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FRAMING FEMINISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BBC AND DAWN'S COVERAGE OF THE AURAT MARCH

SYEDA RIDA FATIMA[1], SUMARIA BILAL[2], IQRA ALI[3], ZUJAJA AHMAD[4], SYEDA FAREEHA BUKHARI[5]

[1]EMAIL: RIDAFATIMA7905@GMAIL.COM
[2]SUMERABILAL11@GMAIL.COM
[3]EMAI: IQRAAKHUNZADA0@GMAIL.COM
[4] EMAIL:ZUJAJA54@GMAIL.COM
[5] EMAIL: ALISBASHARAT357@GMAIL.COM

Abstract
The article investigates the portraying of Aurat March 2020 in two comparable news reports in English, in BBC and Dawn in a news cycle (7 and 8 March 2020). The data was qualitatively analyzed for framing using framing theory, the protest paradigm and feminist and postcolonial media scholarship, Entman (1993) four framing functions, source and voice allocation, participant representation and religious positioning. The BBC report framed the event as a threatened rights participant-centred frame, with marchers anonymized and pseudonymised as the primary definers; the Dawn report framed the event as a state-protected civic commemoration institutionally mediated frame, with the President, the Prime Minister, a federal minister and party politicians as the primary definers. Both reports were broadly sympathetic to the marchers, but they differed in the way they dealt with religion, with religion appearing as a resource of opponents in the BBC report, but as a shared and contested idiom collectively invoked by both supporters and opponents of the march and the state in the Dawn report. In both reports the struggle over the economic demands of the march was highlighted. Indeed, it is argued here that the difference in international and national coverage of feminist activism is as much to do with the 'distribution of voices' and 'conceptualisation of religion' as the evaluative stance, and that comparative studies of such coverage should be carried out on the same genre of texts.

Keywords: Aurat March, news framing, feminist media studies, protest paradigm, primary definers, BBC, Dawn, Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, a few women marched in a Karachi park on or around International Women's Day to campaign against violence and harassment against women, and this was the precursor of Aurat March (BBC News, 2020). Coordinated since in large part by the feminist collective Hum Auratein, the march has spread to a number of cities, and the theme of khudmukhtari ('women's autonomy') was a key part of the 2020 manifesto (Dawn.com, 2020). The march has united women and transgenders, workers, and activists from varied class and local backgrounds, with demands and slogans ranging from safety from violence, economic empowerment, and freedom of mobility for women in public space (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020; Khan et al., 2021).

At the same time, the march has been one of the most controversial public events in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2021). Ahead of the march in 2020, its organizers were threatened, posters were vandalized, a petition was filed with a Lahore court calling for their prohibiting it, and its slogan, mera jism, meri marzi ("my body, my choice"), was branded un-Islamic and Western by its critics (BBC News, 2020). On the day of the march, counter rallies took place in Islamabad, where marchers were stoned (Dawn.com, 2020). Likewise, based on online discourse, march participants are seen as misguided women who require control by men (Sadaf & Siitonen, 2022).

Such a polarizing context renders meaningful the role of the news media as meaning makers, as the news texts do not only report on an event but select (and foreground) from it and promote specific definitions of the problems at hand, illustrations of their causes, moral definitions, and remedies (Entman, 1993). Indeed, it has been argued that those actors quoted earliest and most fully are the primary definers of an event, to whose interpretations all other voices are compelled consciously or unconsciously to relate (Hall et al., 1978). Framing of the Aurat March

and the actors within it is, therefore, key to the public contestation that is happening around this movement (Nishat & Hussain, 2022).

This additionally emphasizes the fact that the march is framed for at least two categories of audiences, (one 'closed' for which a nationalistic write-up is being prepared by national papers) and (one international for which a write-up is being prepared at the international level) (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In this respect, postcolonial feminist scholars have already warned about the coverage of Global South women produced as equally oppressed and needing to be saved, as well illustrated in Western coverage of their lives and with the veil as a recurring image of enclosure in subsequent coverage (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mohanty, 1988). National coverage, in turn, may avoid this imagery but perhaps at the expense of marginalizing the voices of activists in favor of officials, as is common in the routine reliance in news production on accredited sources (Tuchman, 1978b). International and national coverage can thus be compared in this domain in this regard to explore the role of these pressures in constructing coverage of a single feminist event.

However, recent studies comparing Aurat March coverage have focused on either comparing international coverage with one another, talk shows and social media (Nishat & Hussain, 2022; Tabassum et al., 2023) or national coverage with one another, rather than comparing the international and national systems of coverage on an equal footing (that is, by texts of the same genre). Additionally, comparisons between Western and Pakistani coverage have frequently been grounded in theoretical assumptions rather than a systematic examination of sourcing, agency, and the influence of religion in particular texts (Mendes, 2011). The study compares the main BBC coverage of the Aurat March 2020 and the main national coverage of the Aurat March 2020 published by Dawn on the day of the march, both hard news reports published in the same news cycle (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020).

Three research questions guide the study (Entman, 1993; Hall et al., 1978). First (RQ1), it aims to discover how the Aurat March 2020 is framed in the selected coverage of the BBC and Dawn regarding problem definition, cause interpretation, moral judgment, and treatment recommendation. Second (RQ2), it asks who are the dominant modifiers of the event in each report and how the participants are represented. Third (RQ3), it asks how religion is positioned in relation to women's rights in the reports and how the reports reproduce/resist the patterns of representation identified in the postcolonial feminist critique (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Zia, 2018).

