

WIFE BATTERY IN ISLAM: SOCIO-LEGAL INTERPRETATIONS IN ISLAMIC SOCIETIES¹

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Partner violence, including physical and/or sexual abuse of women, is a global problem, present in all cultures, and affecting up to 70% of women in the world.² Muslims, including a population of up to 6 million residents in the United States,³ are not immune to this social and health concern. The few studies conducted on violence within Muslim communities have uniformly demonstrated that wife beating is the most common form of family violence experienced.⁴ In the US, wife beating

¹ A version of this article was originally published as N. Ammar, "Wife Battery in Islam: A Comprehensive Understanding of Interpretations." *Violence Against Women* 13 (2007): 516-526.

² World Health Organization, *Violence Against Women: The Health Sector Responds*. Occasional Paper#12 (Washington, D.C.: World Health Organization, 2003).

³ Y. Y. Haddad, "A Century of Islam in America", *Hamdard Islamicus* XXI (1997): 1-12.

⁴ L. Abed Al-Wahhab, *al-'Unf al-usar-i: al-jar-imah wa-al-'unf didda al-mar'a* [Violence against women in Egypt] (Dimashq: D'ar al-Madā lil-Thaqāfah wa-al-Nashr, 1994); N. Almosaed, "Violence against women: A cross-cultural perspective", *Journal of Muslim Affairs* 24 (2004): 67-88; I. Azzam J., "Al unf did al mara' wa ini'kasatuh ala' sihat al mara' fi al mujtama' al Arabi" [violence against women and its effect on women's health in Arab societies], *Journal of Culture* (June-August 2000): 38-51; Muhammad M. Hajj-Yahia, "The incidence

appears to be on the rise in Muslim communities following the tragic attacks of 9/11.⁵ Current anti-Muslim climate in the US may be feeding family violence in these communities and almost certainly affects advocacy and intervention efforts to support Muslim victims. These effects are likely further compounded by growing racism and xenophobia post-9/11, as the majority of the US Muslims are immigrants⁶ coming from diverse global regions including Asia, Africa, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.⁷ Better understanding of and respect for Islam are needed to better serve US Muslims including female victims of wife beating.

US assumptions are often that Islam is supportive of wife beating, based on some literal and patriarchal interpretations of the text. However, as seen in numerous non-English texts,⁸ there is a range of Islamic interpretations on the acceptability of wife beating. This paper examines Islamic rulings on wife beating in an effort to showcase this diversity for English readers. The discussion in this paper is intended for

of wife abuse and battering and some socio-demographic correlates as revealed by two national surveys in Palestinian society”, *Journal of Family Violence* 15 (2000): 347- 375; N. Ramzi and A. Sultan, ‘Al ‘unf did al mara’: rai’ al nukhab wa al junhur [Violence against women: Elite and popular opinions] (Cairo: UNICEF, 1999).

⁵ S. Childress, “Muslim American women are quietly coping with a tragic side effect of the attacks – a surge in domestic violence”, *Newsweek*, April 8, 2003, 142.5, 2003, 2bw.

⁶ Y.Y. Haddad, “A Century of Islam in America”, *ibid*; Y.Y. Haddad, “The Globalization of Islam: The Return of Muslims to the West”, in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. J. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 601-642; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, eds. *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

⁷ D. Hassouneh-Phillips, “Strength and vulnerability: Spirituality in abused American Muslim women’s lives”, *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 24 (2003): 681-694.

⁸ J. Al-banna, ‘al Mara’ al muslimah bin tahrir al Qur’an wa taqid alfuqaha’ [The Muslim woman between the liberation of the Qur’an and the restrictions of the religious leaders] (Cairo: Dar al fikr al Islami, 1997); Abed Al -Wahhab, *ibid.*; M. A. Abu Firas, *Huquq al mara’ al madaniah wa al siyasiah fi al Islam* [Women’s civil and political rights in Islam] (Amman: Dar al furqan lilnashr wa altawzi’, 2000); Ramzi and Sultan, *ibid*.

advocates, service providers who deal with battered Muslim immigrant women and to the Muslim women themselves whose knowledge of Islam is often learned mostly from patriarchal sources and interpretations – so they can make better decisions regarding safety and non-violence. Examples or literature from Muslim countries is often used in this paper, underscoring the importance of the national culture as it relates to interpretations of the Islamic doctrine.

