** (**D**)[men may ultimately] **Beat** (**E**). In his CDA, Fairclough emphasises the “situational context” of discourse, specifically, the words which describe “what’s going on?”, “who’s involved?” and “in what relations?” (Fairclough 2001:122). Due to CDA’s emphasis on power relationships and the implications of word choices, the questions that come to the fore are:

1. What is the relationship between A and C?
2. Does B imply a power status with regard to C?
3. What type or level of offence does D imply?
4. What type or level of recourse does E imply?

In this analysis, necessarily brief, the purpose was less to analyse each individual word, than it was to focus on the range of possible answers to these questions, based on the variety of translations used in this study. The following table provides examples of how specific words were isolated for analysis in this portion of the project⁷:

Table IIIa Diversity of word choices in Qur’an 4:34 as a whole.⁸

Q.1 <i>What is the relationship between A and C?</i>			
Ali, A.	Men	Support	Women
Haleem, M.	Husbands	Take good care of	Wives

⁷ For the purposes of this study, parenthetical additions by translators with reference to the 5 key framing words were included as they would be expected to be read along with the text proper. As well, although the verse under examination is here always referred to as 4:34, some editions have alternative numbering (e.g. the Behbudi and Turner edition considers it 4:35).

⁸ In order to provide these word and phrase fragments with a context, the complete Qur’an 4:34 from each translation used may be found in the Appendix to this paper.

Q.2 Does B imply a power status with regard to C?			
Bell, R.	Men	Overseers	Women
Irving, T.	Men	Support	Women
Nikayin, F.	Men	Protectors	Women
Q.3 What type or level of offence does D imply?			
Bakhtiar, L.	Men	Wives	Resistance
Chaudhry, M.	Men	Women	Evil Conduct
Tariq, A (rev. Z. Gilani)	Men	Women	Disobedience
4. What type or level of punishment does E imply?			
Ali, Abdullah Yusuf (A)	(Husbands)	(Wives)	spank them (lightly)
Ali, Muhammad, Language updated by Z. Aziz	Men	Women	Turn them away (from wrongdoing)
Pickthall, M.	Men	Women	Scourge

The bolded words in the above examples represent the diversity of translations for classes of participants, roles, misdeeds and recourses, and hints at the possible number of potential combinations.

ii: *Translation choices for the Arabic word 'idribuhunna'*

In the previous section, the emphasis was placed on gaining insight into the effect on the reader of various English translations of Qur'an 4:34 by highlighting the differences in what are taken here to be the 5 key framing words and/or phrases in the verse. In this section, the emphasis is on the translation of the Arabic word, *idribuhunna*, in isolation. *Idribuhunna*

represents the 3rd recourse open to, as seen above, a specific class of males (A) with regards to a specific class of females (C), in reaction to—or out of fear of—their committing (D). In the formula shown above, therefore, *idribuhunna* is E.

Idribuhunna is, arguably, the most contentious word in Qur'an 4:34 for 2 reasons: the number of significantly different translations as can be seen in Table IIIa, and the overtones which they imply. In order to highlight these implications, the individual words or phrases chosen as appropriate translations for *idribuhunna* in the 27 translations analysed were examined with regard to their dictionary meanings as well as what Western readers were likely to infer from them. This process was carried out in four stages:

1. The translations of *idribuhunna* were isolated from the 27 translations.
2. The definitions for each example were looked up in the Oxford English Dictionary, online edition (hereafter referred to as OED).
3. The definitions for each example was looked up in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, online edition (hereafter referred to as MWD).
4. Conclusions were drawn as to the likely implications of the word choices, based on the dictionary definition and the author's experience as a Western reader.

The dictionary definitions were used to ascertain the shades of meaning normally associated with each word. The 2 specific dictionaries used were chosen as being representative of both British and North American dictionaries, and the online editions were chosen as the most up-to-date. Conclusions were then drawn as to what a general English speaking Western audience would infer from each word or phrase considered. Once conclusions were drawn as to the implications of these specific words or phrases, they were then ranked from non-physical recourses through to decidedly violent ones, and sorted into five categories. The five categories are:

- 1: no physical force
- 2: mild physical force

- 3: medium physical force
- 4: violent physical force
- 5: extremely violent physical force.

Following this, each translations of *idribuhunna* was sub-categorised within this framework, until each translation had a unique place in the list.

By way of example, one translation from each main category is shown in Table IIIb:

Table IIIb Partial listing of translations of *idribuhunna*, sorted by ascending level of implied physical violence:

Translator	A	C	E	Category
Ali, M. Language updated by Z. Aziz	Men	Women	Turn them away (from wrongdoing)	1
Ali, A.Y.(1)	(Husbands)	(Wives)	Spank (lightly)	2
Haleem, M.	Husbands	Wives	Hit	3
Bewley, A. and A. Bewley	Men	Women	Beat	4
Pickthall, M.	Men	Women	Scourge	5

D. Web Search

One of the main thrusts of this project was to find out if web sites with specific agenda chose those English translations of Qur'an 4:34 which best served their agenda. In order to determine if this was a common practice, websites were surveyed from August 1 – August 3, 2013 to find out if there was a correlation between website viewpoints and translation types.

i: *Options*

In considering how best to perform this search, 4 main factors were considered, all relating to mirroring what could be termed a ‘typical’ internet search. The 4 factors were:

1. Choosing a search engine
2. Setting search parameters
3. Search time
- 4: Search length

a: *Search engine*

Although there are many search engines available on the internet, Google is by far the most used. According to the rating services eBizMBA, Complete Rank, Quantcast Rank and Alexa Rank, on August 8, 2013, Google was the number one search engine in the world, with 900,000,000 “estimated unique monthly visitors” (Ebizmba.com 2013).⁹ The Google search engine was, therefore, chosen to gather information on English language websites discussing Qur’an 4:34.

b: *Search parameters*

The next step was deciding on the search parameters. To begin with, there were a number of options available for searching the word ‘Qur’an’, however a preliminary search using the 3 spelling variations Koran, Quran, and Qur’an all produced the same results. Secondly, there were a number of ways to enter the information that the verse in question is the 34th in the 4th book of the Qur’an, such as 4:34, chapter 4 verse 34, and *surah 4 aya 34*, and after more preliminary searching, it was found that as long as one of the above spellings of Qur’an and the numbers 4 and 34 were present, the findings showed little variation. It was decided that the simple Qur’an 4:34 would be used as arguably the most likely internet ‘shorthand’ for a search of this nature, with the verse/chapter structure echoing the notation of Biblical referencing.

c: *Search time*

⁹ To put this into perspective, the 2nd ranked search engine was Bing with 165,000,000.

