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## The BDR mutiny in Bangladeshi media. From a 'proletarian revolution' to a 'brutal massacre'

**Kurzfassung:** Der Aufsatz analysiert die Medienberichterstattung über den BDR-Aufbruch in Bangladesch im Februar 2009 und untersucht die journalistischen Prozesse und die Art und Weise, wie die bangladeschischen Medien über den Konflikt berichteten, mit Blick auf die Anwendbarkeit friedensjournalistischer Konzepte in der aktuellen Konfliktberichterstattung. Mittels einer Kombination verschiedener Methoden untersucht der Aufsatz die vorherrschenden Trends der Berichterstattung über den Aufbruch. Die detaillierte Analyse der Berichterstattung dreier Zeitungen zeigt, dass fast zwei Drittel der Berichte den Konflikt auf Gewalt und Gewalttätigkeit reduzierten, während ein Drittel einem Peace-Frame folgte. Interessanterweise hatten sämtliche Editorials einen Peace-Frame. Gestützt auf Ausschnitte aus Interviews mit Journalisten und Redakteuren trägt der Aufsatz zur Diskussion darüber bei, wie Journalisten und Redakteure selbst den Prozess der Konfliktberichterstattung interpretieren und ihn als gegeben hinnehmen oder in Frage stellen.

**Abstract:** The article analyses the media coverage of the BDR mutiny in Bangladesh, February 2009. In examining journalistic processes and how the Bangladeshi media reported the violent conflict, the article looks at how the approaches of peace journalism can be used in actual conflict reporting. Through a combination of methods the article discusses the dominant trends in the news coverage of the mutiny. Studying three newspapers' coverage in detail, it was found that nearly two-thirds of the news reports reduced conflicts to force and violence, while one-third had a 'peace frame'. Interestingly all the editorials analyzed had a 'peace frame'. Presenting excerpts from interviews with journalists and editors, the article talks to the discussion about how journalists and editors themselves interpret, accept or challenge the process of conflict reporting.

### 1 Introduction and aims

In February 2009, Bangladesh witnessed one of the bloodiest military coups since its independence in 1971<sup>1</sup>. The soldiers from the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) revolted against their commanding officers, on deputation from the Bangladesh Army. The event popularly referred to as *BDR mutiny* took place at the BDR headquarters in the capital Dhaka. The mutineers killed a total of 74 people including 57 army officers<sup>2</sup>. Given the magnitude of the incident the mutiny received huge coverage by print, electronic and online media.

The aim of this article is twofold, as it sets out to explore how the Bangladeshi media covered the incident. The shifting media frames of the coverage during and after the incident will be central to the discussion. In examining journalistic processes and how the Bangladeshi media reported the conflict, the article looks at how the approaches and methods of peace journalism and conflict sensitive reporting can be used in actual conflict reporting. The broader analysis is based on 155 articles related to the mutiny from some of the major newspapers in English, television news from the 25 and 26 of February 2009 and blog material from the same dates from the first and largest Bengali blog: *somewherein*<sup>3</sup>. Secondly the article seeks to dive deeper into a selected amount of material, and more thoroughly identify the war and peace journalism trends in the BDR mutiny coverage by three leading English-language newspapers: *The Daily Star*, the *New Age* and *www.bdnews24.com*. Building on Johan Galtung's war and peace journalism model (Galtung, 2002) and the discussions the model has incited, the article will through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods discuss the dominant trends in the news coverage of the BDR mutiny.

Research on war and conflict reporting has often stressed how such journalism constitutes a litmus test of all sorts of reporting and might challenge our perceptions of what the role of a journalist should be (Allan and Zelizer, 2004; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). An exclusive focus on the manifest content of media representations would, however, not disclose the operation of journalistic agency, or provide any direct evidence of how journalists and editors themselves interpret, accept or challenge the process of conflict reporting. This would be reductive not least because there often is a considerable space between how media scholars write about conflict reporting and how the journalists and editors in the field experience their work. Hence, in this article some journalists' and editors' views and experiences are included in addition to the discussion of media representations<sup>4</sup>.

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1. *Scenarios-Uncertainty lingers in Bangladesh despite mutiny end* by Anis Ahmed, Reuters, Mar 1, 2009  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSDHA391723>

2. *BDR probe misses another deadline* bdnews24.com <http://bdnews24.com/details.php?id=158948&cid=32>

3. <http://www.somewhereinblog.net>

4. Interviews with journalists and editors were conducted in Dhaka in May 2009 and November 2010. Please see appendix for a full list of interviewees.

## 1.1 The BDR mutiny

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) is a paramilitary force mainly tasked with guarding the country's borders and assisting the military and police during national emergencies. The BDR follows a unique command structure: the soldiers, known as *jawans*, are directly recruited, whereas their commanding officers are deputed from the Bangladesh Army.

What was to be known as the BDR mutiny broke out at *Pilkhana*, the BDR headquarters, in the center of Dhaka on 25 February 2009 and continued till the following day<sup>1</sup>. On 25 February, the BDR *jawans* and officers gathered at the annual *Darbar* (assembly). At the *Darbar*, in presence of the BDR sector commanders, battalion commanders, and officers from the headquarters, the *jawans* started accusing them of misappropriation from the *Dal-Bhat* (Rice-Lentil) programme, a country-wide initiative to provide people with essential food items at a lower-than-market price. These allegations apparently led to altercation and the mutiny sparked shortly after 9 am. The armed *jawans* took control of the armory, held the officers and their families hostage and the entire BDR headquarters was under siege for the following more than thirty hours. On the first day the firing continued until 2 pm with breaks. Within an hour after the *jawans* took over, heavily equipped army personnel from the Dhaka cantonment reached the spot and took positions around the BDR Headquarters. However, they still could not enter the compound and waited for government's directives. In the afternoon of 25 February, government envoys held talk with the rebels to break the siege, but without progress. Later on that day a group of rebels met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who promised them general amnesty and asked them to give in. This announcement momentarily tranquilized the situation and a number of hostages were released soon after. However, the team that negotiated with the PM apparently failed to get the message across and the siege continued till the next day. In the meantime, rebellion at battalions and outposts in different parts of the country were also reported. On the second afternoon (26 February), the Prime Minister through a televised speech urged the *jawans* to surrender and warned of tough actions if they failed to comply. Shortly after her speech, the army tanks and military vehicles began to close in and the situation further intensified. This ostensibly intimidated the rebel soldiers and finally they laid down their arms and many managed to flee the headquarters. It still remains an open question as to how a couple of thousand soldiers fled the 'surrounded' compound at that stage. With the mutineers' surrender, the more than 30 hours mutiny finally came to an end. A total of 150 hostages including women, children and 34 officers were rescued from the BDR premises. Eventually, Police and Armed Police Battalion took charge of the BDR headquarters and its armory. The day after the mutiny ended, a full-fledged rescue and recovery operation was launched to trace out the unknown number of missing BDR officers including the Chief, Major General Shakil Ahmed. In the afternoon, the bodies of 45 slain army officers were found in a mass grave and more dead bodies of officers were recovered from in and around the headquarters. In the end, the death toll stood at 74 including 57 army officers making it one of the most gruesome military coups in the history of Bangladesh. The extent of violence still to a large degree remains shrouded in mystery.