Theoretical contribution of the study is threefold (Krippendorff, 2018). Theoretically, it integrates framing and primary definition theories with feminist and postcolonial critique in the analysis of a South Asian feminist movement (Hall et al., 1978; Mohanty, 1988). Methodologically, it demonstrates the benefit of a comparative approach to texts of the same genre, as conclusions based on comparing a news report with an opinion column are not supported by routine news coverage (Tuchman, 1978b). Empirically, it enriches the scarce studies of the mediation of the Aurat March in international and national coverage by its paragraph-referenced analysis (Nishat & Hussain, 2022).

The paper will be structured as follows (Schreier, 2012). Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, while section 3 reviews the literature on the news framing, feminism in the news, postcolonial critique, and Aurat March representation. Section 4 describes the data and methodology, Section 5 discusses the results, Section 6 discusses the results in the light of the literature, and Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It draws on a mixture of frames and framing, primary definition, the protest paradigm and feminism and postcolonial media theory (Entman, 1993; Hall et al., 1978; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Mohanty, 1988). Each of these perspectives was selected because they offer useful analytical categories for verbal news texts and all have relevance to at least one of the research questions stated in Section 1.

2.1 Framing Theory

Goffman (1974) was the first to introduce the term frame as referring to the schemata of interpretation by which people locate, perceive and label the occurrences of their everyday life. The notion has since been reformulated in communication studies, e.g. Entman (1993) defined framing in terms of "selection and salience": framing involves choosing some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation. Similarly, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) defined media discourse as a collection of interpretive packages built around a central theme that communicates what an issue is about.

In this study, the four functions identified by Entman (1993) have been used as the principle tool for answering RQ1 as they give us a more systematic (rather than impressionistic) way to describe the overall orientation of each report. In addition, the generic frames (conflict frame; human interest frame) of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) have been used to identify the dominant modality of each report. "Framing is done in language, in particular in the grammar of subject and active or passive voice and agency placement, but also by evaluative and hedge expressions and by other strategies that will make the theory more amenable to close textual analysis" (Entman, 1993).

2.2 Primary Definition and Sourcing

The primary definition activity (Hall et al., 1978) shaped the development of framing approach as it claimed that journalists tend to take the powerful and/or authoritative actors, who are able to set the primary definition of a concrete event, and within this definition all other voices (e.g., a challenger) have to locate themselves. Similarly, Tuchman (1978b) showed how news production processes in privileging official sources open some meanings and shut others out. These arguments are operationalized in the present study within the framework of an analysis of who we quote, who we paraphrase, who we talk about but do not allow to speak, and in which form each actor comes up as the answer to the first part of our second research question, RQ2.2 (Hall et al., 1978).

2.3 The Protest Paradigm

Since the Aurat March is a form of public protest, the study also draws on the protest paradigm, which describes the tendency of mainstream news to marginalise protest movements through an emphasis on disruption and deviance, a dependence on official sources and an attention to spectacle rather than to grievances (Chan & Lee, 1984; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). It is pertinent to note that McLeod and Hertog (1999) conceptualised adherence to the paradigm as a matter of degree, so that coverage which is sympathetic to protesters may nevertheless foreground conflict and order. Consequently, the paradigm has been employed in this study not to classify the reports as hostile or supportive but to identify the extent to which the grievances of the marchers are displaced by attention to threat, security and confrontation (Gitlin, 1980).

2.4 Feminist and Postcolonial Media Theory

The second dimension of RQ2 deals with the representation of the march's participants and is informed by feminist media theory (van Zoonen, 1994). In this regard, van Zoonen (1994) observes that "media texts do not merely reflect [the gender sense], they also help produce it," whereas Mendes (2011) claimed that the legitimacy of the discussed feminist movements in the news largely depends on the sources used and on whether activists are portrayed as reasonable agents or as deviant, marginal figures. Therefore, the analysis addresses collectivization/individualization, agency/victimhood, and elitism/diversity by class, region, and gender of players (Mendes, 2011).

Answer to RQ3: Postcolonial feminist analysis of the positioning of religion and culture (Mohanty, 1988). On the other hand, Mohanty (1988) argued that there is one 'Third World woman' in Western discourse, based on victimhood and tradition, and Abu-Lughod (2002) illustrated that the 'saving' of Muslim women is often premised on the veil as a sign of submission and religion versus freedom. However, Zia (2018) cautioned against the opposite tendency of idealizing religious agency as feminism and argued that secular autonomy is still required for women in Pakistan to achieve their rights. Collectively, these views are expected to allow the study to assess whether religion appears in media discourses as an obstacle to rights, as a resource for rights, or as a contested terrain of rights claimed and denied (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Zia, 2018).