The next step was deciding on the timing of the search. In order to find out whether searching on a different day or at a different time would alter the results, the search ‘Qur’an 4:34’ was performed 3 times, on August 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of 2013, at different times of day. The results were identical all three days,¹⁰ and these are the results presented in this study.

d: *Search length*

The final step was deciding on the length of the search. Although there were “about 383,000 results (0.38 seconds)” to my search enquiry (Google.com 2013), it was decided to limit the results to those unique ones found on the first 3 pages. Although a casual seeker of information is unlikely to go beyond page one¹¹, it was felt that someone with a specific interest in this precise verse may well scroll down, if only to find a view that mirrors their own. This allowed for enough examples to begin to see trends, without going beyond the limit of what an interested party might reasonably do.

ii: *Google.com search Aug 1-3, 2013*

The internet search for websites answering the search parameter ‘Qur’an 4:34’ was performed on August 1-3, 2013. In all, 18 different websites were selected to be examined, with the ones not examined being duplicate websites, listings of other search engines’ results, or Qur’an search sites which catalogued a multitude of translations and were, therefore, beyond the scope of this paper.

In order to highlight the perspectives of these websites, each one was categorised as to its stated or implied perspective on Islam: Islamic, neutral, or anti-Islamic. Table IIIc shows examples of such website categorisations along with the ranking assigned to their chosen translation’s word choice(s) for the Arabic *idribuhunna* in Qur’an 4:34. By doing so, it was hoped that any connections found between viewpoint of website and type of translation would be highlighted. An example of the information found is shown in Table IIIc:

¹⁰ For information on how Google.com ranks findings, please see this article on its algorithms:

<http://www.google.ca/insidesearch/howsearchworks/algorithms.html>

¹¹ For an interesting chart on page viewing, please see <http://www.gravitateonline.com/google-search/2nd-place-1st-place-loser-seriously>

Table IIIc Categorisation of Websites by Viewpoint and Recourse Type

<u>Viewpoint of Website</u> (<u>Stated or Inferred</u> from Content)	<u>Web Source</u>	<u>Translation(s) Used</u>	<u>Type from Table 1</u>
<u>Islamic</u> (Perspective: Qur'an translator)	Quran-Islam.org	E. Yuksel	1d
<u>Neutral</u> (Perspective: Academic)	UMich.edu	Shakir (uncredited)	4a
<u>Anti-Islamic</u> (Perspective from website: "Christian Apologetics Website")	AnsweringMuslims.com	Pickthall Dawood A.Y. Ali (B) Shakir	5 4a 3d 4a

At this point, all the data had been collected and sorted into tables, and findings were then made.

Chapter IV: Findings

In the course of this study, the 5 key framing words of Qur'an 4:34 have been identified and marked as the following:

A = The male or class of males

B = The relationship between A and C

C = The female or class of females

D = What C has done—or was feared to have done—to occasion E

E = Third recourse of action of A towards C.

A. Translations of 4:34

In discussing what has been analysed in Qur'an verse 4:34, we return to the 4 questions previously asked:

1. What is the relationship between A and C?
2. Does B imply a power status with regard to C?
- 3: What type or level of offence does D imply?
4. What type or level of punishment does E imply?

The first 3 questions can be discussed with reference to the 5 key framing words of Qur'an 4:34.

i: *Discussion of findings for the key framing words*

a: *What is the relationship between A and C?*

In analysing the relationship between A and C, as shown in the 27 English translations of Qur'an 4:34 listed below in Table IVa, it is clear that A is male and C is female, but less clear about the relationship between them. The majority of the translations, 25 out of 27, list Class A as men, while the remaining 2 list Class A as husbands. While it is clear that all husbands are men¹², not all men are husbands, and it is this ambiguity of Class A in reference to Class C that carries differing implications for the reader. This same ambiguity is found in the variety of choices for defining who is included/excluded in Class C. The majority, 24 out of 27, define the class of people as 'women', while 3 define them as 'wives'. There are, in total, 24 men/women combinations, 2 husbands/wives combinations, and 1 men/wives. Therefore, a reader coming across an English translation of this verse is more likely to read that it refers to men, as a class, and women, as a class, than to the specific class of husbands and wives. This may not only apply to the casual onlooker for, as al-Hibri notes, this verse has been called "the hallmark of patriarchal bias, since it has been interpreted to mean that all men are superior to all women at all times" (Al-Hibri 2001: 51).

Although it is clear that Qur'an 4:34, in the context of its surrounding verses, deals with *marital* discord, presented in isolation—particularly the first section alone: A is B to C—translations where A equals men and C equals women appear to state universal values. In this case, therefore, one could not fault the casual browser from inferring decidedly different Islamic ideals from Haleem's "husbands should take good care of their wives" (Haleem 2010: 34), Chaudhry's "Men are the protectors (and maintainers) of women" (Chaudhry 2010: 85), and Rodwell's "Men are superior to women" (Rodwell 1909: 415).

¹² Although the point of the analysis is to highlight the inferences likely to be drawn by those reading the verse in a largely non-contextual way, it is considered unlikely that a reader would consider a 'medieval' religious text to have referenced any class other than men as husbands, and women as wives.

b: *Does B imply a power status with regard to C?*

In the same way that the terms for the persons inhabiting Class A and Class C differ in the translations, so does the role Class A plays with regard to Class C. Although the scope of the project does not allow for a closer look at the implications and likely inferences taken from each word or phrase individually, when listed, the diversity of choice becomes clear. Figure IVa below lists the translation choice found for B, sorted by popularity.

