# *Mera Jism Meri Marzi*[1]
## Framing the Contestations of Women's Rights in Pakistan

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### 1. Introduction: State, Islam and gender discourses in Pakistan

Gender ideology in Pakistan has had a checkered history of discourses, either restricting women's mobility to private spaces to adhere to the image of the ideal Muslim woman during the military dictatorship of Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq[2] (1977-1988), or allowing them into designated public spaces to project a soft image of the enlightened moderation of the Islamic state to the Western powers during the era of Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008) (Mumtaz/Shaheed 1987; Khan 1998; Cook 2001; Khan 2007; Shaheed 2010; Syed 2010; Grünenfelder 2013; Saigol 2016). Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality comes into play here, where in addition to class, regional origin, age and educational status women's identities in Pakistan are heavily influenced and defined by the discourses of Islam, nationalism and postcolonialism. This is reflected in the discourses of *chador and chaar-diwari* (veil and four walls) promoted during the Zia regime; these discourses strictly regulated women's bodies and their physical movements by the dress codes specified by male religious clerics. Moreover, the private space had to be women's primary domain. Pakistani scholars (Hashmi 1995; Zia 2020) observe that through its anti-women policies, the "Zia era had made women very conscious of the body" (Hashmi 1995: 51). This control over and regulation of women's bodies, sexuality and their mobility extended to public spaces: Women were not allowed to participate in sports, dance and theater. Vigilance was kept over

1 *Mera Jism Meri Marzi* is Urdu and means 'my body, my choice'.

2 In 1977, Zia-ul-Haq came to power in a military coup; he promoted a far-reaching Islamization of public life.

relationships in both private and public spaces, resulting in moral policing of couples in public areas such as parks, beaches and universities where they could be asked to provide a document to prove that they were married (Zia 2020).

Traditionally, a woman in male spaces is deemed "provocative and offensive" (Storti 1990: 66). Jawad Syed (2010: 151) observes that there are two 'sacred domains' in which women are supposed to spend their lives, i.e. the *veil and the four walls* of the house. However, if by sheer necessity, women have to come out in the public arenas, they must remain invisible in a veil. Hussain (2016) elaborates the point further: Women may earn and work outside wearing a veil, but without compromising their responsibility of providing labor to sustain life within the confines of the home. Hence, the *veil and four walls* project has been reconfigured for the 21st century of privatization and neoliberal globalization. Several scholars (Zia 2009; Khan 2007; Zubair 2016a) maintain that there is a deliberate ideological purpose behind the state policy, which promotes gender segregation by citing deference to culture and tradition regarding *purdah*[3] as an explanation for women's inability to work outside their homes or have access to social sector services or greater political participation. The historical state policies and practices of control, regulation and legislation have thus crafted a religious and cultural discourse over the years which has gained pervasive force within the state institutions as well as the psychology of the masses. Western scholars (Mies 2014; Rai 2019; also Manuela Boatcă in this volume) have often pointed out how state-promoted ideologies and discourses of 'housewifization' and motherhood have undervalued women's unpaid domestic work and how these relate to the division of labor and gendered social reproduction within neoliberal capitalist states in Western democracies as well as globally. Silvia Federici (2012), for example, argues that women's unpaid domestic work, sexuality and procreation are practices indispensable to capitalism. She goes on describing it as "unfree labor, revealing the umbilical connection between the devaluation of repro-

3 *Purdah* literally means a screen. In Muslim societies, it is an institution, which limits women's access to the public domains, as women must not appear in public without a veil. This not only limits their interaction with men who are not kin, it also curtails their access to education and other public arenas. It has been interpreted by scholars like Shaheen Sardar Ali (1993) and Fatima Mernissi (1993) as a symbolic division of Muslim space on the basis of gender.

ductive work and the devaluation of women's social position" (Federici 2012: 97). In the Pakistani context, similar discourses have resulted in

> the construction of an idealized 'Pakistani Woman', who becomes available to state leaders and Islamic fundamentalists for ideological purposes. For example, when state and religious leaders restrict women to the confines of the private sphere through their politico-religious rhetoric, as well as in law, they fashion a 'Pakistani Woman' almost exclusively as wife and mother. That wife and mother becomes useful in projects of nation-building and Muslim group identity construction (Cook 2001: 31).