2.5 Integration of the Framework

In a nut shell, framing theory supplies the overall structure of the analysis, the concept of primary definition directs attention to voice and sourcing, the protest paradigm directs attention to the displacement of grievances by conflict, and feminist and postcolonial theory direct attention to the representation of participants and of religion (Entman, 1993; Hall et al., 1978; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Mohanty, 1988). These perspectives have been translated into the analytical categories of the codebook presented in Table 2, so that each theoretical claim is linked to identifiable features of the texts (Schreier, 2012).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 News Framing and the Coverage of Protest

Here, the idea of framing was developed further in the communication research, where, following Goffman's (1974) popularization of the concept, framing is defined as the way people make sense of their experience through encoded interpretative schemata, and in the news texts, it is understood as the way some aspects of reality would be made more salient (Entman, 1993). According to Entman (1993), 'Framing is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.' Gamson and Modigliani (1989) also viewed media discourse as an interpretive package for a collection of ideas, one of which becomes a central idea around which the package is organized; Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) found generic frames in the news, such as conflict, human interest, responsibility, morality and economic consequences, that are repeated on different issues.

They also argued that routine organizational practices, most importantly the reliance on the official and accredited sources, are a prerequisite of news and not its reflection (Tuchman, 1978b). Likewise, Hall et al. (1978) argue that such sources become the 'primary definers' of an event, with their account being the first interpretation to which all others must conform. Hence, the question of who is permitted to speak in a news text is seen as more central to framing analysis than a marginal feature of style (Hall et al., 1978).

In particular, Gitlin (1980) demonstrated how press coverage of the New Left in the United States marginalized the movement by focusing on spectacle, internal division, and deviance. This pattern has since become known as the protest paradigm, with mainstream news delegitimizing protest through an emphasis on disruption, a reliance on official sources and an implicit appeal to public opinion against protesters (Chan & Lee, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). However, the protest paradigm is considered a matter of degree, since even the most sympathetic coverage will emphasize conflict and order, not dissenting grievances (McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

3.2 Feminism and Women in the News

Feminist media scholarship has argued that gender relations are signified in news media rather than reflected (van Zoonen, 1994). In her seminal work, Tuchman (1978a) argued that women were subjected to symbolic annihilation through their absence, trivialization, and condemnation in the mass media. In a similar vein, van Zoonen (1994) argued that gender analyzes in the media ought to address text-encoding and the negotiation of meanings by audiences in context, rather than a straightforward transmission of patriarchal ideology.

In the case of feminist movements, Mendes (2011) carried out a longitudinal study of British and US newspapers and found that feminism was represented in legitimizing or delegitimizing frames, and whether one frame rather than another dominated depended on the journalist's choice of source. Gill (2007) also found that the modes of gender construction offered by contemporary media were ambivalent in that they embraced and contested ideas and agendas of feminism. Therefore, it is suggested that feminist activism cannot be reduced neither to the endorsement of feminist ideas (extreme on one hand) nor to the rejection of feminism (extreme on the other), and it is obligatory to consider the modalities of ostensible supportive representation (Mendes, 2011).

3.3 Postcolonial Critiques of the Representation of Muslim Women

The literature around this issue has also dealt with the representation of women of the Global South in the Western discourse (Said, 1978). In this context Mohanty (1988) argued that Western feminist scholarship has represented the "Third World woman" as a homogenous ideal: uniformly oppressed, tradition-bound, and ultimately some other kind of being than secretly the liberated woman of the West. Mohanty (2003) has since developed this critique within the framework of a project of transnational feminist solidarity that recognizes the particular histories and struggles of women in different contexts.

Similarly, a second body of work (Abu-Lughod, 2002) critiqued the discourse of 'saving' Muslim women in Western public discourse in the aftermath of 2001, claiming that 'the veil' was often used as a sign of oppression, hiding these women's agency and attention to their lived and emergent political economy. These critiques, we contend, resonate in international coverage of the Aurat March, which, even when sympathetic, can reinscribe the binary of oppressive religion and culture versus liberating modernity (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mohanty, 1988).

3.4 The Women's Movement in Pakistan and the Aurat March

The Aurat March has been situated within a longer history of women's activism in Pakistan, including the mobilisation of the Women's Action Forum against the discriminatory laws introduced during the 1980s (Khan, 2018; Saigol, 2016). In this regard, Khan (2018) traced the strategies through which the movement has negotiated its relationship with Islam and with democratic politics, while Saigol (2016) mapped the principal actors and debates within the movement, including the tension between secular and religiously grounded approaches to the rights of women.

That tension has been examined most directly by Zia (2018), who argued against the celebration of religious agency as a form of feminism and maintained that secular autonomy remains necessary for the realisation of the rights of women in Pakistan. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2021) examined several gendered contentions in Pakistan, including feminist mobilisation, and found that protest operates alongside advocacy, court petitions and engagement with formal politics, while gains remain uncertain because of shrinking civic space and increasing backlash. It is pertinent to note, therefore, that the relationship between feminist activism, religion and the state constitutes the central axis along which the Aurat March is contested (Zia, 2018).

3.5 Media Representations of the Aurat March

The media coverage of Aurat March in Pakistan has begun to attract studies (Nishat & Hussain, 2022). In examining coverage of the Aurat March in The Nation and Dawn in their news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials, Nishat and Hussain (2022) identified three major themes related to patriarchy; abuse and violence; and women's rights and suggested that the Azdat Marth (march) is portrayed in very progressive terms by Dawn and, conversely, in terms of being oppositional and conventionalist by The Nation. This was thus felt to be further polarizing the society ideologically toward the march, with relatively polarized press amplifying it strongly (Nishat & Hussain, 2022).