More than a year after the mutiny, on 27 May 2010, the government published a formal investigation report on the BDR mutiny suggesting that it was instigated by "unidentified" masterminds who cashed on the issues of deprivation of the BDR soldiers. The report states, "the main motive of the mutiny was to break the BDR's chain of command . . . expose BDR and army to a conflicting state, cause an overall damage to army, destabilize the newly elected government, endanger Bangladesh's internal security and stability." However, the Chairman of the investigation committee acknowledged that the real causes and objectives behind the mutiny could not be clearly identified and further investigation was imperative. Furthermore the report strongly criticizes the role of the media, and private television channels in particular, during and after the BDR rebellion.<sup>2</sup>

In November 2009, the government formed six special courts to try about 3500 border guards accused in 40 cases around the country. At the time of writing this article (February 2011), the rebel *jawans* are being tried in different military courts, which triggers controversy as the BDR members are not part of the military.

## 1.2 Bangladesh's media landscape

Despite its constitution of 1972, where Article 39 guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression of every citizen, and the Right to Information Act of 2009, which ensures "free flow of information and people's right to information"<sup>3</sup>, Bangladesh still has a long way to go when it comes to press freedom. The country ranked 126 out of 178 countries in the

1. The following overview of the event is based on a reading of many different media versions and discussed with journalists and editors too. It is of course problematic to base the background of an analysis of the media on facts taken from the media, but the authors of this article believe that they have reached a rather 'neutral' description of the incident here, as a common description one-and-a-half year after it took place.
2. *Defiance, deprivation led to BDR mutiny: Probe report* the Financial Express 28 May 2010 <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/05/28/67951.html>
3. Ministry of Information, Bangladesh Govt. [http://www.moi.gov.bd/RTI/RTI\\_English.pdf](http://www.moi.gov.bd/RTI/RTI_English.pdf)

World Press Freedom Index 2010<sup>1</sup> by the Reporters without Borders.

Television is the most-popular medium in Bangladesh with more than 60 million viewers (Rahman 2009: 5). Bangladesh Television (BTV), the only state-owned and terrestrial channel covers 93% of the country's population through 15 relay stations. There are also 13 privately owned satellite channels. Apart from the only state-run radio channel *Bangladesh Betar*, a number of FM radio channels have been launched in recent years. When it comes to daily newspaper, around 20-22 daily newspapers are published regularly<sup>2</sup>. Unlike TV and radio, all newspapers in Bangladesh are privately-owned with *Prothom Alo*, *Ittefaq*, *Jugantor*, *Kaler Kantho*, *Amader Shomoy* etc. being some of the popular Bengali ones. On the other hand, the English-language dailies e.g. *The Daily Star*, the *New Age*, [www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com), *The Financial Express*, the *Bangladesh Today*, are quite popular among educated urban readership. Most major Bengali and English-language dailies have online versions as well. Bangladesh has 2 million internet users as of November 2010. The further potential for electronic media is considered enormous, as there are 68.65 million mobile phone users in Bangladesh<sup>3</sup> and people working in the digital media sphere expect a 'revolution' when people start to use internet on their mobile phones (interviews, Dhaka, 2010).

The blogosphere is increasingly becoming important in Bangladesh. *Somewherein* is the first and largest Bangla blog community in the world. It was started in 2005 and rapidly turned out to be a flagship within electronic communication in Bangladesh. The blog community has worked to bring the Bengali language to internet<sup>4</sup> and today the blog community has 60 thousand Bengali bloggers. The front page is organized around the latest 15 blogs, in addition the monitors can choose the topics they highlight and keep on top on the first page, hence they undertake editorial work as well (interview, Chowdhury, 2010).

## 2 Peace journalism and conflict sensitive reporting

### 2.1 Peace journalism

Peace journalism stems from the work of Johan Galtung and seeks to counter the established journalistic practices of war journalism. Peace journalism, Galtung (2002) argues, attempts to depolarize by showing all sides and de-escalate violence through a process of peace and conflict resolution. In recent years the term 'peace journalism' has been developed further, for instance by Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick:

„Peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices, about what to report and how to report it, which create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value the non-violent, developmental responses to conflict“ (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 5).