However, these Western scholars overlook the point that the relationship between the private and public domains is not always shaped by capitalism or the production-reproduction-care nexus. As this contribution illustrates, in addition to capitalism, religion is an important factor in understanding the asymmetry of gender in public and private spaces in Pakistan. Therefore, capitalism cannot be regarded as the only cause of perpetuating gendered inequalities, as argued by these scholars. Additionally, several Pakistani scholars have observed that the social implications of the state's religious discourse are far more compelling than the juridical ones (Jahangir 1998; Shah 2016). This has led to various groups and collectives to act as enforcers of religious mores, such as conservative ulema[4] and extremist groups. However, women no longer accept these constraints silently and started a public protest movement called the *Women's March* in Pakistan (henceforth *Aurat March*) in 2018.[5] As Umaima Ahmed (2021a; 2021b) reports, this movement has faced severe resistance ever since it was started.[6] In 2021, the organizers faced tough opposition in the form of disinformation campaigns, accusations of blasphemy, and even threats from the banned terrorist group *Tehreek-e-Taliban*. The protesters countered this by calling the accusations a 'pandemic of patriarchy'. One of the organizers argued that *Aurat March* presented a feminist healthcare man-

4 Islamic religious scholars.

5 The Urdu word *aurat* literally means woman, but is derived from the Arabic word *aurah*, meaning a thing that is covered or is meant to be covered or hidden from the public eye. In some cases, women's names are also hidden from strangers.

6 Ahmed, Umaima (2021a): 'Aurat March' organizers face intimidation and threats of prosecution in Pakistan Global Voices. Online: https://globalvoices.org/2021/04/03/aurat-march-organizers-face-intimidation-and-threats-of-prosecution-in-pakistan/, 27 August 2021.

ifesto as the protesters demanded that the government increase the health budget so that women may get better healthcare.[7]

Against this backdrop, my main argument in this chapter is focused on the language of the contestations about women's rights from a linguistic perspective. Further on, I will examine the way linguistic violence is linked with other broader forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, which feeds into the ongoing feminist movements in contemporary Pakistan, including the *Aurat Marches* and *#MeToo*[8]. Writing about the power of language to harm and violate, for example, Judith Butler (2015: 28) observes:

> An utterance brings what it states into being (illocutionary) or makes a set of events happen as a consequence of the utterance being made (perlocutionary). [...] The point is not only that language acts, but that it acts powerfully.[9]

While linking linguistic aspects to performativity and bodily acts, Butler goes on to connect both to the performativity of mass demonstrations as well (ibid: 29), to which I will return later. Drawing on Butler's (2015) performative theory of assembly, I hope to illustrate through citing data of posters, banners and slogans used by Pakistani women that the two movements, the *Aurat Marches* and *#MeToo*, have suddenly gained momentum and ubiquity across the country (including smaller cities and working class women) because the language of slogans and the associated semantics resonate with the indigenous women's struggles against the oppressive patriarchal structural and gendered inequalities encapsulated in linguistic violence. Thus far, women were silent about these issues, but with indigenous slogans such as *hum gunehgar aurtain* (we sinful women) and the vernacular lingo, they are reclaiming the language as well as the public spaces.

In the light of the ongoing worldwide contestations of women's rights and the increased resistance of right-wing populism across the board contesting the language of women's rights, this chapter goes some way in answering the question how the use of violent language is countered by women's protests

7 Ahmed, Umaima (2021b): 'Aurat March' 2021 presents feminist healthcare manifesto in Pakistan. Online: https://globalvoices.org/2021/03/14/aurat-march-2021-presents-feminist-healthcare-manifesto-in-pakistan/, 27 August 2021.