Sources of Islamic Rulings and Interpretations

There are more than 1.2 billion Muslims living in more than 184 countries and speaking more than 200 languages and dialects.⁹ Thus discussing Islam as an ideology that has a singular interpretation is impossible and to many social scientists such a discussion represents a simplified view of the intertwined societal forces and structures. Despite the existing diversity among Muslims, most agree that the major sources of Islam are: the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet's sayings and traditions (*hadith and sunnah*), and *shari'a* (jurists' legal derivations and decisions). The sources of Islam are treated hierarchically; jurists go first to the Qur'an, then to the exegetical works related to the *hadith* and *sunnah*, and finally to the *shari'a* (juridical corpus). This chapter aims to look at the unity of the sources as the basis of understanding the issue of wife beating in Islam. While Islam is not the only force that guides the behaviour of Muslims, in the case of wife-beating in the US, "religion" is used to justify wife beating with the police, in courts and in other arenas. Hence, the paper focuses primarily on the issue of wife beating in the major sources and its various interpretations. It utilizes a framework of "feminist Islam" and not secular feminism; this is a purposeful analytic endeavour that aims to be relevant to Muslim

⁹ *Muslim Refugees*: www.culturalorientation.net/content/download/1360/7921/version/2/file/Muslim+Refugees.pdf

women in their choice to maintain their religious ideology and know wife beating is unacceptable.

Most of the socio-legal discussion on wife beating in Islamic communities revolves around the thirty fourth Qur'anic verse (*Ayah*) of the *Al Nisa* Chapter (*Surah*). The verse states:

As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct (nushuz), admonish them, refuse to share their beds, and beat them.

The Qur'an is the highest religious source on the topic of wife beating and the opinion revealed in the Book provides the foundation for any discussion. However, the other sources of Islam including the Prophet's sayings (hadiths) and fatwas have been used to render opinions about wife beating.

According to Mernissi,¹⁰ "hadiths are a vivid panorama of the daily life in the seventh century". However, many believe that because the hadiths were not compiled until the ninth century, they contain many fabrications to support political leadership or patriarchal sentiments.¹¹ Mernissi¹² has shown that a number of hadiths on women's political participation, gender roles, and female purification were manipulated to accommodate the male-oriented agendas of the time.

Fatwas are formal answers to "(a) an interrogatory or (b) an issue of principle on dogma and law given by a person with authority to do so".¹³ There are many fatwa-issuers (known as muftis, mullahs, ayatollah, mulana, sheikh, etc.) in the Muslim world with no formal

¹⁰ F. Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. M. J. Lakeland (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993), 35.

¹¹ J. Esposito and N. J. Delong-Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982); Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*; F. Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

¹² Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*; Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*.

¹³ M.B. Hooker, *Indonesian Islam: Social Change Through Contemporary Fatwas* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Allen and Unwin and University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 1.

framework for establishing their qualifications. Fatwas in recent times have concerned themselves more with leadership issues and the relationship of the Muslim world with outside political and militaristic forces. As such there have been few fatwas issued from the religious centres of the Muslim world focusing on wife beating in the last few years.

The Opinion of Islamic Sources on Wife Beating

The Qur'anic Verse on Wife Beating

It is possible to classify the understanding of the Qur'anic verse 34 of *Al Nisa* Chapter on wife beating into four schools of interpretations. The first is an interpretation that sees that wife beating is permissible if a wife does not obey her husband.¹⁴ The second interpretation understands Islam as permitting wife beating, but with conditions of consideration for her safety.¹⁵ The third interpretation regards the Qur'anic verse 34 of *Al Nisa* Chapter to be addressing exceptions when wife-beating is allowed because it is generally unacceptable.¹⁶ The fourth and last interpretation uses linguistic rules to show that the verse 34 of *Al Nisa* Chapter has been misinterpreted and does not even refer to beating when using the Arabic word *Idribuhunna*.¹⁷

The following is a discussion of the criteria leading to the order and classification of the four schools of interpretation that influence Muslim communities regarding wife beating.

¹⁴ A. Al-Samharani, *Al mara fi al tarikh wa al shariah* [Women in History and in Shari'a] (Beirut: Dar al nafa'ah lil tiba'ah, 1989), 155-163.

¹⁵ Abu Shaqah, *ibid.*; Al-banna, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Sisters in Islam, *Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat Their Wives?* (Malaysia: SIS Forum Berhad, 1991).

¹⁷ F. Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. M. J. Lakeland (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1991); A. Suliman, "Darb al mara' wasilah lihal al khilafat al zawjiah: ru'iah manhajiah" [Wife beating to solve marital discord: A systemic view], *Islamiyat al Marifah* [Islamic knowledge] 24 (2001).