Peace journalism as opposed to the established practices of war journalism demands contextualization of a conflict. It suggests the reporter should refrain from mere event coverage on violence and delve deep into the root causes of the conflict in order to find possible peaceful long-term resolutions (Galtung, 2002). According to the peace journalism model, an important task is to report in relation to the context and historical issues in the conflict area, identifying 'its history, recent causes and internal composition' (Francis in Lynch 2007: 8). Peace journalism is hence a more complex and time consuming process of gathering information, providing a wide range of balanced facts to analyse and propose possible solutions. As several scholars have pointed out, this is where one of the main challenges to peace journalism lies, as most mainstream media face constraints in relation to time and resources (e.g. Hanitzsch, 2007; Loyn, 2003). The peace journalism paradigm has met harsh criticism from active journalists and editors criticizing the 'prescriptive' nature of peace journalism (e.g. Hanitzsch, 2007; Loyn, 2007). Some would argue that when put in a proper perspective there is no real contradiction between serious quality journalism as such and working with a peace perspective in reporting. It is interesting that many of the strongest critics to peace journalism both argue that it is incoherent with the integrity of journalism and at the same time that it 'is already there in the outfit of good journalism' (Hanitzsch, 2007; Loustarinen, 2002). The proponents of 'good quality journalism', insisting on what Loyn (2007) refers to as training on better 'emotional literacy', are in many ways talking the same language as the proponents for peace journalism. One main difference might be that many of the critics of peace journalism still highlight the need for objectivity and 'reporting the world as it is' (Loyn, 2003). This is at loggerheads with an increasing body of literature the last years showing how objectivity itself might be a relative term (e.g. Schudson, 1978 and 1997; Allan and Zelizer, 2004).

1. [http://www.rsf.org/IMG/CLASSEMENT\\_2011/GB/C\\_ASIA\\_GB.pdf](http://www.rsf.org/IMG/CLASSEMENT_2011/GB/C_ASIA_GB.pdf)

2. Internews *Bangladesh* <http://www.internews.org/regions/mena/amr/bangladesh.pdf>

3. Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (December 2010)

[http://www.btrc.gov.bd/newsandevents/mobile\\_phone\\_subscribers/mobile\\_phone\\_subscribers\\_december\\_2010.php](http://www.btrc.gov.bd/newsandevents/mobile_phone_subscribers/mobile_phone_subscribers_december_2010.php)

4. *Somewherein* introduced the first Bengali keyboard. When they started in 2005 there were only around 75 bloggers in the entire country operating on individual platforms. *Somewherein* contacted each of them personally by email and invited them to the new blog. Everybody accepted the invitation. From 2007 it is possible to send a message to the net and join the conversation on a specific topic.

Some of Galtung's central concepts on conflict analysis are presented in a table (Galtung, 2002), which has become a conventional reference within the field of war and peace journalism. The table (see Annex-1) is based on the dichotomy between peace/conflict journalism on the one side and war/violence journalism on the other. The four different axes of this table, namely Peace/conflict versus war/violence orientated; Truth versus propaganda orientated; People versus elite-orientated and Solution versus victory orientated will serve as inspiration for the following discussion. The recent contributions to the field further indicate that the peace journalism idea has been able to include some of the major criticisms against it, and redefined some of its core arguments. Lynch for instance emphasizes, "Conflict reporting does not have to include all the elements called for in the Galtung table if it is to be regarded as peace journalism" (Lynch, 2007: 10). He continues "if peace journalism is about creating opportunities for society to consider and to value non-violent conflict responses, then that ought to be enough". Peace journalism is supposed to be "an alternative journalistic programme where the idea is to escape from the war propaganda trap of symbolically constructing armed conflicts as polarized, black and white, zero-sum games" (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2008: 13). This approach has a lot in common with the school of conflict-sensitive reporting, where the central concept is that violent conflict attracts intense news media attention that requires greater analytical depth and skills to report on it without contributing to further violence or overlooking peace building opportunities (Howard, 2009).

## 2.2 Frames in the news

It is the argument of this article that it makes sense to use Galtung's dichotomies in combination with some of the central notions from framing theories. The concepts of *frames* and *framing* have increasingly gained popularity in journalism studies the last years as a way of analyzing media production, media content and media impact (Iyengar, 1991; de Vreese, 2002; Entman, 2004; Reese, 2003). The core idea is that frames are needed to organize fragmentary items of experience or information and promote a certain understanding of a phenomenon. In the words of Stephen D. Reese frames are:

*"organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world"* (Reese, 2003: 11, original emphasis).

A frame is hence not only a question of choosing the adequate description of an event or development, but rather a question of the value given to the element in question, with implications of how the actual society should treat it.

The approach in the first part of this article is inductive in nature and analyses the news stories on the BDR mutiny without *a priori* defined news frames in mind, to explore what 'issue-specific frames' (de Vreese, 2002) the news stories about the BDR event used. The second part of the article looks into a selection of news stories using a rather deductive approach, investigating frames that are defined and operationalised prior to the analysis, namely the 'peace frame' and the 'war frame' based on Galtung's table referred to above.

In order to determine 'war frame', and 'peace frame', 11 variables for each category were developed, built on Galtung's table (Annex-1). All 22 variables were applied to every news item and a score of 1 was given against each variable present in that particular news item. In the end, the total score was counted and a news item either fell under 'war frame' or 'peace frame' whichever score was higher. In some cases the scores leveled and the news item was considered having a 'neutral frame' (see e.g. Lee and Maslog, 2005).

The frames prime the audience members' responses by activating associations between the information highlighted in the text and concepts already stored in their schema systems (Reese, 2003: 28). The frames with the greatest potential for influence, Robert Entman argues, "use words and images highly salient in the culture, which is to say *noticeable, memorable and emotionally charged*" (2004: 6). Hence Entman explicitly includes visual images. Rune Ottosen (2007) argues that the visual aspects of journalism often are underestimated and that more focus should be given to such aspects in the concept of peace journalism. Images both live and still are given some attention in this present analysis, as they constitute an important part of the explanation of how the Bangladeshi media framed the news from the so-called BDR mutiny.