8 This is a vernacular version of *#MeToo*.

9 Illocutionary and perlocutionary are terms used by John Austin (1975) in elaborating his speech act theory.

in Pakistan. More specifically, it focuses on the following questions: First, how are the indigenous women's movements *Aurat March* and *#MeToo* linked with similar movements globally, if at all? And second, how is the framing of women's rights contested by different stakeholders in the Pakistani context? This will be discussed in four steps: After a short introduction to the *Aurat Marches*, the embodied performativity and linguistic aspects of women's public assembly will be discussed. This is followed by a closer look at the way how women's rights are linguistically and visually framed in the protest movements, and by, lastly, placing it in the context of global developments.

The data on which this chapter is based consists of *Aurat March* posters; clippings, excerpts and photos from fieldwork as well as newspapers, social media networks including Twitter, Facebook and blogs/vlogs. In addition, I recorded nine interviews of main *Aurat March* organizers, participants and observers from Lahore and Karachi. The organizers were asked questions regarding their personal motivation and the perceived needs as well as the ideological underpinnings behind the movement. Similarly, participants were asked to reflect on what feminism meant to them personally and what motivated them to take part in women's marches.

## 2. *Aurat March* (2018-2021): A significant shift in gender discourses and ideologies

Notwithstanding the resistance, there have been some significant shifts in discourses on women's rights since 2018 after the emergence of *Aurat Marches* on 8 March every year to celebrate International Women's Day, to express solidarity with women worldwide (including trans women) and to publicly demand their rights as rightful citizens of the Islamic Republic. Since 2018, women in large numbers are taking over the public sphere of streets in the form of women's marches every year, not only in big cities like Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, but with each passing year, their numbers keep rising, including women from all walks of life, different social strata and from smaller cities and towns, such as Multan, Sukkur or Hyderabad. More importantly, their main slogan *mera jism meri marzi* (my body, my choice) has taken center stage in the electronic and social media channels and is a matter of intense contestations and debates among politicians, scholars, parliamentarians, intellectuals, writers, artists and the general public. The sight of thousands of women's bodies occupying the central public space is disturbing to the collec-

tive subconscious of the Pakistani psyche, which has imbibed the erstwhile Islamization and nationalist discourses of women as the repository of family honor and 'shame'. [10]

*Fig. 1: Aurat March 2020: women chanting slogans (© Sheema Kermani)*

10 Pakistani women can bring shame and disgrace to their male kin by having sex outside marriage or by marrying a man of their choice without family's approval. Therefore, their sexuality is strictly controlled. Their bodies have to be protected/guarded by their male kin. Rahman (2002) observes that since a woman's body is associated with shame, there is a tendency in many Pakistani communities to hide their women from the public eye. Some even avoid naming their wives and sisters in the presence of men who are not family members. Saadia Toor's (2007) analysis of the famous 'Saima Waheed case' shows how the Pakistani state manages 'moral regulation' through the discourse of cultural authenticity, and by designating women as the repository of culture. Therefore, exerting control over women's sexuality (and in some cases men's) is viewed as a constitutive feature of state formation (cf. Hussain 2016). If the Muslim home is considered a symbolic national model and a bastion in the cultural battle against the West, and women as the repository of national culture and honor, women who do venture outside the home are rendered foreign (outsiders to the national home) and construed as threats to the nation (cf. Jamaal 2010). Their transgression is "in some way mapped onto the unwelcome and undue influence within Pakistani society of the 'upper-class woman', understood as 'Westernised' and therefore degenerate" (Toor 2007: 265).