Figure IVa: Translation choices for key framing word B

Protectors & Maintainers	5
Charge.....	3
Maintainers.....	3
Support.....	3
Care.....	2
Guardian.....	2
Manage.....	2
Overseers.....	2
Responsible	2
Pre-eminence.....	1
Protector	1
Superior	1

Building from the choices for readers in Question 1, the variety of choices for key framing word B adds a second layer in Question 2. The reader is now faced with not only the ambiguity of what classes of people the instruction refers to but also, within the parameters of whatever relationship one infers from the translation, whether the role of A toward C is to be one of caring for, managing, or one that encompasses all the ramifications of being ‘superior’.

c: *What type or level of offence does D imply?*

We have now arrived at the crux of the circumstance which would allow the members of Class A to perform E with regard to Class C. In other words, what act of C opens the door to E. Perhaps not unexpectedly, there is a range of words—with their embedded implications—to describe the actionable offence. Figure IVb below shows the variations found, sorted by popularity:

Figure IVb Action of C which allows for recourse E, sorted by popularity

Rebel/Rebellious.....	5
Disobedience	4
Desertion.....	2
Disloyalty	2
Disloyalty & Ill-conduct..	2
Ill-conduct.....	2
Refractoriness.....	2
Averse	1
Evil Conduct.....	1
High-handedness.....	1
Misconduct	1
Perverseness.....	1
Recalcitrance.....	1
Resistance	1
Surliness.....	1

It is clear at this point that a further layer of ambiguity has been added for the reader, as the terms describe different actions or states of being. Desertion, disloyalty and disobedience, for example, are not interchangeable terms; the phrases ‘she deserted her husband’, ‘she was disloyal to her husband’ and ‘she disobeyed her husband’ would be likely to conjure up

significantly different images in the mind of a reader. The same could be said for being rebellious or exhibiting surliness, clearly not the same states.

From the analysis of the findings regarding the first 3 questions above, it can be seen that definitive answers to them were not forthcoming.

ii: *Discussion of findings for the translation of idribuhunna*

At this point, we are ready to address Question 4: What type or level of punishment does E imply?

As shown above, there was found a wide range of translation choices for the first 4 words of the framing sequence. It will not come as a surprise, therefore, that the same outcome was found for the 5th word, the translation of *idribuhunna*. As this is the part of the verse which occasions the most controversy, individual words were analysed so as to create a plausible ranking of their implications of physical violence. Those translations which did not include a violent implication (with the exception of ‘strike them out’) were not analysed further since they were considered self-explanatory and constructed of phrases rather than single words. The following findings resulted from searches conducted on August 5. 20-13.¹³

a: *Strike out (of the house)*

Along with the more standard definitions given for ‘strike’ showing its meaning as a blow, OED also defines strike as “to make one's way, go”, and MWO defines it also as “to delete something“. In this sense ‘to strike’ someone implies to remove them, in the way that one might strike a name from a list. This implies a non-violent form of punishment where the offender is told to leave the home, i.e. a forced separation.

b: *Spank*

The OED defines ‘spank’ as “to slap or smack (a person, esp. a child) with the open hand”, while the MWO defines it as “to strike especially on the buttocks with the open hand”. Spank, in popular use, refers to a relatively mild punishment suitable for a disobedient child, and

¹³ As mentioned above, the letters OED refer to the Oxford English Dictionary Online Edition (OED.com 2013) and MWO refers to the Merriam-Webster Online Edition (Merriam-Webster.com 2013).

therefore can imply a number of things when addressed towards women. It can imply that the punishment should be relatively light, that women are like children, and/or that women should be treated like children. It also has, when used in reference to adults, sexual overtones. For these reasons, it is ranked lowest on the violence scale.

c: *Smack*

The OED defines ‘smack’ as “to strike (a person, part of the body, etc.) with the open hand or with something having a flat surface; to slap...also *spec.* to chastise (a child) in this manner”. The MWO defines it as “to strike so as to produce [the sound of] a smack”. These definitions imply a single action, of a severity in line with that with which one might punish a child. This latter quality places it near ‘spank’ in severity.

d: *Hit*

The OED defines ‘hit’ as “to get at or reach with a blow, to strike”, and the MWO similarly defines it as “to reach with or as if with a blow” Hit, therefore, refers to a single blow, but does not speak to its intensity. Due to the implied single action and its more adult nature, ‘hit’ is rated relatively low on the violence scale, while still being higher than those words which evoke childhood punishments.

e: *Strike*

The OED defines ‘strike’ as “to deal a blow, to smite with the hand (*occas.* another limb), a weapon or tool”, while the MWO defines it as “to aim and usually deliver a blow, stroke, or thrust (as with the hand, a weapon, or a tool)”. In this usage, strike is similar to hit, but in common usage implies a hard hit, as “he struck her” implies a more dramatic incident than “he hit her”. Also the word ‘strike’, with its hard ‘k’ makes it sound more threatening than ‘hit’. For these reasons it is rated as higher than ‘hit’ on the violence scale.

f: *Punish*

The OED defines ‘punish’ as “to penalize for an offence...to cause (an offender) to suffer for an offence, esp. a transgression of a legal or moral code; to subject to a penalty or sanction as retribution or as a caution against further offences”. The MWO defines it as “to impose a penalty on for a fault, offense, or violation...to inflict a penalty for the commission of (an offense) in retribution or retaliation”. To punish, therefore, is a general term, which could itself describe the actions inherent in all the terms analysed, plus non violent actions such as isolating an offender or verbally abusing them. As the severity is not stated or implied, this word choice is listed in the middle of the rankings as the average of all the levels of severity it *could* imply.

g: *Beat*

The OED defines ‘beat’ as “to strike with repeated blows”, while the MWO defines it as “to hit repeatedly so as to inflict pain —often used with up”. Beat, therefore, refers to a series of actions meant to cause pain. Beat is a much more common term in the modern West than the following terms ‘scourge’ and ‘chastise’, as the terminology for one who attacks his own wife is ‘wife beater’. This is a decidedly negative term, and the repeated action of ‘beat’ ranks it higher on the violence scale than ‘hit’ or ‘strike’. Beat also implies a more direct physical attack than the next words in line, ‘scourge’ and ‘chastise’, in that the chain would be A attacks C with his hands, rather than A chastises/scourges C with an object.

h: *Chastise*

The OED defines ‘chastise’ as “to inflict punishment or suffering upon, with a view to amendment; also simply, to punish, to inflict punishment (esp. corporal punishment) on”. In turn, the MWO defines it as “to inflict punishment on (as by whipping)” and “to censure severely”. In both definitions, although the physical nature of the act of chastisement is emphasised, there is also the possibility that it might be non-physical. In my own experience, chastise, although rarely heard, has overtones of judgement and revenge but tends to refer to non-violent punishment and/or abuse, and therefore, ‘chastise’ is rated as somewhat less violent than ‘scourge’ due only to the *possibility* of it not being physically violent. It is rated higher than ‘beat’, however, since it may well include the beating of someone with a device such as a

whip, a punishment type reserved for animals—and decried as violence towards them—in the West.