## 3 Framing the event

### 3.1 The Proletarian Revolution frame

The news about BDR mutiny first broke in the Bangladeshi blogosphere:

„The news broke on *Somewherein* only some 45 minutes after the mutiny started, at around 10 am the 25 February. It was a big chance to collect the very first information from the blog. From a news point of view the first half of the day was very smoky. What was clear was that something very unusual was happening. The discussions really started in *Somewherein* at 10:30 am. After that the first media to respond was television. Private TV channels rushed to the spot but could not go far into the hot zone. Live telecast started around 11-11:30 am. There were many un-confirmed news in the air and in *Somewherein*. That the head of BDR was killed, that many officers were kidnapped ..." (Interview, Chowdhury, 2010)

For the first day and at least half of the second it was difficult for most people to actually make sense of what was going on at the BDR Headquarters. Adding to the uncertainty the newly elected government refused to comment on the situation until the afternoon of the second day. Here the blogosphere became important. During the first day, 25 February 2009, the Bangladeshi media were full of reports that showed how increasing frustration among the border guards over unfulfilled demands and anger over the lifestyle of their seniors from the army led to the mutiny in Pilkhana. This media frame was rebellion centered and focused on the suffering of the BDR men that had led to the mutiny.

Due to 'zero-access' to the headquarters the *jawans* were the primary source of information for the media as to why this mutiny had broken out in the first place and what was happening inside the compound. Therefore, the reasons justified by the *jawans* behind the mutiny received slanted coverage in many national dailies that often sympathised with the 'mutiny causes' and provided for what this article will refer to as the 'Proletarian Revolution' frame. One of the journalists who was to play a core role in this drama, Munni Saha<sup>1</sup> from ATN Bangla, describes this particular morning:

„I reached my office at 9.30 in the morning, after the news came in, I kept calling the spot since I was in charge of news management, but I couldn't get any information. I thought of my viewers, of their dissatisfaction because of the lack of information. People could see the helicopters flying overhead, they could hear the sound of gunshots; they could see that the army had surrounded the BDR Headquarters. There was tremendous anxiety, rumors were flying wildly, there was a near complete lack of factual information, and this was bound to create further panic, to feed grist to the rumor-mill. Till 10 we had thought that the gunshots were because of the BDR parade, but from 11 onwards, that idea was shattered. Rumors and SMSs were flying around wildly each contradicted the earlier one. What were we to make of the situation? What *was* happening? And, for god's sake, why?“ (Interview, Saha, 2010)

Shortly after, Munni Saha decided to go to the place of action where she was able to conduct one of the most praised and controversial interviews with the *jawans*. Saha received lots of credit for her interviews not least because she put herself in a highly vulnerable situation joining the excited BDR rebels without any kind of protection in a very unpredictable situation.

„I couldn't tell where the BDR soldiers had positioned themselves but they seemed to be firing at the army. My camera person and I got footage of the scene, half-crouching, for fear of bullets. As we were sitting there, one of the men from the crowd of curious people who had gathered there, called out, `Apa, why don't you try to get in? I'm sure you can manage.' Now this was something that no reporter in his or her right mind would not attempt, of course, as long as you didn't think about the risks involved...about death. I knew that Taposh<sup>2</sup> was trying to enter the headquarters, but was not succeeding. Not even with a white flag. And it was still not known whether the Prime Minister would declare an amnesty or not. So I thought, if I can manage to get in and speak to them, if I can gain their confidence and help convey what they want from the government, if it helps in any small way to resolve the crisis that would definitely be a good thing. And of course, since we didn't know about the brutal killings inside, it made sense to call it a `bidroho' (mutiny), to call them our `brothers', to plead with them to sit for negotiations with the government.“ (Interview, Saha, 2010)

The private television stations served as what Tumber and Webster have called 'frontline definers of reality' (2007: 70), and were to a large degree used to send messages live from the rebels to the public and the leading politicians during this first period of the incident. They also became crucial in defining the frame of the first phase of the event. Most of the attention during this first period was given to the disparities between the BDR personnel and the army officers, and the incident was to a large degree seen as a (quite understandable) revolt. The 'Proletarian Revolution' frame explained how the BRD *jawans* revolted because they had been suffering for long: over pay, rations, corruption among their superiors and lack of opportunities.

On ATN Bangla, a BDR *jawan* wearing helmet and speaking behind a window, his face covered, stated that the BDR personnel wanted to speak to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and that she would have to declare amnesty for them and meet their demands. "Otherwise we will not stop the war!" he declared. Another BDR *jawan* told the private television station Bangla Vision that they would talk to the government delegates if they entered the BDR compound through the third gate. On the 25<sup>th</sup> afternoon, a BDR *jawan* telephoned from inside the besieged headquarters in Pilkhana and was allowed to express his grievances on air on Bangla Vision. He told the viewers that the needs and aspirations of the paramilitary border guards had always been neglected by their commanding officers from the army and were never conveyed to the highest authorities. The angry *jawan* continued that the BDR personnel now had realized that their fate was not going to change after the new Awami League government had taken over. What appeared to have been the most frustrating was army control, since the BDR administration and nearly all its officers are from the army. In the words of one *jawan*, "We are not against the nation, or the Government. We want that the BDR should belong to the BDR" (Bangla Vision, 25 February 2009).

The 'Proletarian Revolution' frame was supported univocally by the media and facilitated by interviews with rebels in masks who were allowed to talk almost uninterruptedly on several television stations broadcasting live from the premises. The

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1. Munni Saha is considered a leading female TV journalist, often referred to as one of the representatives of the first generation of TV reporters as private television started in Bangladesh.
  2. Fazle Noor Taposh, Member of Parliament

labels used within the 'Proletarian Revolution' frame were 'angry and aggrieved' BDR soldiers, rebel soldiers. The news stories gave the background story to a certain degree and focused quite a lot on non-elite sources.

Within the 'Proletarian Revolution' frame, a wide range of such stories showed how increasing frustration among the border guards over unfulfilled demands and anger over the lifestyle of their seniors from the army led to the mutiny in Pilkhana. The soldiers expressed grievances to the media over poor pays and benefits, discrimination and repression by the BDR (army) officers, restrictions on joining the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission abroad, inadequate allocation of food rations, corruption, and irregularities by the BDR top brass. They also demanded the withdrawal of army officers from the BDR's chain of command. Simultaneously, the blogosphere was functioning both as amplifier and inflector of the news. The continuous discussions, not least in the blogosphere, commented upon the television news as they evolved.