*Fig. 2: Women from all social strata participating in the Aurat March, Karachi (© Sheema Kermani)*

Previous research has illustrated the ways in which feminist bodies are read, interpreted and silenced within institutional spaces that are shaped by historical forces of state-sponsored Islamization campaigns, which are built upon the bodies of women. The regulatory discourse of *veils and walls* around women's bodies is disrupted by feminist bodies and their work, which contests the historically constructed hetero-patriarchal spaces structured by Islamization ideologies (Zubair 2016a).

## 3. Embodied performativity and linguistic aspects of assembly

Judith Butler, writing about the performative aspects of public protests and assembly in streets, argues that "the bodies assembled 'say' we are not disposable, even if they stand silently. This expressive possibility is part of a plural and embodied performativity that we have to understand by dependency and resistance" (Butler 2015: 18). The signification processes generated by the sight of thousands of women's bodies in the public arena of the street – chanting slogans such as *my body, my choice*, *down with patriarchy* or *I am a slut* and carrying pictures and slogans depicting women's sanitary pads or menstruation, or women sitting with their legs spread wide – is an enactment of this embodied

performativity which has taken the collective mainstream (malestream) Pakistani psyche by storm. Butler (2015: 25) defines the term performative as “the right to appear, a bodily demand for a more livable set of lives”. Considering performativity as linguistic, she links the formation of gender to the performativity of mass demonstrations (ibid: 29). This can be best illustrated by the example of Sheema Kermani – one of the interviewees and founding members of *Tehrik-e-Niswan* (Women’s Movement, Pakistan) and the *Aurat March* in Karachi. When Kermani raised the slogan *hum aurtain hain, hum zinda hain*! (we are women, we are alive!) in 2020, women chanted it after her in a chorus.

## 4. Framing women’s rights: language and visual signs of the *Aurat March* (2018-2021)

Drawing on the framework by Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan (2009) – who proposed a contextualized historical approach to the linguistic landscape that emphasizes the importance of considering how the signs came to be and what they mean in a given context – the remainder of this chapter will look at the signs and slogans of the *Aurat March* in Pakistan as a contestation of the framing of women’s rights and embedded ideologies. The study of language in post-war and conflict-ridden areas has attracted the interest of scholars who applied the linguistic landscape approach as a method to explore how the use of language in the public space represents ethnic groups, reflects territorial conflicts, expresses statehood and projects ideologies or socio-cultural identities. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (2016) points out, such linguistic representations go hand in hand with structural inequalities.[11]

Earlier research (Zubair 2016a; Zubair/Zubair 2017) on Pakistani Muslim women’s literacies and empowerment issues in the postcolonial Islamic state of Pakistan has shown that the issues of language(s) and women’s identities are central since there is no equivalent in the indigenous languages for feminism. The nearest synonym is the movement for women’s freedom, which is

11 Intersectionality, as Crenshaw (2016) argues, is not about multiple identities, as many people often think; it is not primarily about identity – it is about how structures make certain identities the consequence or the vehicle for vulnerability. To see intersectionality, it is important to look at the context: What kind of discrimination is going on? What are the policies? What are the institutional structures that contribute to the exclusion of some people and not others? So there are multiple forms of intersectionality.

usually equated with Western notions of freedom, from which women actively distance themselves. Previous research has also shown that the global modernities and development paradigms posit a universalistic agenda for women's empowerment, which cannot be easily enforced in various South Asian contexts (Zubair 2016b; Zubair/Zubair 2017). Similarly, Amina Jamal (2013) in her research on *Jamaat-i-Islami*[12] women in Pakistan has highlighted the language issue. She observes that while all *Jamaat* women leaders whom she interviewed rejected Western ideas of freedom, it cannot be regarded a coincidence that none of them were comfortable speaking English regardless of their social status, political influence or economic level. Citing Tariq Rahman (2002, 2005), Jamal goes on to argue that this inability is a means of situating a citizen of Pakistan in specific configurations of cultural and social privilege, since Urdu and English are deeply implicated in ideological claims and power struggles between groups and classes in Pakistani society (Jamal 2013: 33). However, as Zuneera Shah (2020) points out, it is interesting to note that the organizers labelled it the *Aurat March* instead of women's march, to give it a distinct cultural connotation and nuance although etymologically both words *Aurat* and *woman* reek of patriarchal overtones (the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this contribution).