i: *Scourge*

The OED defines ‘scourge’ as “to beat with a scourge; to whip severely, flog” and notes that its use is now rhetorical. In turn, the MWO defines it as “flog, whip”. Scourging, therefore, is an extremely violent action, done to inflict severe pain. It is also a continuing rather than a single action as flogging, for example, implies repeated action. With scourge, therefore, there is no doubt as to the severity of its use as a form of punishment. As the OED notes, the word is normally used rhetorically, presumably because words for the scourging/whipping/flogging of human beings are not part of the normal Western discourse. It is rated most violent as the definitions and implications are unequivocal in their view of ‘to scourge’ as anything other than an act of severe and repetitive physical violence.

The findings above have led to a ranking of the terms chosen as translations for the 3rd recourse in Qur’an 4:34. They have been ranked by the presence and severity of physical punishment, since it is the physical nature of the punishment which tends to attract the most criticism and controversy. The first grouping is non-physical, reflecting words that imply a non-physical—although not necessarily a non-harmful--recourse. The remaining four groupings reflect physical recourses, grouped by their implied severity into mild, medium, hard, and extreme physical punishments.

Type 1: Non-physical resolution

1a: Go to bed with wives, when they are willing [implies reconciliation and affection]

1b: Turn them away from wrongdoing [aiding rather than punishing]

1c: Go away from them [separating from them]

1d: Strike them out (of the house) [sending them away]

Type 2 : Mild or childlike physical punishment

2a: Spank lightly

2b: Smack

Type 3: Medium Physical Punishment

3a: Hit

3b: Strike

3c: Punish

3d: Beat lightly

3e: Scourge slightly

Type 4: Hard Physical Punishment

4a: Beat

4b: Chastise

Type 5: Extreme Physical Punishment

5: Scourge

iii: *Table of findings*

Table IVa, beginning on page 39, shows the results of the analyses, including the 5 key framing words and phrases of Qur'an 4:34, sorted by the severity of the 3rd recourse, as detailed above.

Table IVa: English translations of Qur'an verse 4:34, sorted by type of punishment recourse.

<u>Type</u>	<u>Translator</u>	<u>Male (A)</u>	<u>Male's role towards female (B)</u>	<u>Female (C)</u>	<u>Female's wrong doing (feared or actual) (D)</u>	<u>Third recourse of male towards female (E)</u>
1a	Ali, A.	Men	Support of	Women	Averse	Go to bed with them (when they are willing)
1b	Ali, M. (Language updated by Z. Aziz)	Men	Maintainers	Women	Desertion	Turn them away (from wrongdoing)
1c	Bakhtiar, L.	Men	Supporters	Wives	Resistance	Go away from them
2a	Ali, A.Y. (1)	(Husbands)	Protectors and maintainers	(Wives)	Disloyalty and ill-conduct	Spank them (lightly) ¹⁴
2b	Khalida, T.	Men	Legally Responsible	Women	Rebel	Smack
3a	Haleem, M.	Husbands	Take good care of	Wives	High-handedness	Hit
3c	Tariq, A (rev. Z. Gilani)	Men	Guardians	Women	Disobedience	Punish

¹⁴ The editor of this edition adds a footnote explaining his belief that "stay away from" would be the correct translation (Ali (C): 195 n.547a).

3d	Ali, A.Y. (2)	Men	Protectors and Maintainers	Women	Disloyalty and ill-conduct	Beat (lightly)
3d	Hilali, M. and M. Khan	Men	Protectors and Maintainers	Women	Ill-conduct	Beat them (lightly, if it is useful)
3e	Nikayin, F.	Men	Protectors	Women	Disloyalty	Scourge her slightly
4a	Arberry, A.	Men	Managers	Women	Rebellious	Beat
4a	Bell, R.	Men	Overseers	Women	Refractoriness	Beat
4a	Bewley, A. and A. Bewley	Men	Have charge	Women	Disobedience	Beat
4a	Chaudhry, M.	Men	Protectors (and maintainers)	Women	Evil Conduct	Beat them (if the first two measures fail)
4a	Fakhry, M.	Men	In charge of	Women	Rebel	Beat
4a	Gohari, M.	Men	Care for	Women	Disloyalty	Beat
4a	Irving, T.	Men	Support	Women	Surliness	Beat them [if necessary]
4a	Khalifa, R.	Men	Made Responsible	Women	Rebellion	(As a last alternative) Beat them,
4a	Ibn Kathir (Translator unknown)	Men	Protectors and maintainers	Women	Ill conduct	Beat
4a	Malik, M.	Men	Overseers	Women	Disobedience	(If necessary) Beat
4a	Qara'i, A.	Men	Managers	Women	Misconduct	(As the last resort) Beat
4a	Shakir, M.	Men	Maintainers	Women	Desertion	Beat
4a	Tabataba'i, M.	Men	Maintainers	Women	Recalcitrance	Beat

4b	Ali, S.	Men	Guardians	Women	Disobedience	Chastise
4b	Sale, G.	Men	Pre-eminence	Women	Perverseness	Chastise
5	Pickthall, M.	Men	In charge of	Women	Rebellion	Scourge
5	Rodwell, J.	Men	Superior	Women	Refractoriness	Scourge

B. Websites discussing *Qur'an 4:34*

As can be seen from the above discussion, there is a wide range of translation options available to interested parties. If an individual or group wishes to present information regarding *Qur'an 4:34* to an English reading online audience, the choices in translations are plentiful and diverse. It is not surprising, therefore, that the variety of translation choices available was reflected in the diversity of translation choices made.

i. Discussion of findings

While the majority of websites surveyed used one or more of the translations shown in Table IVa, others highlighted different ones. Some, like the posting on *Quran-Islam.org*, used the translation of its poster, Edip Yuksel (Yuksel 2010), while others, such as *AmericanMuslim.org*, used uncredited translations which could not be immediately identified (*AmericanMuslim.org*). These additional translations were analysed regarding their translation of *idribuhunna*, and given a punishment severity rating based on those which had been applied to the original set of 27 translations.