Basis of Classification of the Four Schools of Interpretation Regarding Wife Beating and Family Violence in Muslim Societies

The four schools are presented in the order of the most to the least strict patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'anic verse 34 of *Al Nisa*. Patriarchy allows for the structural justification of and support for wife beating; wife abuse is considered a husband's way of expressing socially sanctioned power and authority over wives and families.¹⁸ In the contemporary Islamic world, Islamization's "return to the past" ideology has interpreted the role of women through excessively patriarchal lenses.¹⁹ However, the Islamists' views are themselves diverse and have co-existed with competing values including modernization, feminism, human rights and nationalism. The result of this co-existence has been challenges to the various Islamist pressures of rigid patriarchal visions of contemporary Islamic society, resulting in diverse Islamic interpretations on wife beating. The four schools interpreting wife beating in Islam do not represent a historic progression in the socially normative understanding of this issue. In reality they reflect the prevalent debates regarding the role of women in present day Islamic societies.

The Four Interpretations of Al Nisa, verse 34 in the Qu'ran

School 1: Interpreting verse 34 of the Al Nisa chapter in the Qur'an as justifying wife beating as permissible in Islam.

This interpretation was extrapolated on the basis of two additional Qur'anic verses: the first lines in verse 34 from the *Al Nisa* chapter and verse 228 in the *Al Baqarah* chapter. The verses, respectively, state:

¹⁸ R.D. Dobash R., *Violence against Wives: A case against the Patriarchy* (New York: Free Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Y.Y. Haddad, ed., *Women, Religion and Social Change* (Albany, New York: State University Press, 1985).

*Men are qawamun (protectors) of women because of what God has favoured some with over the others and because of what they spend from their money.*²⁰

They wish for reconciliation and women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree over them.

The superiority of men over women, according to this interpretation, is a natural and everlasting one. *Qiwama* according to this interpretation, is a God-given relationship of power and authority that men are granted over women that in turn permits men to discipline women (including wives) by beating them.²¹ To the proponents of this school, wife beating is often advanced as open, having very few limitations or regulations. Although this is not a position advanced by many prominent religious leaders, it is one that has been identified in some US Muslim immigrant communities.²²

School 2: Interpreting verse 34 of the Al Nisa chapter in the Qur'an as Islam permitting wife beating with conditions and as a last resort

A second interpretation of verse 34 of the *Al Nisa* chapter is more dominant in contemporary Muslim communities. This interpretation rules that Islam permits the beating of wives within certain parameters of behaviour. On the part of the wife, the condition of disloyalty and ill conduct permits the husband to beat her. However, such beating can

²⁰ My translation; see A.Y. Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989).

²¹ S. Shaikh, "Exegetical Violence: nushuz in Qur'anic gender ideology", *Journal for Islamic Studies* 17 (1997): 49-73.

²² N. Ammar, "Simplistic stereotyping and complex reality of Arab-American immigrant identity: Consequences and future strategies in policing wife battery", *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 11 (2000a): 51-70; N. Ammar, "In the shadow of the pyramids: Domestic violence in Egypt", *International Review of Victimology* 1, 2, 3 (2000b): 29-66; A.D. Kulwicki and J. Miller, "Domestic violence in the Arab American population: Transforming environmental conditions through community education", *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 20 (1999): 199-215.

only be a last resort in a preferential order of behaviours found in the Qur'an: (first) admonish her, (next) refuse to share her bed, and (last) beat her (lightly). Those who agree that Islam permits wife beating with conditions use the *hadith* to further support their ruling.²³

Among those who rule according to this understanding of the Qur'anic verse there is a strong agreement that all the stages prescribed by *verse 34* of al-Nisa – admonish her, abandon her bed and then beat her – should be carried out in the spirit of reconciliation and healing.²⁴ They specify that the preferential order that leads to wife beating is meant to prevent divorce. Wife beating, according to this interpretation, should be a last resort and should not result in injury. 'Abd al-'Ati²⁵ states that if the beating causes injury or death to the woman, then she or her relatives have the right to take her abuser to court.

Those who agree that Islam permits wife beating with conditions argue that only specific methods of striking are acceptable, based largely on the *hadith*. Their conditions include:

1. The husband should have fulfilled all the requirements of the marriage contract; otherwise his beating of her is oppressive and unjust.
2. The beating should not be inflicted with anything larger than a toothbrush.
3. The beating should be soft and away from the face.
4. The beating is to be a last resort and avoided when possible in favour of arbitration between the spouses.
5. The purpose of striking the wife is discipline, not anger or revenge.