Moreover, Tabassum et al. (2023) expanded the analysis to the television talk shows aired during the Aurat March 2022 and found that, mainly due to a misunderstood discourse, the controversy surrounding the march emerged primarily from the culturally insensitive content perceived by the media. In a similar vein, Sadaf and Siitonen (2022) analyzed YouTube comments on the Aurat March 2019 and found themes around the Aurat March that portrayed the women participating in the march as having strayed and requiring correction by men, and Islam and

native culture as being threatened. These studies indicate a hostile discursive context in which the framing choices of mainstream news organizations should be seen (Sadaf & Siitonen, 2022).

3.6 Research Gap

It is evident from the foregoing review that existing studies have compared Pakistani outlets with one another, or have examined broadcast and social media, but have seldom compared an international outlet with a national outlet on the basis of texts of the same genre (Nishat & Hussain, 2022; Tabassum et al., 2023). Moreover, comparisons of Western and Pakistani coverage have frequently relied on assumptions derived from postcolonial theory rather than on systematic analysis of sourcing, agency and the positioning of religion in particular texts (Mohanty, 1988; Mendes, 2011). In this regard, the present study seeks to address this gap through the research questions set out in Section 1.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The present study has been situated within a qualitative and interpretive paradigm, and a comparative qualitative framing analysis has been adopted in order to examine how the Aurat March 2020 was constructed in the English-language news coverage of the BBC and Dawn (Entman, 1993; Schreier, 2012). It is pertinent to note that framing has been treated here not as a fixed attribute of an outlet as a whole but as a property of particular texts, so that the claims advanced in this study are confined to the news reports analysed rather than extended to "Western" or "Pakistani" media at large (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Krippendorff, 2018). Consequently, the design is best described as an exploratory comparative case study, in which depth of textual interpretation has been prioritised over breadth of coverage (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.2 Data

4.2.1 Rationale for Genre Matching

It is argued that a comparison between a news report published by one outlet and an opinion column published by another would confound the outlet with the genre, since an opinion column expresses the stance of an individual writer rather than the routine news practice of the newspaper (Tuchman, 1978b; van Zoonen, 1994). In this regard, the present study has been restricted to verifiable hard news reports, so that the comparison is conducted between texts of the same genre, produced by the news desks of the two outlets, within the same news cycle (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

4.2.2 Corpus

The corpus comprises two English-language news reports published within the same news cycle surrounding International Women's Day 2020, namely the principal report of the BBC on the 2020 march and the principal nationwide report of Dawn on the day of the march (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). The profile of each text is presented in Table 1, and each text has been assigned a code (B1 and D1) through which the evidence reported in Section 5 is referenced (Schreier, 2012).

Table 1 Profile of the Corpus

Code	Outlet and scope	Headline	Date	Genre and byline	Principal focus
B1	BBC News (international public service broadcaster)	Aurat March: Pakistani women face violent threats ahead of rally	7 March 2020	Hard news report with background; BBC News, drawing on reporting by BBC Urdu	Threats, court petitions and the slogan controversy before the march
D1	Dawn.com (national English-language daily)	'Aurat March' held nationwide to mark International Women's Day	8 March 2020	Hard news report, multi-city round-up; Dawn.com with eight city reporters	Conduct of the march across cities on the day, including the Islamabad clash

4.2.3 Selection Criteria

The two texts were selected on the basis of five criteria. First, genre equivalence was ensured, since both texts are hard news reports rather than opinion, editorial or feature writing, so that differences in framing cannot be attributed simply to a difference in genre (Tuchman, 1978b). Second, temporal equivalence was ensured, since both texts were published on 7 and 8 March 2020, within a single news cycle. Third, institutional voice was

ensured, since both texts were produced by the news desks of the respective outlets rather than by guest contributors (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Fourth, topical equivalence was ensured, since the Aurat March 2020 constitutes the principal subject of both texts rather than an incidental mention (Entman, 1993). Fifth, verifiability was ensured, since both texts are publicly retrievable from the official websites of the outlets and have been archived for the purposes of this study (Krippendorff, 2018). Likewise, the two outlets were chosen because they represent an international public service broadcaster addressing a global English-speaking readership and a national English-language newspaper addressing a domestic readership, which allows the influence of the media system and the imagined audience on framing to be explored (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

It is pertinent to note that an asymmetry remains between the two texts, since B1 is anticipatory and was published on the eve of the march, whereas D1 is reportorial and was published on the day of the march (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). This asymmetry has not been eliminated but has been treated as part of the analysis, since the decision of each outlet about which moment of the event to foreground is itself a framing choice (McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

4.3 Data Collection and Preparation

Both texts were retrieved from the official websites of the outlets and were saved as PDF and plain text files, with the date of access recorded (Schreier, 2012). The headline, standfirst, body text and any embedded quotations were included in the analysis, whereas photographs, captions, embedded social media posts, videos and reader comments were excluded, since the study is concerned with verbal framing. Each paragraph was then numbered (for instance, B1.P4 or D1.P12), and every actor who was quoted, paraphrased or reported in each text was entered into an attribution sheet recording the name or description of the actor, the category of the actor, the form of the attribution and the paragraph in which it occurs (Hall et al., 1978).

4.4 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework integrates four sets of categories, which were derived deductively from framing theory and from feminist and postcolonial media scholarship (Entman, 1993; van Zoonen, 1994). First, the four framing functions proposed by Entman (1993), namely problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation, were applied to each text as a whole. Second, sourcing and voice were examined in order to establish which actors were permitted to act as primary definers of the event and which actors were spoken about rather than allowed to speak (Hall et al., 1978; Tuchman, 1978b).