Since 2018, how language and discourses frame women's and gender rights has been a central, albeit contested, issue raised and discussed in electronic and social media as well as in parliament by different social and political actors in Pakistan. Some sections – including the clergy and the ultraconservative – were furious and uncomfortable after seeing the word *jism* (body) and dick, i.e. penis or male genitalia, written on the posters for public display (fig. 3), arguing that it is obscene and contrary to moral values and the ideological underpinnings of an Islamic state like Pakistan. Further, they argued that this is the language of the privileged class. Considering that the language of Western feminism and human rights is English, the detractors assumed that only educated and elitist women are conversant in English and Western feminisms, although the slogans and posters were bilingual as well as indigenized, as I aim to illustrate in this contribution.

Further, despite the hue and cry over the slogan *my body, my choice* from the religious clerics and prominent sections of male journalists, politicians and parliamentarians, the organizers of *Aurat Marches* were adamant that

12 Extreme Islamic-Islamist right-wing political party of Pakistan.

*Fig. 3: A young woman at Aurat March holding a poster referring to male genitalia: Keep dick pics to yourself!*

Source: "https://twitter.com/hueraal vi?lang=en"; 8 March 2019

they would not change their slogan as it is central to their charter of demands. Originally, the slogan was an outcry by Western feminists' over the 'use and abuse' of their bodies as they mobilized for their bodily and reproductive rights, such as in the famous *Roe vs. Wade* case in the United States in 1973.[13] However, in this context – fifty years and thousands of miles apart – this slogan encapsulates the protest against abuse of women's bodies through forced marriages, marital rape, pressure to produce children (preferably sons) without consent, sexual harassment in the workplaces and the requirement

13 In the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* case, the US Supreme Court ruled that the constitution protects a pregnant woman's liberty to choose to have an abortion without excessive government restrictions (Rubin 1994).

to provide four male witnesses to the act of penetration to prove a case of rape. So, women are reclaiming their rights over their bodies in the public space of streets, which signifies their ownership of their own bodies, as opposed to their bodies being the repositories of family's or state's honor. It was recently reiterated by the female parliamentarians Shirin Mazari and Hina Rabbani Khar that women are first and foremost citizens of Pakistan and, therefore, should not be referred to as nation's daughters, mothers and sisters. Thus owning their individual selves as equal citizens in the parliament goes some way to illustrate the shift in the gendered narratives while also contesting the dominant state narratives about women being "the biological reproducers of state members" (Cook 2001: 32). Although the slogan *my body my choice* has travelled historically and geographically from the Global North to the Global South as it is simultaneously connected with the resurgence of the women's marches and the *#MeToo* Movement in the United States since 2017, it has been localized and re-appropriated to fit the Pakistani context in ways in which Pakistani women experience bodily violence and discrimination. One of my interviewees, Nida Kirmani, who is associate professor of sociology at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), further explicates this in her tweet:

> NidaKirmani: #MeraJismMeriMarzi means opposing: rape sexual harassment child marriage physical abuse lack of healthcare domestic violence human trafficking bonded labor/slavery. Opposing this statement means perpetuating a culture that produces all of the above. #khalilurrehmanqamar[14]

By adhering to their slogan, which many oppose as a Western import reminiscent of Western feminists' fight for abortion rights, women are reclaiming their bodily and reproductive rights, their choice to marry, to have children and to say no to sexual violence, harassment and domestic abuse. Pakistan's *Aurat Marches* are thus rejecting the taboos around women's bodies and their sexualities *by being visible* and taking over the public space of the street, which traditionally has been a male (public) space. Further, by raising slogans about their reproductive rights and health issues, they are articulately contesting the erstwhile national discourses promoted by the patriarchal hegemonic state – those of housewives, daughters and sisters. Moving beyond their legal rights,