After noting the perspectives of the various websites surveyed, it was found that they could be divided in three distinct groups: Islamic, neutral, and anti-Islamic. The one website which did not fit into one of those categories, *SkepticsAnnotatedBible.com*, was listed as anti-

religion, and its findings included in the statistics for the websites categorised as anti-Islamic.¹⁵ Some websites, such as *AnsweringMuslims.com*, were quite forthcoming about their perspective, which they gave as “Christian apologetics website” (*AnsweringMuslims.com*), while others appeared deliberately misleading, such as *TheReligionofPeace.com*, which described its viewpoint as “pluralistic, non-partisan”, but linked to its home page, which had as its title banner “the politically incorrect truth about Islam one really messed up religion” (*TheReligionofPeace.com*). The ‘neutral’ sites were those which aimed for neutrality such as *Wikipedia.org* and *USC.edu*, which were not seen to be promoting a particular cause or agenda.

ii. *Tables of findings*

The findings from the survey of websites is presented in Table IVb, which begins on page 42. The websites are grouped by viewpoint type, with any additional information on their perspectives added in parentheses. In order to determine if there was a link between viewpoint of website and translation type as see in Table IVa, the punishment types of the websites’ respective translation choices are listed in the table as well.

¹⁵ It was assumed that a website with an anti-religious perspective would also be ‘anti’ any particular religious system.

Table IVb: Translation types chosen by websites discussing Qur'an 4:34, sorted by viewpoint of website

<u>Viewpoint of Website (Stated or Inferred from Content)</u>	<u>Web Source</u>	<u>Translation(s) Used</u>	<u>Type from Table IVa</u>
Islamic (Perspective: Islamist Feminist)	SistersInIslam.org	Ali, K.	3b
Islamic (Perspective: Countering the claims of the anti-Islamic website AnsweringIslam.com)	Answering-Christianity.com	Unknown (uncredited)	3b
Islamic (Perspective: Personal Weblog)	ControversialIslam.Wordpress.com	Shakir, M. (uncredited)	4a
Islamic (Perspective: material from Islamic Foundation UK)	IslamicStudies.info	Unknown (B) (uncredited)	4a
Islamic (Perspective: Muslim Volunteers)	Quran.com	Sahih Intl.	3b
		Hilali/Khan	3d
		Pickthall, M.	5
		Ali, A.Y. (B)	3d
		Shakir, M.	4a
		Ghali, M.	3b

Islamic (Perspective: Qur'an translator)	Quran-Islam.org	Yuksel, E.	1d
Islamic (Perspective: aligned with Answering-Christianity.com)	QuranSearch.com	Munshey, M.	4a
		Ali, S.	4b
		Shakir, M.	4a
		Pickthall, M.	5
		Sale, G.	4b
		Hilali/Khan	3b
		Khalifa, R.	4a
		Rodwell, J.	5
Islamic (Perspective: American Muslims)	TheAmericanMuslim.org	Unknown (A) (uncredited)	1a
Islamic (Perspective: Qur'anic Commentary)	TheModernReligion.com	Shafaat, A.	4a
Islamic (Perspective: Individual Weblog)	Islam and Comparative Theology (Wordpress.com)	Ali, A.Y. (B)	3d
Neutral (Perspective: Academic)	Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement (USC.edu)	Ali, A. Y. (B)	3d
		Pickthall, M.	5
		Shakir, M.	4a
Neutral	Wikepdia.org	Ali, A. Y. (C)	3b

Neutral (Perspective from website: “This article was written by non-Muslim Arabs in response to the strange translation of the verb <i>darb</i> ”) ¹⁶	WikiIslam.net	Ali, A. Y. (B) Followed by listing of “agreed-upon translations”:	3d 4a x 12 5 x 1 2b x 1
Anti-religion (Perspective: atheist and/or agnostic)	SkepticsAnnotatedBible.com	Pickthall, M.	5
Anti-Islamic (Perspective from website: “Christian Apologetics Website”)	AnsweringMuslims.com	Pickthall, M. Dawood, N. Ali, A.Y. (B) Shakir, M.	5 4a 3d 4a
Anti-Islamic (Perspective: Christian, no denomination given)	Bible.ca	Rodwell, J. Dawood, N. Pickthall, M. Arberry, J. Shakir, M. Ali, A.Y. (B)	5 4a 5 4a 4a 3d
Anti-Islamic (Perspective from website: “pluralistic, non-partisan site”). ¹⁷	TheReligionOfPeace.com	Shakir, M. (uncredited)	4a

In summarising the above table, the 3 categories of websites, Islamic, neutral, and anti-Islamic (including anti-religion in general) had their group statistics on translation choices

¹⁶ It references and rebuts the Bakhtiar translation but, oddly, does not quote it.

¹⁷ Website links to the main *TheReligionOfPeace.com* website, which is blatantly anti-Islamic.

divided by broad translation type, from Type 1, non-physical recourse to Type 5, extremely violent recourse. Table IVc below illustrates these findings:

Table IVc Summary of findings of website categories and their chosen translation types

<u>Viewpoint of Websites</u>	<u>Translation Type</u>	<u>Number of Instances Found</u>
<u>Islamic</u>	1	2
	2	0
	3	8
	4	9
	5	3
<u>Neutral</u>	1	0
	2	1
	3	3
	4	13
	5	2
<u>Anti-Islamic/Anti-Religion</u>	1	0
	2	0
	3	2
	4	5
	5	4

Conclusions drawn from these results are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter V: Conclusions

A. Introduction

It could be argued that in analysing a sample 27 English translations of Qur'an 4:34, no two alike, it was, in actuality, an analysis of 27 unique discourses on one aspect of the Qur'an. In each, the translator has provided the reader with what he or she judged to represent the best English version of the original Arabic, whether that was believed to be the most literal, the most poetic, or the one exhibiting the clearest depiction of meaning. The message of their translation choices, the product of their education, beliefs and influences, is 'let me tell you what the Qur'an says, in English'. Judging from the translation samples used in this project, this is not a simple task, as the findings indicate a wide variety of meanings and attendant nuances, all based on the same original Arabic text. Judging, as well, from the website samples, it is clear that the translation choices provide a wide scope for answering the question of what 'the Qur'an says' about the status of women in Islam.