Third, the protest paradigm was employed in order to identify whether the marchers were delegitimised through an emphasis on disruption and deviance, a reliance on official sources, or a focus on spectacle at the expense of grievances (Chan & Lee, 1984; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Fourth, a feminist and postcolonial lens was applied in order to examine whether the women concerned were represented as agents or as victims, whether a singular figure of the oppressed "Third World woman" was invoked, and whether religion was positioned as an obstacle to rights or as a resource within which rights are claimed (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mohanty, 1988; Zia, 2018). The resulting codebook is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Codebook of Analytical Categories

Category	Analytical question	Indicative linguistic realisation	Source
Headline and lead framing	Which aspect of the event is placed in the most salient position?	Grammatical subject, agency, voice (active or passive), evaluative modifiers, quotation marks	Entman (1993); Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)
Problem definition and causal interpretation	What is presented as the problem, and who or what is presented as its cause?	Agent deletion, attribution, hedging (for instance, reporting verbs and modal expressions)	Entman (1993)
Moral evaluation and remedy	Which actions are evaluated, by whom, and what solution is implied?	Evaluative lexis, attributed condemnation, deontic modality	Entman (1993)
Sourcing and voice	Who speaks, who is spoken about, and in what form?	Direct speech, indirect speech, naming and anonymisation, collective attribution	Hall et al. (1978); Tuchman (1978b)

Category	Analytical question	Indicative linguistic realisation	Source
Protest paradigm	Are the marchers framed through disruption, deviance or official perspectives?	Law and order lexis, security emphasis, attribution of violence	Chan and Lee (1984); McLeod and Hertog (1999)
Portrayal of participants	Are the marchers individualised or collectivised, agentive or victimised, elite or diverse?	Social actor descriptions, age, class, gender identity, affective vocabulary	van Zoonen (1994); Mendes (2011)
Religion and culture	Is religion positioned as an obstacle to rights or as a shared and contested idiom?	Religious lexis and its attribution to particular actors; cultural metonyms	Abu-Lughod (2002); Mohanty (1988); Zia (2018)

Note. Inductive codes were added to these deductive categories during the second cycle of coding, as described in Section 4.5.

4.5 Coding Procedure

Coding was conducted in two cycles (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schreier, 2012). In the first cycle, each text was coded deductively against the categories presented in Table 2, and each coded segment was linked to its paragraph number so that every interpretive claim could be traced to its textual evidence. In the second cycle, inductive codes that emerged from the texts, such as the hedging of agency in reports of violence and the incorporation of the rights agenda into state discourse, were added to the codebook and the texts were recoded accordingly.

In addition, analytic memos were written throughout the coding process in order to record interpretive decisions, to document the refinement of the codebook and to provide an audit trail through which the analysis may be scrutinised (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.6 Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings has been addressed by grounding every claim in quoted or paragraph-referenced evidence from the texts, while dependability and confirmability have been addressed through the use of an explicit codebook, repeated readings of the texts and an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is suggested, however, that transferability is limited, since the findings describe two texts within a single news cycle and should not be read as a description of the BBC or Dawn in general (Krippendorff, 2018).

4.7 Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged (Krippendorff, 2018). Only two texts have been analysed, so the findings cannot be generalised to the outlets or to the media systems in which they operate. The texts also differ in their timing, since one precedes and the other reports the march. Furthermore, the analysis has been restricted to English-language print coverage, which excludes Urdu-language newspapers, BBC Urdu, television talk shows and social media, in which much of the controversy surrounding the march was conducted (Khan et al., 2021). Likewise, visual material has been excluded, although photographs and placards are likely to have shaped the interpretation of the march by readers. It is suggested that a larger corpus covering several years of coverage and including Urdu-language outlets would allow these limitations to be addressed in future research.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The study is based exclusively on publicly available news texts, and no human participants were recruited, so formal ethical approval was not required (Schreier, 2012). Nevertheless, private individuals who were quoted anonymously or under pseudonyms in the source texts have not been further identified, and their words have been reported only as they appear in the published texts.

5. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the comparative framing analysis of B1 and D1, and it is organised according to the analytical categories presented in Table 2 (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). An overview of the findings is presented first in Table 3, after which each category is discussed with reference to the textual evidence.

Table 3 Comparative Matrix of Frames in B1 and D1

Dimension	B1 (BBC News)	D1 (Dawn.com)
Dominant frame	Rights under threat: women preparing to march in the face of intimidation	Civic commemoration under state protection: a nationwide event conducted with security

Dimension	B1 (BBC News)	D1 (Dawn.com)
Problem definition	Threats, harassment and legal attempts to stop the march	Disruption of the march in Islamabad by counter-protesters
Causal interpretation	Religious and right-wing opponents and conservative norms	Men from the counter-rally, with agency partly backgrounded
Moral evaluation	Condemnation voiced by Amnesty International; fear and courage of participants	Condemnation voiced by politicians and a federal minister
Treatment recommendation	Persistence of the marchers despite fear	Police control, legal action and religiously grounded tolerance
Primary definers	Organisers, volunteers and participants	State officials and party politicians
Portrayal of participants	Individualised, affective, gender-diverse, partly anonymised	Collective, plural, diverse in class, region and gender
Religion	Mainly the resource of opponents	A shared idiom claimed by supporters, opponents and the state

5.1 Headlines and Leads

In the headline of B1, the women are placed in the position of grammatical subject but are construed as experiencers rather than actors, since they "face violent threats", and the temporal phrase "ahead of rally" positions the march as an ordeal yet to be endured (BBC News, 2020). It is suggested that this realises a frame of rights under threat, in which danger rather than demands occupies the most salient position. Moreover, the report opens by invoking the conservative notion that the proper place of a woman is within the home and out of public view, so that the problem is defined from the outset as one of mobility and public visibility (BBC News, 2020; Mohanty, 1988).