²³ A.H. Abu Shaqah, *Tahrir al mara' fi 'asr al-risalah: dirasah jamiah linusus al Qur'an al-karim wa Sahih al Bukhari wa Muslim: al Jus' al khamis – makanat al mara' al muslimah fi al usrah* [Women's liberation in the times of the message: a collection of Qur'anic verses, and Sahih al Bukhari and Muslim: part five-the role of the Muslim woman in the family] (Kuwait: Dar al qalam lilnashr wa al tawzi', 1994), 243.

²⁴ Abu Shaqah, *ibid.*; Al-banna, *ibid.*; Abu Firas, *ibid.*

²⁵ H. Abd al-'Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1997), 159.

6. The behaviour of the woman that leads to the act of beating should qualify as ill conduct, or *nushuz*.²⁶ A wife's *nushuz* includes adultery, but it also includes sexual refusal, disobedience or cruelty.²⁷

This school's interpretation of wife beating cannot be considered a historic one. Recent *fatwas* in Europe indicate the contemporary nature of such an interpretation. A book by an *imam* of a mosque in Spain entitled "Women in Islam" appeared in 2000, describing how Muslim men could beat their wives, citing the Qur'anic verse 34 of *Al Nisa* Chapter as a basis for the action. This book followed a *fatwa* made by the *imam*, Muhammad Kamal Mustafa, and led to more than 80 Spanish women's organizations to file a legal suit charging the author of encouraging Muslim men to beat their wives.²⁸ The *Imam* wrote in his book:

*The [wife] beating must never be in exaggerated, blind anger, in order to avoid serious harm [to the woman]... It is forbidden to beat her on the sensitive parts of her body... she should be beaten on the arms and legs, using a rod that must not be stiff, but slim and lightweight so that no wounds, scars, or bruises are caused.*²⁹

This recent *fatwa* by Imam Mustafa in Spain clearly affirms the preferential order that leads to wife beating by noting that

Wife-beating must be the last resort to which the husband turns in punishing his wife, and is, according to the Qur'an, Chapter 4,

²⁶ Sahih Al Bukhari, *Matn Sahih Al Bukhari* Vols. 1-8 (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al Kutub al Arabia, 1996); Al-banna, *ibid.*, 51; Abu Shaqah, *ibid.*, 246-7.

²⁷ A. Berri, "Al-Islam wa al 'unf al manzili" [Islam and Domestic Violence] (Unpublished paper of the Islamic Center in Dearborn, MI, 1999); Mernissi, *The Veil*, *ibid.*

²⁸ D. Fuchs, "Spain sentences imam for book offering advice on wife-beating", *New York Times*, January 15, 2004.

²⁹ Quoted in S. Stalinsky and Y. Yehoshua, "Muslim clerics on the religious rulings regarding wife-beating" in The Middle East Media Research Institute, *Special Report 27* (2004): 1.

*Verse 34, the husband's third step when the wife is rebellious: First, he must reprimand her, without anger. Next, he must distance her from the conjugal bed. Only if these two methods fail should the husband turn to beating.*³⁰

School 3: Interpreting verse 34 of the Al Nisa chapter in the Qur'an as an exception to the general spirit of Islamic sources

School 3 interprets verse 34 of the *Al-Nisa* Qur'anic chapter to indicate that wife beating in Islam is permissible, but not desirable. Wife beating, to those who uphold this interpretation, is not consistent with the general principles expressed about women in other Qur'anic verses and other sources of Islam. First, in several *hadiths*, the Prophet directly discouraged the practice of wife beating. He considered the men who beat their wives as lacking in character, as indiscriminate in their behaviour, and as unethical.³¹

Second, the *sunnah* indicates that the Prophet did not promote wife beating as desirable. For example, Aisha, the Prophet's wife, said, "The Prophet never hit a servant or a woman."³² Moreover the Prophet never resorted to beating his wives regardless of the circumstances.³³

Finally, this school of interpretation argues that Qur'anic principles and the general spirit that protect the status of women, support family values, and promote spousal equity are diametrically opposed to the act of wife beating. This school also believes that the Qur'an sees women as full partners in the devotional rights of Islam and declares that they will be judged equally as men in the afterlife.³⁴

More specifically, mention of the Qur'anic verses that are directly related to women's status in the family and in marriage is made to

³⁰ Quoted in Stalinsky and Y. Yehoshua, *ibid.*, 5.