B. Summary of findings and conclusions

The research objective of this project was to collect and analyse, through Critical Discourse Analysis, a variety of English translations of Qur'an 4:34, type them by their specific translations of *idribuhunna*, and determine whether internet sites with specific agenda used one type of translation over others for the purpose of furthering those agendas. The findings have led to the conclusion that although English translation choices for Qur'an 4:34 provide websites with the chance to link the phrase 'the Qur'an says' with varying—and in some cases diametrically opposed—points of view, it does not appear that they consistently do so.

In drawing conclusions from Table IVc, which linked the viewpoint of websites to the translation type of *idribuhunna*, it was noted that in the websites surveyed, Type 1 (non-physical resolution) was found twice in websites with an Islamic viewpoint, and Type 2 (mild physical resolution) was found once in websites categorised as neutral. Neither of the translations

categorised as Type 1 or 2 were found in the anti-religion or anti-Islamic websites. This may reflect deliberate choices by Islamic and neutral websites to present Islam in a positive or neutral light, as well as choices by anti-religion and anti-Islamic websites to avoid such a representation.

The strongest tendency noted, however, was that towards translation options reflecting a harsher form of recourse. In the ‘Islamic’ category, while 12 out of 22 translations were in the 4 and 5 categories, 15 out of 19 were found in those categories in the ‘neutral’ category, and 9 out of 11 in the “anti-religion” and “anti-Islamic” categories. Therefore, although the Islamic sites were less likely to use a translation with an English word or phrase for *idribuhunna* which implied a higher level of physical violence than those in the other two website categories, all 3 groups were seen to favour translation types 4 and 5, which represent ‘beat’, ‘chastise’ and ‘scourge’.

Although it is beyond the scope of this project to determine why translation types 4 and 5 were more popular on websites surveyed, a few observations are appropriate at this point. If, as on anti-Islamic sites, the main thrust of the message is to portray Islam in a negative light, the words ‘beat’, ‘chastise’ and ‘scourge’ hold the most negative connotations. As the discourse analysis shows, beat is a repeated action, linked with the phrase ‘beat up’, which paints a picture of men and women (or husbands and wives) as bullies and victims, respectively. The terms ‘chastise’ and ‘scourge’ also describe actions such as whipping or flogging, which I would hazard to say are abhorrent to most, but they are also largely obsolete words and, therefore, may paint the verse—and by extension Muslims and Islam—as backward, violent, and intrinsically ‘other’. On the sites categorised as ‘Islamic’ or ‘neutral’ these words are used as well, which in those cases, may point to a more traditional Islamic point of view, a mistrust of the newer and controversial translations such as that by Bakhtiar, or a belief in the correctness of standard translations such as those of A. Y. Ali,¹⁸ Shakir and Pickthall.

Perhaps the most telling conclusion is that by viewing what appears to be a representative sampling of English translations of Qur’an verse 4:34, it is clear that political agency in the choosing of translations for use on websites *could* easily be done. As noted in Chapter I, diverse translations of this verse can imply quite diverse ideals. Translations such as Rodwell’s, which

¹⁸ It is interesting to note, however, that preferences were made, and the choices between different editions of A. Yusuf Ali’s well known and widely distributed translation are an interesting example.

is framed by the words “men...superior...women...refractoriness...scourge” (Rodwell 1909: 415), paint, on the surface, a picture of institutionalised violent misogyny. On the other hand, a translation such as that by Bakhtiar, framed by the word “men...supporters...wives...resistance...go away from them” (Bakhtiar 2007: 94) reflect the modern model of a supportive union in a successful marriage, and separation in an unsuccessful one. Neither of these translations may be ‘correct’, nor their implications have anything to do with the ideal espoused in the Arabic original—this paper comments on the translations as discourse only, not on the original text—but to their English readers, their words and implications *are* the Qur’an. That the results of the study do not point strongly to the idea that websites routinely use such stark differences in translations to lobby their readers to one opinion over another—whether from integrity or a lack of ingenuity—does not take away from that fact that they could.

Finally, the idea that each different translation is a unique discourse speaks to the idea that translations create *versions* of the Qur’an, an argument against any translation from the Arabic. A glance down Table IVa highlights the choices translators have made in the creation of what might fairly be called their version of the Qur’an, and the width of their differences should cause pause to all who rely on them. Although translators and publishers of Qur’ans add words like ‘meaning’ and ‘interpretation’ to their titles, and protest that the Qur’an cannot be translated, their efforts are viewed by their readers as accurate translations, and therefore as valid sources for a defence of or attack on Islam framed by their certainty of what ‘the Qur’an says...’. In a time in the West in which Islam as a whole is under suspicion due to the actions of a few, it can be seen that English translations arguably meant to expose Western readers to the message of the Qur’an may as easily be used to fuel an attack upon it. Whether the Qur’an is going to be translated from the Arabic is, at this time in its history, a moot question, but the diversity of translations and global internet opportunities to use specific ones to guide the Western discourse on Islam could inform the discussion of whether or not it *should* be.

Appendix: Qur'an 4:34, Full Verses (alphabetically by translator, if known)

Ali , Abdullah Yusuf (A) (*The Holy Qur'an: English Translation and Commentary*)

“(Husbands) are the protectors and maintainers of their (wives) because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard). As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) spank them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (annoyance); for Allah is Most High Great (above you all)”

Ali, Abdullah Yusuf (B) (from *QuranSearch.com* and *Quran.com*)

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For God is Most High, great (above you all).”

Ali, Abdullah Yusuf (C) (from *Wikipedia.org*)

“Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand”.

Ali, Ahmed (*Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*)

“Men are the support of women as God gives some more means than others, and because they spend of their wealth (to provide for them). So women who are virtuous are obedient to God and guard the hidden as God has guarded it. As for women you feel are averse, talk to them suavely; then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them) and go to bed with them (when they are willing). If they open out to you, do not seek an excuse for blaming them. Surely God is sublime and great”•

Ali, K. (from *SisterInIslam.org*)

“Men are *qawwamun* in relation to women, according to what God has favored some over others and according to what they spend from their wealth. Righteous women are *qanitat*, guarding the unseen according to what God has guarded. Those [women] whose *nushuz* you fear, admonish

them, and abandon them in bed, and strike them. If they obey you, do not pursue a strategy against them. Indeed, God is Exalted, Great.”