In the headline of D1, on the other hand, the march is realised through an agentless passive ("held nationwide"), which presents the event as an accomplished and orderly fact, while the purpose clause "to mark International Women's Day" anchors the march in an internationally recognised calendar of commemoration (Dawn.com, 2020). Furthermore, the name of the march is enclosed in single quotation marks, which may be read as the marking of an Urdu proper name for an English-language readership, although a degree of distancing cannot be ruled out (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In a nut shell, the headline of D1 realises a civic and commemorative frame rather than a frame of conflict.

5.2 Problem Definition and Causal Interpretation

In B1, the problem is defined as the intimidation of the marchers, which is elaborated through accounts of threats, the vandalism of posters and a petition in a Lahore court that sought to stop the march on the grounds that it spread "anarchy, vulgarity, blasphemy and hatred" (BBC News, 2020). It is pertinent to note that this delegitimising vocabulary is attributed explicitly to the petitioners rather than adopted by the reporter, so that the language of the opponents is reported but not endorsed (Entman, 1993). Similarly, the cause of the problem is located in religious and right-wing groups and in a broader conservative culture, and a television incident in which a playwright verbally abused a women's rights activist is reported as a further instance of this hostility.

In D1, by contrast, the problem is confined largely to the section on Islamabad, where stones were thrown at participants after a counter-rally organised by students of Jamia Hafsa had concluded at the same site (Dawn.com, 2020). It appears that the agency of the attackers is rendered through reported and partly hedged attribution, whereas the restoration of order by the police is stated directly, which indicates that the narrative is resolved through the competence of the state rather than through the grievances of the marchers (Hall et al., 1978). Consequently, the frame of D1 is suggested to be one of a disturbance that was contained rather than one of a movement under systematic threat.

5.3 Moral Evaluation and Treatment Recommendation

In B1, the moral evaluation is supplied by Amnesty International, which is reported to have condemned the threats, intimidation and harassment directed at the marchers, and by the marchers themselves, whose fear is presented as the measure of their courage (BBC News, 2020). The treatment recommendation is implied rather than stated, since the report closes with the words of a volunteer: "We are scared. But if we are not scared, if we don't have fear, how do we expect the change to come?" It is suggested that persistence in the face of fear is thereby positioned as the remedy (Entman, 1993).

In D1, on the other hand, the moral evaluation is voiced by politicians, since a Pakistan Peoples Party senator is quoted as describing the attempt to scare women "from sticks, stones and bad language" as "cowardly behaviour",

while the federal Minister for Human Rights is quoted as stating that "violence is unacceptable" (Dawn.com, 2020). Likewise, the remedies proposed are legal action against the attackers and adequate policing, which locates the solution within the institutions of the state (Hall et al., 1978).

5.4 Sourcing and Voice

The distribution of voices across the two texts is presented in Table 4, and it indicates the clearest difference between them (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). In B1, the marchers are the primary definers of the event, since an anonymous 38-year-old organiser from Karachi, a 28-year-old gender-fluid volunteer and a participant writing under the pseudonym Noor are given extended space, whereas opponents appear mainly through the reported text of the court petition (Hall et al., 1978).

Table 4 Actors Quoted or Reported in B1 and D1

Actor category	B1 (BBC News)	D1 (Dawn.com)
Organisers and participants	Anonymous organiser (Karachi); gender-fluid volunteer; participant under the pseudonym Noor	Islamabad organisers (through a slogan); Sukkur participants and the Home Based Women Workers Federation (through collective demands)
State officials	None quoted	President Arif Alvi; Prime Minister Imran Khan; Chief of Army Staff Qamar Javed Bajwa; Minister Shireen Mazari; the police
Party politicians	None quoted	Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar (PPP); Sirajul Haq (JI); MPA Kanwal Liaquat (PML-N); Shehbaz Sharif (PML-N); Ghinwa Bhutto and Murtaza Wahab (as attendees)
Opponents	Court petitioner (through the petition); unnamed playwright (reported); religious and right-wing groups (collectively)	Jamia Hafsa students (Haya March); supporters of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat in Badin
Civil society and public figures	Amnesty International; actor Mahira Khan	None quoted
Courts	Lahore court (ruling reported)	None reported

Note. Compiled from the attribution sheet described in Section 4.3.