„In the first day, the BDR soldiers were represented as heroes, if not as the “revolutionists”. At about 3 pm we saw the first interview with revolutionists with covered faces. Munni Saha, the ATN Bangla reporter went close to the gate of the hot zone to get the interview. This short interview was repeatedly shown on TV. We also saw the political leaders who tried to make a dialogue with the revolutionists. They were trying, but the firing remained. At 5 pm a more close approach was shown, as they tried to go in with a white flag to negotiate. So far there had been no formal statement from the government about what really was happening. We saw the overview shots from different rooftops but no close up or clear view.“ (Interview, Chowdhury, 2010)

Munni Saha's interview clearly shows how eager the mutineers were to talk. The agitated BDR men fought for attention, and for more than four minutes twenty seconds several of them were allowed to talk without much interruption. Saha did ask a few questions e.g. about casualties and the whereabouts of the officers, trying to direct the news story, but nobody really responded to that. The BDR personnel were mostly delivering their demands and complaints. Some of the mutineers had their faces partly covered by orange scarves and these images become emblematic visuals of the 'Proletarian Revolution' frame, both in the live television reports, on internet and in the printed press during the first period of the revolt. In retrospective, the ATN Bangla interviews were also the ones receiving most criticism.

„It was a most frightening situation, the nation's borders were unprotected, bodies of army officers were being recovered: we didn't know how many had survived, what had happened to their family members. Instead of pointing out these things, senior media persons went on air, they started apologizing for the role of the media. They started saying that we should not have uttered the word 'mutiny', we should not have wanted to hear what the soldiers had to say, things like that. As a media person, I think I should be asking the nation's forgiveness for this, this was highly irresponsible. From 26th night, some senior journalists went on air, spouting things like these, like puppets being pulled on strings.“ (Interview, Saha 2010)

Without doubt to identify the 'history, recent causes and internal composition' (Francis in Lynch 2007: 8) of the crisis was most difficult, if not impossible as the BDR conflict broke out. Many of the journalists and editors interviewed described the situation as one similar to 'the fog of war' (Interviews 2009, 2010). The then Head of News at ATN Bangla<sup>1</sup>, Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul told in an interview that the ATN Bangla did not segment their topics along the lines of peace journalism:

„There is a lack of considering non-violent responses to a conflict in the reports. This is not really the fault of the reporters, but rather of people like me – the editors. I think there is a need to include courses in the curriculum for journalists that focus on less drama driven news. At the same time this was a big dramatic event and it was covered as such.“ (Interview, Bulbul, 2009)

Drawing on conflict analysis, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 42) emphasise the need of mapping a conflict in order to explore what kinds of goals the parties to a conflict have. They argue that members of the press should detect the real needs of parties to a conflict, not only their fears and positions. To unravel the real goals they believe it is essential to keep asking the parties why they want what they say they want. After the BDR incidents, the television journalists hardly discussed or defended their positions during the more than 30 hours in any public forum<sup>2</sup>. Whether this was due to directives from the channels or any pressure is not clear.

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees held that the media coverage especially the first day of the Pilkhana crisis did add fuel to the fire. Nohrstedt (2009: 84) stresses how “media and journalists have gained an increasingly central position due to developments in media technology such as satellite TV channel broadcasting 24/7 news so rapidly that it is possible to report live from a combat zone”. This was exactly what happened during the first stage of the BDR incident when the television stations broadcast live from the conflict zone and when bloggers played the role of witnesses. Nobody was prepared for the BDR incident and the speed of live reporting may certainly make the sensitivity towards conflict more difficult. Some of the journalists and editors from the printed press expressed in interviews that the time delay and the process of editing a newspaper give you time to reflect and digest the material. This is of course a dimension that is lost with the development of internet papers. Especially ATN Bangla, the first satellite television of Bangladesh was criticised for making drama out of the BDR case. Several of the newspaper editors stressed how the BDR incident was not handled well from the side of the

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1. As of February 2011, with Boishaki TV, a private TV channel

2. Munni Saha is somehow an exception here, as she has been given interviews and participated in conferences explaining her experiences covering the BDR case.

electronic media:

„I blame the media for having gone crazy at the first stage of the coverage. In a war you have to get there the fastest with the most if you want to win the battle. Bringing in reporters there and putting them on live they forgot the ideal of objectivity. The journalists were of course not prepared for this to happen.“ (Interview, Khan, *The Daily Star*, 2009)

„The BDR case was not a conflict it was a mutiny. It was not handled properly from the electronic media side. From the newspapers side it was a bit better. The mutineers should not have been allowed to talk to the media. The story was very biased. We had no formal government statements in 24 hours. The only voice you got was the mutineers', they were on the screens in uniforms and with their arms. There is an acute shortage of good journalists in Bangladesh.“ (Interview, Alam, *The Independent*, 2009)

ATN Bangla reporter Munni Saha, explained the situation from a different angle:

„As we all know, the BDR soldiers were armed, Pilkhana grounds was under their control. It was not possible to storm the compound with the help of tanks and cannons. Therefore, in that context, what was urgent was to gain their trust, to speak to their leaders, or those who were directing them, to try and gain their confidence, to make them think they have public support, the media's support, to work towards softening their attitude, to persuade them to sit for negotiations, to get them to agree to the Prime Minister's proposals -- if these were the reasons, I have no problems with that. I think it was the correct thing to do.“ (Interview, Saha, 2010)

According to Galtung's peace journalism table (please see Annex-1), peace/conflict journalism would look beyond the manifest violence towards a broader context of conflict formation where resolutions may be found. It is important to remember that the journalistic process does not start when the journalists arrive at the scene of manifest conflict, as in the case of the BRD mutiny. The explanations for the violence are to be found also in the history and culture, and a wide spectrum of investigative journalism. For instance the accusations of corruption among the army could have led to uncovering and prevented the conflict to become so violent. It should be noted that some Bangladeshi journalists had covered the corruption stories in relation to the *Dal-Bhat* programme under the caretaker regime the year before, and this perhaps had served as a broader opening to a larger conflict formation in line with the ideal of the peace/conflict side of Galtung's dichotomy.