³¹ B. Alqurashi, *al Nizam al tarbawi fi al Islam* [The Educational System in Islam] (Najaf, Baghdad: Matb'at al adab, 1972), 87-8.

³² *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Hadith al Islam, 87355.*

³³ Mernissi, *The Veil*, *ibid.*

³⁴ see Ali, *ibid.*: Ali-'Imran:195; Al-Nisa:124; At-Tawbah:71-72; Al-Nahl:97; Al-Mu'minum:35

highlight the exceptional instance of verse 34. The Qur'anic marriage involves intimacy, support, and equality, saying "They are your garments, and you are their garments" (*Al-Baqarah*: 187). The Qur'anic descriptions regarding marriage as a close and mutual relationship is repeated more than once (*Al Nisa*: 19; *Al Ahzab*: 35). Adherents to this school's interpretation of wife beating ask how a religion that asserts such ideas about the relationship between the spouses permit the beating of wives as a general rule.

The opinion of this school of the *Al Nisa*, verse 34 is best summarized by an excerpt from the booklet *Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat Their Wives?* produced by the Malaysian group Sisters in Islam:

Islam does not allow a husband to act cruelly to his wife, either physically or mentally. The Qur'an stresses love, kindness and justice in family relationships and prohibits cruelty of all kinds.

³⁵

In response to a question about why the Qur'an included the method of striking a woman, the booklet says that the single strike against a woman is used as "a restriction and not a recommendation".³⁶

There is support for this view of wife beating in Islam by many contemporary Muslims. The fatwa bank of IslamOnline.net includes this opinion in two of the five *fatwas* listed under the fatwa title of "wife beating in Islamic perspective". An example is worth noting here:

The permissibility of such symbolic expression of the seriousness of continued refractoriness does not imply its desirability. In several hadiths, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) discouraged this measure (IslamOnline.net).

School 4: Interpreting verse 34 of Al Nisa chapter in the Qur'an as using the Arabic word Idribuhunna to mean something other than hitting.

³⁵ Sisters in Islam, *ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ Sisters in Islam, *ibid.*, 7.

School 4, unlike the above interpretation, views verse 34 to be a reconciliatory one, with the specific purpose of restoring marital harmony. The sequence of the ideas in verses 34 and 35 in the *Al Nisa* chapter indicate such a purpose. Verse 34 prescribes what should happen if the woman is the initiator of ill conduct and verse 35 deals with the situation when the conflict is between the two partners in the marital relationship. The Qur'an in both verses outlines legitimate behaviour to avoid persistent disharmony within the marital situation and to prevent divorce.

School four interpreters believe that the word *idribuhunna* in verse 34 of *Al Nisa* Chapter does not mean “hit/beat/strike them even lightly” given the general spirit of the Qur'an, *hadith*, and *sunnah*. This school considers that the logical sequence in the verses would be nullified by prescribing a behaviour that is not reconciliatory, such as hitting, when their general theme is to offer ways by which to return harmony to the marriage. As such, many within this school have gone to the etymology of the word *idribuhunna* to better understand the meaning of the verse 34.

In consulting an Arabic dictionary, one often returns to the three-letter origin of the word to understand its various meanings. In the case of *idribuhunna*, the three letter origin is ضرب, or *daraba*. There is a list of meanings ascribed to the word *daraba*, only one of which means “to hit”. The other meanings related to the word include: to travel the earth, to beat, to set up, to give examples, to take away, to condemn, to seal, to cover, to explain, to have sex, to create monetary coins and to multiply in a mathematical formula.³⁷ Table 1 includes some examples of the multiple meanings of the word *daraba* as it is used in the Qur'an (see Table 1). The various meanings of the word *daraba* provide evidence

³⁷ Muslim Women League, “The verse of abuse or the abused verse al-Qur'an 4: 34” (www.mwluca.org); Mernissi, *The Veil*, 158-9; Suliman, *ibid.*, 132.

that when the Qur'anic verse uses the word *idribuhunna*; it refers to isolation, separation, or parting.