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14 Kirmani, Nida (2020): #MeraJismMeriMarzi means opposing. Online: https://twitter.com/nidakirmani/status/1235057887308726274, 1 September 2021.

significant issues are raised in regard to women's social and familial roles as well as their identities as Pakistani citizens and individuals and not as domesticated, unpaid workers within the family. Feminist lawyers and right's activists are arguing that women should not be called the nation's mothers, daughters and sisters. As citizens of Pakistan, they claim to be their parents' daughters only, arguing that this issue should not be politicized since a nations' honor does not depend on its women, but on the performance of the state.

Several prominent playwrights and self-appointed intellectuals, including Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar and journalists like Hassan Nisar, Orya Maqbool Jan either termed the slogan *my body, my choice* as immodest and immoral or dismissed it as absurd and ridiculous. For instance, an MMA[15] lawmaker lashed out at the organizers of the *Aurat March*, claiming it was disrespectful to women and in violation of Islamic principles.[16] He went on to argue that the placards held by women at the march were shameful. Citing *my body, my choice*, he went on to say that a person does not have any authority over any part of their body as it is the prerogative of God.

The placards and banners women carried showed a clear departure from subsuming women's issues under the umbrella term of human rights, since the human rights discourse is usually deemed a Western construct by right-wing politicians, religious organizations and the general public alike, as these groups claim that Islam as a religion gives equal rights to all and sundry, including women. The posters not only clearly articulated a feminist agenda, they also highlighted tabooed topics in Pakistani society such as menstruation, body-shaming and slut-shaming in addition to challenging the prescribed gendered norms and behaviors (fig 3 and 4).

Many posters and slogans, such as shown in figure 3, triggered rage, particularly among men, certain conservative sections of the media and society, particularly the religious clergy – further widening the divide between the liberal-secular feminist groups and the fundamentalist and extremist groups in Pakistani society. Most of this resistance discourse came from right wing elements like the Jamaat e Islami and the right MMA, which saw the slogans as a challenge to their traditional politics which has confined women to the veil and walls and has sought only those notions of feminism which promote

15 A political alliance of conservative, Islamist, religious and far right parties of Pakistan.

16 Dawn (2019): MMA lawmaker says will seek police FIR against Aurat March (2019). Online: https://www.dawn.com/news/1469421, 30 August 2021 (author not specified).

Fig. 4a: Aurat March Karachi 2018. The placards and banners show the slogan Free women means free society: we sinful women. The red color hinting at Karl Marx's revolution is a visual sign that signifies a profound shift in public discourse. (© Sheema Kermani)

Fig. 4b: Aurat March Karachi 2018. The placards and banners show the slogan Free women means free society: we sinful women. The red color hinting at Karl Marx's revolution is a visual sign that signifies a profound shift in public discourse. (© Sheema Kermani)

their own ideology, such as setting up female universities or an increase in female-led *dars* (congregation) and religious gatherings (Qureshi 2020).

*Hum Aurtain* (We Women), the organizing committee of the *Aurat March* 2019, commented: "It seems that the use of the word 'dick' or the reference to pictures of men's genitals is somehow more obscene, coming from a woman, than the actual images being referenced themselves, since they come from men, who are not held to the same behavioral expectations as women" (interview notes).