This is closely related to what Iyenagar (1991) in his approach to framing theory argues when saying that news reports may be analyzed by their thematic or episodic content. Thematic news places events in a broader context of related events. In general, thematic news does better at informing citizens. Episodic framing merely provides snapshots of an issue, with any explanations based on sensational or emotional appeals. Where the coverage within the 'Proletarian Revolution Frame' failed fatally according to both general theories of peace journalism and Galtung's table (see Annex-1), is when it comes to 'giving voice to all parties' and 'uncover cover-ups'. However the editor of one of the largest Bengali newspaper in Bangladesh *Amader Shomoy*, would not give in to all the criticism that came in retrospective:

„The BDR incident was not covered in a completely wrong way. We went in with cameras and the BDR *jawans* did not lie – they did not justify themselves, they were telling their truth. The question that came after of course was that what many journalists did not ask in the initial hours: What happened to the generals? We must remember that this is the very first time anything like this happened in the area of television in Bangladesh. If you watch the television news from the first two days nobody was critical.“ (Interview, Khan, *Amader Shomoy*, 2009)

### 3.2 Change of frame: 'A Brutal Massacre' frame

The change of frame started in the middle of the night in the blogosphere and was fulfilled in the general media during the second day of the mutiny (26 February). Throughout the 26th, the general media increasingly focused on how panic was spreading among ordinary people in the streets of Dhaka as the mutiny went on. There was a visual shift in focus on the television coverage from the BDR *jawans* to the huge crowd of anxious relatives who gathered outside the Pilkhana compound, telling media their personal stories about the loved ones being inside the gates. When the bodies of army officers who had been killed and dumped in sewage canals were shown on television and internet, and later in the printed newspapers, the shift of frame was total. Then a mass grave containing 38 dead bodies was discovered in the compound and a real sense of horror set in and pervaded the general media coverage. The 'Proletarian Revolution' frame disappeared extremely quickly from the Bangladeshi media scene and the new frame that this article refers to as 'A Brutal Massacre' took over. On the internet and television the change was most sudden and remarkable.

Such an extreme and abrupt change of media frame reminds us what framing really is about. At the same time, the definition of a frame is somewhat challenged here in terms of the time span as the 'Proletarian Revolution' frame only lived for about a day and a night. It is argued that to "frame 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 for the item described" (Entman, 1993: 52).

In the new 'Brutal Massacre' frame the focus was on the 'heroic officers' and their suffering wives and children. In grim opposition to the *jawans* who now were labeled 'the killers' and 'murderous troops' conducting acts described as 'carnage', 'killing spree', 'bloody massacre', 'brutal massacre', and 'barbaric acts'. As part of the rhetoric shift, the incidence was now



referred to as 'the Pilkhana tragedy' or 'attack'. As the second day went on there was increasingly less room for nuances in the portrayals of neither 'the heroes', nor 'the inhumane murderers' in the media.

Rune Ottosen has showed (1995: 97) how *giving name to evil-doers* enemy images that are obstacles to analytical journalism are created. The example also shows how the public's sympathy and empathy changed along with which side it felt it could trust and wanted to support. The discursive distinction between 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims that Stig Arne Nohrstedt has described (2009: 97) was very clear within the 'Evil Massacre' media frame<sup>1</sup>. Some BDR *jawans* had been killed too, but these men or their suffering families were not treated as 'worthy victims' in the media coverage at all. Several explanations were now presented along the lines of a conspiracy and pre-planned revolt to demolish the Bangladesh army.

The shift also represented a sudden criticism against the first media frame and the media that had covered the incident so far:

„...from the 26th night things changed drastically. There was a total reversal. The media was held to be responsible for what had happened – its news reporting was to blame, speaking to the rebels was to blame. And it is this *reversal* that I consider to be 'irresponsible.' I had repeatedly said at the time that we don't know what has happened inside the Pilkhana campus, how many people have died, how many officers have been killed, we had no idea that looting that had taken place inside -- we knew next to nothing.“ (Interview, Saha, 2010)

Even though the Bangladeshi media in general applied both the 'Proletarian Revolution' and 'Brutal Massacre' frames in a rather unison manner, *The Daily Star* stood out as more nuanced or careful in the exercise of both frames. During the first 'Revolution' frame *The Daily Star* seems to be to be only newspaper that put "angry and aggrieved" BDR soldiers in brackets (25 February, internet version). Interestingly the change of frame and accompanying rhetoric alteration was also less remarkable within *The Daily Star* where, even during the month of March 2009, when other news desks hauled violent descriptions of the BDR soldiers, *The Daily Star* in a more temperate manner stuck to descriptions as 'BDR personnel', 'rebels', 'BDR men' and still mostly used the term 'mutiny' to describe the incident. The term 'bloody mutiny' was used (10 March) however, but compared to other media the labeling of the event was more sober.

## 4 A closer look into three newspapers' coverage of the BDR mutiny

### 4.1 A quantitative approach

In this part of the article we take a closer look into three newspapers' coverage of the BDR case. The findings are based on an in depth study of a total of 310 news items e.g. reports, editorials, feature articles on the BDR event published during the first week of the mutiny<sup>2</sup> by the three leading Bangladeshi English-language dailies - *The Daily Star*<sup>3</sup>, the *New Age*<sup>4</sup>, and [www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com)<sup>5</sup>.

In order to determine the desired sample, systematic random sampling was used by selecting every 4th unit from the population (*N*) of 310 units (Neuendorf, 2002). However, given the significance of the very first news items from the three newspapers, they were also included. The quantitative analysis was done on a final sample (*n*) of 80 "units of analysis" (Deacon et al. 1999: 118). Out of the total 80 stories (*n*), 70 were reports (87.5%); 2 were feature articles (2.5%) and 8 were editorials (10%). The majority of the stories - a total of 75 stories (93.75%) - were produced based on the newspapers' own sources while only 5 stories (6.25%) were based on national news agencies' sources. No international news agency sources were found quoted in any of the three newspapers stressing the national frame of the event.

When it comes to the use of sources, the findings show that military and law enforcing agencies were the highest quoted sources (38.04%), followed by political sources (35.87%) as shown in Table 1.1 below. Ordinary people were not used much as sources.