This school employs two arguments to its view that the word *idribuhunna* in verse 34 of *Al Nisa* and chapter does not refer to wife beating. The first points out that when the Qur'an intended to express beating as a directive for punishment, it used the word "*al-jald*" (lashing/flogging) instead of *daraba*.³⁸ This is clear in Qur'anic verses such as, "The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them" (*Al-Nur*: 2). The second argument provides a meaning of the word *idribuhunna* from an historic example of the Prophet's life; in this example the word means "to stay away from" or "divorce".³⁹

This interpretation of verse 34 of *Al Nisa* chapter is not new. I personally recall my grandfather, a trained lawyer under the Ottoman curriculum, often explaining to us the verse 34 of *Al Nisa* by using the various Arabic meanings of *idribuhunna*. Almost twenty years ago, Hassan noted how the Qur'anic words were being misunderstood. She said

*[T]he Arabic word that is generally translated as "beating," when used in a legal context as it is here (in Surah al-Nisa 4:34), means "holding in confinement," according to the authoritative lexicon of Taj al-arus... I have analyzed surah 4 verse 34 in order to show how words of the Qur'an have been mistranslated in order to make men masters and women the slaves.*⁴⁰

Conclusion

This paper presented an overview of the opinions on domestic violence in Islam. The Qur'anic verse 34 in *Al Nisa* Chapter of the

³⁸ Suliman, *ibid.*, 138.

³⁹ Mernissi, *The Veil*, 157.

⁴⁰ R. Hassan, "Women in the context of change and confrontation with Muslim communities: From women of faith in dialogue" in *Women of Faith in Dialogue*, ed. V.R. Mollenkott (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 98-105.

Qur'an as well as other sources such as *hadiths* and *fatwas* were utilized as sources for the various interpretations. Both the severity of the patriarchal values reflected in the structural relationship between men (husbands) and women (wives) within the family and the general society contributed to the formulation of the sorting process of the typologies. Four schools of interpretations of domestic violence in Islam emerged. These schools offer opinions that range from viewing Islam as condoning wife beating to one where the word "beat them" is found to mean many things, besides "hitting". These schools of interpretations of wife beating in Islam are not expressions of a unilateral societal evolution, whereby the most patriarchal existed in the past and the most intolerant of violence prevails in contemporary society. In reality these interpretations co-exist. Their co-existence is not the result of a transition from religious to secular societal values. The Muslim world has invalidated the secularization theses that argue that "religious beliefs, practices and institutions eventually lose their significance".⁴¹ Rather, it is the result of an ideological challenge between the effort of some Muslim women and men to focus on the "ethics of care" for all within the roots of Islam and an increasing Islamization of all sectors of society, including women's rights.

These mixed messages and complexities of the situation of the status of women, including wife beating in Islam are perplexing to many who need to understand Islam. This paper is intended to fill a gap in the English literature for advocates who work with battered Muslim immigrant women in the US, with the hope that future research will work on testing these classifications with more empirical data on the condition of Muslim women.

⁴¹ N. Ammar, "To Object or Not to Object: The Question of Women Judges in Egypt", *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 27.1 (2003): 70.

Table 1: Multiple Meanings of the Word *Darab* in the Qur'an⁴²

Qur'anic Chapter and Verse	Meaning
"Allah sets forth (<i>yadrib</i>) parables for people and Allah is all knowing." (<i>Al Nur: 35</i>).	Examples
"If you travel (<i>darabtum</i>) through the earth, there is no blame on you if ye shorten your prayers." (<i>Al Nisa: 101</i>)	Wander around
"Then we drew (<i>fadarbna</i>) a veil over their ears for a number of years." (<i>Al Khaf: 11</i>)	Covered
"Shall we then take away (<i>afanadrib</i>) the Message from you and repel (you) for that you are a people transgressing beyond bounds?" (<i>Al Zukhruf: 5</i>)	Take Away
"This is how Allah explains (<i>yadrib</i>) good from bad [descent from indecent]." (<i>Al Ra'd: 17</i>)	To Explain
"They should draw (<i>liyadribnna</i>) their veils over their bosoms." (<i>Al Nur: 31</i>).	To Cover
"We sent an inspiration to Moses: Travel by night with my servants and (<i>idrib</i>) strike a dry path for them (<i>Ta Ha: 77</i>)	To Strike the Earth
"Go ye to any town, and you shall find what you want. They were (<i>duribat</i>) covered with humiliation, misery and the wrath of Allah." (<i>Al Baqarah: 61</i>)	To Condemn
"They say are our gods best or He? This they (<i>darrbuh</i>) set up for you only by way of contention, for they are contentious people." (<i>Al Zukhruf: 58</i>)	To Set Up

⁴² Suliman, *ibid.*, 134-5.

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