Ali, Muhammad (*English Translation of the Holy Quran with Explanatory Notes*, Z. Aziz, ed.)

“Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah has given some of them above others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient (to Allah), guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and turn them away (from wrongdoing). So if they obey you, do not seek a way against them. Surely Allah is ever Exalted, Great.”

Ali, Sher (*The Holy Qur'an*)

“Men are guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others, and because they (men) spend of their wealth. So virtuous women *are those who* are obedient, and guard the secrets *of their husbands* with Allah’s protection. And *as for* those on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds, and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely, Allah is High, Great.”

Arberry, A. (*The Koran Interpreted*)

“Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God’s guarding. And those you fear many be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All-high, All-great.”

Bakhtiar, Laleh (*The Sublime Quran*)

“Men are supporters of wives because God gave some of them an advantage over others and because they spent of their wealth. So the females, ones in accord with morality are the females, ones who are morally obligated and the females, ones who guard the unseen of what God kept safe. 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). Then if they (f) obeyed you, then look not for any way against them (f). Truly, God had been Lofty, Great.”

Bell, R. (*The Qur'an: Translated, with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs*)

“The men are overseers over the women by reason of what Allah hath bestowed in bounty upon one more than another, and of the property which they have contributed; upright women are therefore submissive, guarding what is hidden in return for Allah’s guarding (them); those on whose part ye fear refractoriness, admonish, avoid in bed, and beat; if they then obey you, seek no (further) way against them; verily Allah that become lofty, great.”

Bewley, A. and A. Bewley (*The Noble Qur'an: A New Rendering of its Meaning in English*)

“Men have charge of women because Allah has preferred the one above the other and because they spend their wealth on them. Right-acting women are obedient, safeguarding their husband’s interests in his absence as Allah guarded them. If there are women whose disobedience you fear,

you may admonish them, refuse to sleep with them, and then beat them. But if they obey you, do not look for a way to punish them. Allah is All-High, Most Great.”

Chaudhry, M. (*The Meaning of the Magnificent Quran*)

“Men are the protectors (and maintainers) of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because the men spend their wealth (for the support of women). So the righteous women are very obedient and guard in absence (of husband) what Allah requires them to guard (i.e. their honour and husband’s property). As to those women from whom you fear evil conduct, admonish them, then refuse to share their beds, and then beat them (if the first two measures fail). And if they (start to) obey you, seek not a way against them. Certainly Allah is Most High and Great”.

Daryabadi, A. (from *Quran4TheWorld.com*, from a footnote on *WikiIslam.net*)

See entry under Bell

Dawood, N. (from *AnsweringMuslims.com*)

“Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and forsake them in beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Surely God is high, supreme.”

Fakhry, M. (*An Interpretation of the Qur’an*)

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made some of them excel the others, and because they spend some of their wealth. Hence righteous women are obedient, guarding the unseen which Allah has guarded. And those of them that you fear might rebel, admonish them and abandon them in their beds and beat them. Should they obey you, do not seek a way of harming them; for Allah is Sublime and Great!”

Ghali, M. (from *Quran.com*)

“Men are the ever upright (managers) (of the affairs) of women for what Allah has graced some of them over (some) others and for what they have expended of their riches. So righteous women are devout, preservers of the Unseen for. And the ones whom you fear their non-compliance, then admonish them and forsake them in their beds, (Literally: a madajic= reclining [sic]) and strike them, (i.e. hit them lightly) yet in case they obey you, then do not seek inequitably any way against them; surely Allah has been Ever-Exalted, Ever-Great.”

Gohari, M. (*The Quran*)

“Men are to care for women due to the fact that God has blessed some of you more than others and because they are to spend from their possessions. So the righteous women are humble and they keep what God wants to be kept as private. As for those (women) about their disloyalty you are concerned, you ought to advise them, and [then] leave them on their own in beds, and [then]

beat them. Then if they obey you, do not seek their faults any longer. God is indeed high and great.”

Haleem, M.A.S. Abdel (*The Qur'an: A New Translation*)

“Husbands should take good care of their wives with [the bounty] God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands’ absence. If you fear high-handedness from your wives remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them. If they obey you, you have no right to act against them: God is most high and great.”

Al-Hilali, M. and M. Khan (*Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*)

“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. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard i the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband’s property). As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful); but if they obey you, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great.”

Irving, T. (*The Quran: The First American Version*)

“Men are the ones who should support women since God has given some persons advantages over others, and because they should spend their wealth [on them]. Honorable women are steadfast, guarding the Unseen just as God has it guarded. Admonish those women whose surliness you fear, and leave them alone in their beds, and [even] beat them [if necessary]. If they obey you, do not seek any way [to proceed] against them. God is Sublime, Great.”

Khalida, Tarif (*The Qur'an: A New Translation*)

“Men are legally responsible for women, inasmuch as God has preferred some over others in bounty, and because of what they spend from their wealth. Thus, virtuous women are obedient and preserve their wealth, such as God wishes them to be preserved. And those you fear may rebel, admonish, and abandon them in their beds, and smack them. If they obey you, seek no other way against them. God is Highest and Mightiest.”

Khalifa, R. (*Quran: the Final Testament*)

“The men are made responsible for the women, and GOD has endowed them with certain qualities; and made them the bread earners. The righteous women will cheerfully accept this arrangement, since it is GOD;s commandment, and honor their husbands during their absence. If you experience rebellion from the women, you shall first talk to them, then (*you may use negative incentives like*) deserting them in bed, then you may (*as a last alternative*) beat them. If they obey you, you are not permitted to transgress against them. GOD is Most High, Supreme.”

Ibn Kathir (translator unknown)

“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. Therefore the righteous women are Qanitat, and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard. As to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, admonish them, and abandon them in their beds, and beat them, but if they return to obedience, do not seek a means against them. Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great.”

Malik, Muhammad (Al-Qur'an: The Guidance for Mankind)

“Men are overseers over women because Allah has given the one more *strength* than the other, and because men *are required to spend their wealth for the maintenance of women*. Honourable women are, therefore, devoutly obedient and guard in *the husband's* absence what Allah requires them to guard (their husbands property and their own honor). As to those women from whom you fear disobedience, *first* admonish them, *then* refuse to share your bed with them, *and then, if necessary, beat them*. Then if they obey you, take no further actions against them, *and do not make excuses to punish them*. Allah is Supremely Great *and is aware of your actions*.”