- 
1. Also several months after the incident there was very little media focus on the families of the BDR men. Many BDR *jawans* were in prison without their families knowing anything about whether they were dead or alive.
  2. The period slightly varies between the newspapers e.g. in the case of *The Daily Star* and the *New Age* the period spans from 26 February to 4 March while the time period for the [www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com) stretches from 25 February to 3 March. As the mutiny broke out on 25 February, the 'regular' newspapers had their first coverage on the following day i.e. 26 February whereas [www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com) being the online daily could publish news in 'real-time' starting from 25 February.
  3. *The Daily Star*, launched in 1991, is the highest circulated English newspaper in Bangladesh (<http://www.thedailystar.net/aboutus.htm>)
  4. The *New Age*, launched in 2003, has the second largest circulation, given the fact that the second largest English daily The Financial Express focuses entirely on business and economics (<http://www.newagebd.com/2009/oct/09/nat.html>)
  5. The first online English-language newspaper launched in 2005 with no printed edition (<http://www.bdnews24.com/about.php?cna=ABOUT%20US>)



Sl.	Source by Social Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Political	33	35.87
2.	Military and Law Enforcing Agencies	35	38.04
3.	Civil Society	3	3.26
4.	Ordinary people	9	9.78
5.	Others	12	13.04
	<b>Total</b>	92	99.99

Table 1: Sources by social category

Out of the 80 stories (*n*), 47 stories (58.58%) had 'war frame' whereas 25 stories (31.31%) carried 'peace frame', and the other 8 stories (10.01%) had 'neutral frame'. The dominant trend was definitely 'war frame' across the three dailies.

The highest number of what this article defines as 'war frame' was from the *www.bdnews24.com* with 17 stories (62.96% of the paper's totality of BDR stories), followed by *The Daily Star* that carried 17 stories as well (58.62% of the paper's totality of stories) while the *New Age* had 13 stories in this category (54.17% of the paper's totality of stories).

There could be two immediate reasons behind the highest number of 'war frame' stories on *www.bdnews24.com*. First, this is an online newspaper which allowed them to publish and update stories in 'real time' and the reports obviously focused on the events taking place in the "conflict arena" (Galtung, 2002). Secondly, *www.bdnews24.com* did not carry any editorials on the issue. In fact this online daily does not publish editorials. Given the findings from the other two dailies where, as we will see in the following, all the editorials were peace-oriented, it can be argued that perhaps the introduction of editorial pieces could have affected/reduced the number of war journalism stories on this online newspaper and also the entire impression the reader is left with when reading a newspaper.

In terms of peace journalism stories, *The Daily Star* had the highest with a total of 11 stories (37.93% of the paper's totality of stories), closely followed by the *New Age* which had 9 stories (37.50% of the paper's totality of stories) and *www.bdnews24.com* with 5 stories (18.52% of the paper's totality of stories). The findings, especially from *The Daily Star* and the *New Age* look quite promising and deserve further investigation as to what the motives and decisions were behind such coverage.

A hint might be found in an interview with the editor of *The Daily Star*, Mahfuz Anam (Dhaka, May 2009). Anam told that he truly believed that process journalism was important for good reporting. Using the climate change as an example, Anam stressed the need for process journalism at the expense of the more traditional journalistic event reporting. Without wanting to use the concept of peace journalism, he described how the two most important things in the 18 years of creating and leading the largest English newspaper in Bangladesh was the people perspective and process journalism.

With regards to neutral framing *www.bdnews24.com* had the highest: 5 stories (18.52%), the *New Age* had 2 (8.33%) and *The Daily Star* had 1 (3.45%). As evident from the findings, the neutral stories had very low presence compared to war or peace journalism frames.

### War frame indicators: Frequency Percentage

The four salient indicators of 'war frame' in the three newspapers were reactive (23.12%), elite-oriented (16.47%), focus on conflict arena (15.60%), and focus on visible effects of violence (12.13%).

	War journalism indicators	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Focus on conflict arena	54	15.60
2.	Two party orientation	20	5.78
3.	Partisan approach	18	5.20
4.	Zero-sum perspective	16	4.62
5.	Differences-orientated	30	8.67
6.	Reactive	80	23.12
7.	Focus on visible effect of violence	42	12.13
8.	Propaganda-orientated	18	5.20
9.	Elite-orientated	57	16.47
10.	Victory orientated	11	3.17
11.	Stops reporting and leaves after war	00	00
	<b>Total</b>	346	100.00

Table 2: War frame indicators in the three newspapers

### Peace frame Indicators: Frequency Percentage

The four salient indicators of 'peace frame' in the three newspapers were: truth-oriented (18.61%), non-partisan approach (18.61%), stays on to report in the aftermath of war (15.00%), and multiparty orientation (9.09%).

	Peace Journalism Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Focus on root causes and consequences	24	7.20
2.	Multiparty orientation	30	9.09
3.	Non-partisan approach	62	18.61
4.	Win-win orientation	21	6.30
5.	Agreement-orientated	23	6.90
6.	Proactive	0	0.00
7.	Focus on invisible effects of violence	23	6.90
8.	Truth-orientated	62	18.61
9.	People-orientated	13	3.90
10.	Solution-orientated	25	7.50
11.	Stays on to report in the aftermath of war	50	15.00
	<b>Total</b>	333	100.00

Table 3: Peace frame indicators in the three newspapers

Arguably one of the most interesting findings when looking into the two printed newspapers is that as opposed to reports and feature articles, the editorials had unique characteristic. All of the analyzed editorials (8 out of 8) from the two newspapers had peace journalism framing. The finding is indeed interesting and calls for further investigation in order to reveal what had prompted the same newspapers to carry peace journalism editorials while both the dailies had dominant war journalism trends in their reports.

One explanation could be that editorials allow journalists more freedom and time to reflect on and investigate into a particular issue. Given this comparative advantage, as opposed to day-to-day reporting, perhaps the peace-oriented journalists used the editorial platform to express their 'true feelings' and counter-balance the 'traditional' war reporting. However, a formal investigation into the matter could uncover as to what prompted them to adopt such framing in the editorials. The findings could certainly be utilised and perhaps infused into day-to-day reporting towards promoting peace oriented coverage.