In D1, by contrast, the event is defined predominantly by the state and by party politicians, since the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief of Army Staff, a federal minister and several provincial and national politicians are quoted or reported, whereas the marchers speak mainly through a slogan, "Iss nizaam se chahtay hain Azadi!", and through lists of collective demands (Dawn.com, 2020). It is argued that this pattern reproduces the reliance on official sources that has been identified as a characteristic of routine news production, even where the coverage is not hostile to the protesters (Tuchman, 1978b; McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

5.5 Portrayal of Participants

In B1, the participants are individualised and represented in affective terms, since their ages, gender identities and fears are reported, and the inclusion of a gender-fluid volunteer and of transgender participants presents the march as diverse in gender (BBC News, 2020; Mendes, 2011). It is pertinent to note, however, that B1 is not uncritically celebratory, since it reports that some moderate voices, including the actor Mahira Khan, supported the march while cautioning against provocative placards, and that the organisers acknowledged that their approach was deliberately confrontational in order to be "challenging the status quo". This finding qualifies the common assumption that Western coverage portrays the march in uniformly positive terms.

In D1, the participants are collectivised and represented as plural, since the marches are reported to have been attended by "women, children, men, transgender people and others", and the report records the demands of the Home Based Women Workers Federation for financial autonomy and protection against harassment at work, together with the demands of marchers in Sukkur concerning forced conversions, karo kari and missing persons (Dawn.com, 2020). Consequently, D1 does not portray the participants as a privileged urban elite, which indicates

that the charge of elitism frequently levelled against the march by its critics is not reproduced in the news coverage of Dawn (Khan et al., 2021; Saigol, 2016).

5.6 Religion and Culture

In B1, religion appears primarily as the resource of the opponents of the march, since the slogan mera jism, meri marzi (my body, my choice) is reported to have been condemned by critics as obscene and un-Islamic, and the movement is reported to have been accused of being too Western (BBC News, 2020). Moreover, the report closes with the image of women who will no longer be "confined to the veil and four walls", in which the veil functions as a metonym for confinement. It is argued that this closing image, although sympathetic to the marchers, risks reproducing the figure of the Muslim woman who requires liberation from her religion and culture (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mohanty, 1988).

In D1, on the other hand, religion is distributed across the full range of actors, since it is invoked by the counter-rally of Jamia Hafsa, by the separate women's march of the Jamaat-i-Islami, at which the leader of the party is reported to have linked his support to the inheritance rights of women, by the federal minister, who stated that "Our religion teaches tolerance and Sabr", and by the Prime Minister, who framed the rights of women with reference to the Seerat of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) (Dawn.com, 2020). Similarly, the President is reported to have quoted Muhammad Ali Jinnah to the effect that the "Power of women is greater than the pen and sword", whereas supporters of a proscribed sectarian organisation are reported to have described the marchers as "misguided women".

It is therefore suggested that religion in D1 is represented not as the antithesis of the rights of women but as a shared and contested idiom within which those rights are both claimed and resisted, which corresponds closely to the account of Pakistani feminism offered in recent scholarship (Khan, 2018; Zia, 2018). Furthermore, the incorporation of the rights agenda into religious and nationalist statements by the President and the Prime Minister indicates that the state is positioned as the legitimate guardian of the rights of women, which may domesticate the more radical demands of the march (Hall et al., 1978).

5.7 The Protest Paradigm

Neither text was found to deploy the classic delegitimising devices of the protest paradigm against the marchers, since violence and deviance are attributed to opponents rather than to participants in both texts (Chan & Lee, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Nevertheless, the paradigm is suggested to operate in an attenuated form in D1, in which the reliance on official sources, the attention to security arrangements, including the layers of security and the policewomen deployed in Lahore and the tent erected to separate the two rallies in Islamabad, and the resolution of conflict by the police foreground order over grievance (Dawn.com, 2020; Gitlin, 1980). In B1, on the other hand, the emphasis on threat and danger may be read as a sympathetic variant of the same paradigm, in which conflict is foregrounded at the expense of the economic demands that the report itself identifies as the central theme of the 2020 march (BBC News, 2020).

5.8 Summary of Findings

In a nut shell, the contrast between the two texts is better characterised as a contrast between a participant-centred frame of rights under threat in B1 and an institutionally mediated frame of civic commemoration under state protection in D1 than as a simple opposition between support and rejection (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). Both texts are broadly sympathetic to the marchers, yet they differ in whose voices define the event, in whether the participants are individualised or collectivised, and in whether religion is positioned as an obstacle or as a shared terrain of contestation (Entman, 1993; Zia, 2018). It is suggested that these findings challenge two common assumptions, namely that Pakistani coverage represents the march as elitist and that Western coverage represents it in uniformly celebratory terms, since neither assumption is supported by the genre-matched news coverage analysed here.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Beyond the Binary of Support and Opposition

The findings indicate that the two reports cannot be adequately described through the binary of support and opposition that has informed much of the commentary on the Aurat March (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). Both reports were found to be broadly sympathetic to the marchers, a finding that is consistent with the observation of Nishat and Hussain (2022) that Dawn adopted a progressive stance in its coverage of the march. It is argued, however, that the more consequential difference lies in the form through which sympathy is expressed, since sympathy in B1 is expressed through the voices of participants, whereas sympathy in D1 is expressed through the voices of the state and of party politicians. In this regard, the findings support the argument of Mendes (2011) that the legitimacy conferred on feminism by the news depends substantially upon the sources selected by journalists.