Munshey, M. (from QuranSearch.com)

“Men are (appointed) in charge (and the caretakers) of women _ (they are held responsible for maintaining the women physically, financially, and emotionally) _ because Allah has given the one precedence over the other. Also, because they spend their means (to support the women). Thus, the virtuous women are obedient. They guard the rights of their husbands in their absence _ (the right) that Allah has upheld. If you perceive defiance (and disloyalty) from your women, admonish them, (then) keep them apart from your bed, and (then, as a last resort) beat them. If they relent and obey, do not seek the means to harass them. Of course, Allah is the most High, the Greatest!”

Nikayin, F. (The Quran: The First Poetic Translation)

“Men are indeed protectors of the women, since God conferred upon them certain merits, above the others, and because they ought to make them outlays from their means; yea, it's the righteous womenfolk, who are devout, and always guard the private parts which God, would have them guard; but any on whose part you fear disloyalty, you should exhort; next you may send her to a bed apart, and scourge her slightly as a last resort; but if she submits, do not go after ways to annoy her, and remember: that God's above you, the Most High, the Great.”

Palmer, E. (from QuranBrowser.com, from footnote at WikiIslam.net)

“Men stand superior to women in that God hath preferred some of them over others, and in that they expend of their wealth: and the virtuous women, devoted, careful (in their husbands') absence, as God has cared for them. But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bed-chambers and beat them; but if they submit to you, then do not seek a way against them; verily, God is high and great.”

Pickthall, M. (*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*)

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.”

Rodwell, J. (*The Koran*)

“Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them. Virtuous women are obedient, careful, during *the husband's* absence, because God hath of them been careful. But chide those for whose refractoriness ye have cause to fear; remove them into beds apart, and scourge them: but if they are obedient to you, then seek not occasion against them: verily, God is High, Great!”

Qara’i, A. (*The Qur’an: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation*)

“Men are the managers of women, because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others, and by virtue of their spending out of their wealth. So righteous women are obedient, care-taking in the absence [of their husbands] of what Allah has enjoined [them] to guard. As for those [wives] whose misconduct you fear, [first] advise them, and [if ineffective] keep away from them in the bed, and [as the last resort] beat them. Then if they obey you, do not seek any course [of action] against them. Indeed Allah is all-exalted, all-great.”

Sale, G. (*The Koran*)

“Men shall have the pre-eminence above women, because of those *advantages* wherein God hath caused the one of the to excel the other, and for that which they expend of their substance *in maintaining their wives*. The honest women *are* obedient, careful in the absence *of their husbands*, for that God preserveth *them, by committing them to the care and protection of the men*. But those, whose perverseness ye shall be apprehensive of, rebuke; and remove them into separate apartments, and chastise them. But if they shall be obedient unto you, seek not an occasion *of quarrel* against them: for God is high and great.”

Shafaat, A. (from TheModernReligion.com)

“Men are (meant to be righteous and kind) guardians of women because God has favored some more than others and because they (i.e. men) spend out of their wealth. (In their turn) righteous women are (meant to be) devoted and to guard what God has (willed to be) guarded even though out of sight (of the husband). As for those (women) on whose part you fear ill-will and nasty conduct, admonish them (first), (next) separate them in beds (and last) beat them. But if they obey you, then seek nothing against them. Behold, God is most high and great.”

Shakir, M. (*The Qur’an*)

“Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the

unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great”

Tabataba’i (translator unknown)

“Men are the maintainers of women because of that with which Allah has made some of them to excel the others and because of what they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear recalcitrance, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping places, and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great”

Tariq, A. (The Holy Quran, Revised by Z. Gilani)

“Men are guardians over women, 1 because of those (advantages) wherein Allah has caused some of them [to] excel others, 2 and because they spend of their wealth (to maintain their families). So the virtuous women are obedient (to their husbands), and guard their honour in their absence, what Allah would have them guard. But as for those, on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds and punish them. Then if they obey you, do not seek a way, for Allah is Sublime, Great.”

Turner, Colin (trans.) (The Quran: A New Interpretation)

“Men are the protectors of their women, for they surpass them in strength, intellectual acumen and social skills. A male doctor is better than a female doctor, a male labourer better than a female labourer, and so on. Furthermore, men are the protectors and maintainers of their women, for it is the men who must provide dowries and support their women financially throughout their married life. Therefore, it is incumbent of righteous women that they obey their husbands. And when their husbands are absent they must, with God as their aid, strive to protect their reputations and do nothing to shame them. As for those women whose righteousness is open to question, and whose obedience and loyalty you doubt—whether their husbands are present or not—admonish them in the first instance; if their disobedience continues, refuse to sleep with them; if their disobedience continues further, beat them. If they see reason and obey, do not chastise them any further. Know without any doubt that God is Most High and Greater than anything which can be imagined.”

Unknown Translator (A) (from TheAmericanMuslim.org)

“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. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah), and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband’s property, etc.). Regarding the woman who is guilty of lewd, or indecent behavior, admonish her (if she continues in this indecency then), stop sharing her bed (if she still continues doing this lewd behavior, then), [set forth for her the clear meaning of either straighten up or else we are finished and when she returns to proper behavior take up sharing the bed with her again], but if she returns in obedience (to proper behavior and conduct) then seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great.”

Unknown Translator (B) (from IslamicStudies.info)

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them excel over the other, and because they spend out of their possessions (to support them). Thus righteous women are obedient and guard the rights of men in their absence under Allah's protection. As for women of whom you fear rebellion, admonish them, and remain apart from them in beds, and beat them. Then if they obey you, do not seek ways to harm them. Allah is Exalted, Great.”

Yuksel, E. (from Quran-Islam.org)

"Men traditionally take care of women, since God has endowed each of them with certain qualities and men spend from their financial resources. The righteous women are obedient (to God) and during the absence (of their husband) they honour them according to God's commandment. As for those women whom you are experiencing a fear of disloyalty from, you shall first advice them, then (if they continue) you may desert them in bed, then you may strike them out. If they obey you then don't transgress against them. God is Most High, Supreme."

Zayid, M. (The Qur'an: An English Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an (revision of N. Dawood))

“Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the others, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen (parts) because Allah has guarded them. As for those from who you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Allah is High, Supreme.”

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