## 5. Intersectionalities and global connectivities

The visibility of women's bodies and their embodied performativity (Butler 2015) in the public domains in Pakistan is a relatively new phenomenon, although women activists protested in Lahore and Karachi against the imposition of Shari'a laws as early as the 1980s. However, their numbers were limited as most of them belonged to the elite. Considering the *Aurat March* a revolutionary feat for Pakistan, Zuneera Shah, an author and activist points out:

> None of this is to say that women's mobilisation in Pakistan is somehow unprecedented. The unrelenting resistance by Pakistani women against Zia's regime is imprinted on Pakistan's historical memory and the iconic *chadar* burning protests are a canonical visual in Pakistan's history of feminism.[17]

However, there has been a huge gap of three and a half decades since Pakistan witnessed such massive turnout of thousands of women in the rallies. The emergence of women from all social classes as well as from smaller cities and towns clamoring for their rights in the streets is, hence, unprecedented. This visibility of thousands of women on the streets signify a historical as well as a hysterical moment in the making: historical as it is unprecedented in Pakistan's street movements' history; hysterical because the epithet captures the resistance and hysterical reactions of the detractors who are either suing the organizers in the courts, or labelling them *randi* (whore) in the local media, or just hurling similar expletives at them in the (social) media. One may recall the term *herstory* and similar slogans such as *sisterhood is powerful* and *sisterhood*

17 Shah, Zuneera (2020): Why the Aurat March is a revolutionary feat for Pakistan. Online: https://www.dawn.com/news/1394385, August 30, 2021.

*is global and sisterhood is forever* coined by Robin Morgan (1970) during the second-wave feminist movement in the West. The power of similar terminologies and slogans cannot be undermined in women's struggles globally. As a patriarchal construct, language globally privileges men and patriarchy (Spender 1980): womansplaining and *behenchara* are new coinages by feminists in the Global North, and by *Aurat March* participants in the Global South respectively, which go some way to show the linkages and connections as well as the contestations of women's and gender rights globally.[18] In 2021, Sherry Rehman, a parliamentarian and leading figure from Pakistan's left-wing political party has compiled an anthology of research on women's struggles and movements in Pakistan titled: *Womansplaining*. The English word womansplaining has been re-appropriated here as the research focusses specifically on women's activism and political struggles in the Pakistani context.

## 6. Concluding comments: the *Aurat March* moving beyond an essentialist framing

This chapter has argued that the emergence of women in the public space of Pakistani streets is not only a re-appropriation of the public arena through the women's marches as opposed to the erstwhile discourses and rhetoric of modesty, *veils and walls*: it is also a re-appropriation of language couched in the slogans of the *Aurat Marches*. Through the contestations by the right-wing actors and the re-contestations of language by the *Aurat March* participants, the chapter has strived to capture the rapidly changing linguistic landscape of Pakistan against the backdrop of the nexus of religion, state and patriarchy. The unprecedented nature of contestations of language and semantics occupy a central position within the public spheres with women not only questioning the hegemony of the patriarchal state narratives of the daughter, sister

18 As discussed in the introduction to this volume, human rights and equality principles are neither universal nor inclusive. Crenshaw's (2016) notion of intersectionality is useful in understanding the diverse contexts where structural inequalities privilege some over others in different ways; women from the Global South experience discrimination in different ways (Mohanty 1988). However, the history and emergence of women's movements across the globe show that women are discriminated against globally, however, they may experience the structures and discrimination unevenly and, in many ways, in different contexts.

and mother but simultaneously indigenizing and vernacularizing the Western feminist slogans and discourses such as *aurat march, mera jism meri marzi, behensplaining, we sinful women, I am a slut, free women means free society, warm your own food* and *you are a stud but I am a slut.* The contestations over the framing of rights has led women to challenge and deconstruct the erstwhile patriarchal construct of Pakistani Muslim women's bodies as a repository of the nation's and family's honor. Hence Pakistani women are owning and reclaiming their bodies as well as their reproductive rights as citizens of Pakistan. Furthermore, the political and ideological constructs of the role and space of women, work and religion in Pakistan are currently in the process of being redefined and reconfigured by these contestations over the framing of women's rights. There is also a strong indication that moving beyond class and language barriers, these marches are an egalitarian and inclusive collective bringing together women from all social classes, genders (including trans women and men), sundry regions and walks of life.

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