6.2 Voice, Primary Definition and the Role of the State

With reference to RQ2, the reliance of D1 on the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief of Army Staff and a federal minister indicates that the state was positioned as the primary definer of the meaning of International

Women's Day and, by extension, of the march itself (Dawn.com, 2020; Hall et al., 1978). It is suggested that this pattern does not delegitimise the march but incorporates it, since the rights of women are reformulated as commitments of the state grounded in religion and in the legacy of the founder of Pakistan. Consequently, the more radical claims of the march, such as bodily autonomy and freedom from the existing system, are rendered less visible, which corresponds to the observation of Tuchman (1978b) that routine dependence on official sources narrows the range of meanings available to readers.

In B1, on the other hand, the marchers were permitted to define the event in their own words, which accords with the call for representations that recognise the agency of women in the Global South (BBC News, 2020; Mohanty, 2003). Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note that most of these voices were anonymised or pseudonymised because of the danger of reprisal, so that the very form of their inclusion testifies to the backlash and shrinking civic space documented by Khan et al. (2021). Similarly, the positioning of men in the counter-rallies and online abuse as threats to women who leave the home resonates with the storylines identified by Sadaf and Siitonen (2022), in which marchers were constructed as women who required correction.

6.3 Religion as Obstacle and as Shared Terrain

With reference to RQ3, the positioning of religion constitutes the clearest point at which the two reports diverge (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). In B1, religion was attributed mainly to the opponents of the march, and the closing image of women no longer confined to the veil and four walls was found to rely on the metonym of the veil as confinement. It is argued that this image, although sympathetic in intention, reproduces the opposition between emancipation and Islam that has been criticised by Abu-Lughod (2002) and Mohanty (1988), since it implies that the liberation of Pakistani women entails a departure from religion.

In D1, by contrast, religion was invoked by supporters, opponents and the state alike, so that it appeared as a shared and contested idiom rather than as the property of one side (Dawn.com, 2020). It is suggested that this representation corresponds more closely to the actual terrain of the women's movement in Pakistan, in which rights have been claimed both within and against religious frameworks (Khan, 2018; Saigol, 2016). At the same time, the appropriation of religious idiom by the state may be read through the critique advanced by Zia (2018), since it indicates that the rights of women are acceptable to official discourse chiefly when they are framed within religious limits, which leaves little room for the claim to secular autonomy expressed in the slogans of the march.

6.4 The Protest Paradigm in Sympathetic Coverage

With reference to RQ1, it was found that neither report delegitimised the marchers in the manner described by Gitlin (1980), yet both reports foregrounded conflict, whether as threat in B1 or as disorder and its containment in D1 (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). It is suggested that this indicates the persistence of the protest paradigm in an attenuated form within sympathetic coverage, as anticipated by McLeod and Hertog (1999). Notably, B1 itself identified economic justice as the key demand of the 2020 march, yet devoted most of its attention to threats and controversy, while D1 recorded the economic demands of home-based workers within a narrative organised around security. Consequently, the economic and structural claims of the march appear to have been displaced in both texts by the conflict frame identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as one of the most pervasive frames in news.

6.5 Implications

Several implications follow from these findings (Entman, 1993). For research on the representation of feminist movements, it is suggested that comparisons between international and national coverage should be conducted on texts of the same genre, since the comparison of a news report with an opinion column may produce conclusions that are not supported by the news coverage itself (Tuchman, 1978b). For journalism practice, the findings indicate that international outlets may represent the agency of local women more fully while still relying on Orientalist imagery, whereas national outlets may avoid such imagery while still subordinating the voices of activists to those of officials (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Hall et al., 1978). Furthermore, for transnational feminist solidarity, it is argued that the most productive representations would combine the participant-centred sourcing observed in B1 with the recognition of religious and regional plurality observed in D1 (Mohanty, 2003).

7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the framing of the Aurat March 2020 in two genre-matched news reports published by the BBC and Dawn within a single news cycle, drawing on framing theory, the protest paradigm and feminist and postcolonial media scholarship (Entman, 1993; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Mohanty, 1988). It was found that the BBC report constructed a participant-centred frame of rights under threat, whereas the Dawn report constructed an institutionally mediated frame of civic commemoration under the protection of the state (BBC News, 2020; Dawn.com, 2020). Both reports were broadly sympathetic to the marchers, yet they differed in the actors permitted to define the event, in the individualised or collective representation of participants, and in the positioning of religion as an obstacle to rights or as a shared terrain of contestation.

It is suggested that the principal contribution of the study lies in demonstrating that the difference between international and national coverage of a feminist movement may be located less in evaluative stance than in the

distribution of voice and the treatment of religion (Hall et al., 1978; Zia, 2018). Moreover, the study has shown that two common assumptions, namely that Pakistani coverage represents the march as elitist and that Western coverage represents it in uniformly celebratory terms, are not supported once the data are restricted to news reports of the same genre (Tuchman, 1978b).

The conclusions must nevertheless be read in the light of the limitations of the study, since only two English-language texts from a single news cycle have been analysed and visual material has been excluded (Krippendorff, 2018). In this regard, future research could examine a larger corpus of coverage across several years of the march, include Urdu-language newspapers, BBC Urdu and television talk shows, analyse photographs and placards alongside verbal text, and investigate how readers in Pakistan and abroad interpret such coverage (Khan et al., 2021; Tabassum et al., 2023). In a nut shell, it is argued that a fuller understanding of how the Aurat March is mediated requires attention not only to whether the news supports feminist activism but to whose voices, and which conceptions of religion and freedom, that support is made to carry (Mendes, 2011).

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