#### 4.2 A closer look on one article: 'Mutiny, bloodshed at BDR HQ'

In the following we will focus on one specific news article in the analyzed material, which contrary to the dominant trend presented a mixture of war and peace journalism elements. To illustrate how meaning is constructed, this highly polysemic (Hall 1980: 134) article is analyzed with a range of semiotic tools and techniques. The semiotic findings are then put into the war and peace journalism model (Galtung 2002) in order to determine the trends of the headline, subheading, photographs and captions<sup>1</sup>.

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1. It should be noted here that we have drawn suggestive lines on the photograph to help readers understand the compositional aspects and their connotations. However, the lines are not necessarily mathematically precise; rather they give an impression of the presence of invisible/imaginary lines in any given photographic composition.

## Mutiny, bloodshed at BDR HQ

# Mutiny, bloodshed at BDR HQ

5 killed • 23 bullet-hit • govt offers amnesty as mutineers hold hostage BDR chief, over 100 army officials at headquarters

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and SHARIEF KHAN

A bloody mutiny by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) soldiers sent Dhaka into a war footing as the paramilitaries fired several thousand shots from machineguns, killing at least two army colonels and three civilians at BDR Pikhana Headquarters.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina offered a general amnesty to the mutineers who held more than 100 top officers hostage including the director general of BDR.

But the situation remained tense even at 9:30pm when this report was filed, as the mutineers did not lay down their arms and sporadic shots were still being heard, despite the premier's call for calm.

Bodies of the two colonels -- Col Mujib and Col Enayet -- were recovered from a sewage system outside the BDR headquarters. But their deaths were not officially declared till the filing of this report.

Sources said the number of death of officers could be as high as 20. Witnesses said they saw scores of bodies lying on the ground in and around Pikhana. They said some jawans were seen stabbing the bodies with bayonets.

Thousands of army personnel surrounded the headquarters with cannons, recoilless rifles, heavy machineguns and

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2



BDR men wait at the gate of their Pikhana headquarters in the capital for a negotiation team yesterday afternoon. Awami League lawmaker from Gaibandha-2 constituency Mahub Ara Gini braves fear and heads towards the gate carrying a white flag, a symbol of peace.



PHOTO: SK THAMBA, WHO

## How it began

STAR REPORT

The mutiny sparked off at the Darbar Hall at the Pikhana BDR Headquarters at 9:00am when rebellious jawans created a commotion while the Director General was delivering his speech to a gathering of officers and lower tier personnel on the occasion of BDR week.

The Daily Star talked to one of the mutineers over mobile phone and took his version of how the mutiny began.

Wishing anonymity, he said, "The lower tier BDR personnel (who are recruited directly by the BDR authority) have been demanding solution to a number of problems related to pay and benefits. These demands were raised before the DG so that he places them before the Prime Minister who came to Pikhana yesterday (Tuesday) to inaugurate the BDR week. The DG raised before the Prime Minister only two demands of the army officers in BDR but none of the demands of the lower tier personnel. This intensified our grievance."

He said by Tuesday the angry jawans went out to print a leather headlined, 'Save BDR! Save the country! Save the Nation.'

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Photo caption: BDR men wait at the gate of their Pikhana headquarters in the capital for a negotiation team yesterday afternoon. Awami League lawmaker from Gaibandha-2 constituency Mahub Ara Gini braves fear and heads towards the gate carrying a white flag, a symbol of peace.

Source: The Daily Star 26 February 2009 Front Page, viewable at <http://edailystar.com/index.php?opt=view&page=1&date=2009-02-26> (accessed 24 November 2010)

The horizontally spread, full-page headline 'Mutiny, bloodshed at BDR HQ' belongs to a first lead news item of the daily from 26 February. At the very onset, this visually dominating 'banner' headline in red, right below the masthead (masthead not visible here), connotes a paradigm of an eerie feeling of danger, threat, and alarm etc. and immediately tends to grab readers' attention. The signifiers 'mutiny' and 'bloodshed' connote the whole paradigm of war, conflict, confrontation, opposition, tension, violence, killing, brutality, body counts and so on. The readers, in no time, could apply their "a priori codes" (Deacon et al. 1999: 136) to be able to comprehend and visualize the extent of the anarchy at the BDR HQ (i.e. Bangladesh Rifles Headquarters).

Scrutinized from the war and peace journalism framework (see Annex-1), the headline clearly features certain war journalism trends. It focuses on the "visible effects of violence" (mutiny, bloodshed etc.), and "conflict arena" (i.e. BDR HQ). The war-journalism oriented tone of the headline is further accentuated by the subheading that offer further details on the "visible effects of violence" with the use of words like '5 killed', '23 bullet-hit', and 'hold hostage' etc. Moreover, both the headline and the sub-heading are "reactive", waiting for violence before reporting, which again is a war-journalism trait as suggested by Galtung (see Annex-1).

However, aside from the heavily dominant war-journalism elements, the sub-heading bears one interesting peace-journalism feature i.e. multi-party orientation of a conflict as opposed to the two party orientation of war journalism. Although the subheading 'apparently' indicates the conflict is between the mutineers (BDR soldiers) and the army officials, a minute look at the subheading suggests that more than two parties are involved in the process. With the words like 'government offers amnesty', it is implied that the conflict involves multiple stakeholders. However, it should be mentioned that given the overall tone of the subheading, this notion of multiparty orientation is rather side-lined. On the whole, the war-journalism features are dominant in the headline and the subheading.

The first photograph, placed almost centrally right beneath the red banner headline, clearly dominates the whole news item with its iconic as well as symbolic connotations. The viewers are persuaded to look at the photograph, perhaps at the very first glance due to its placing and size. The "reactive" photograph is roughly more than twice the size of both the single column text part and the other photograph. The metonymical presence of a group of armed soldiers "who threw the first stone" (Annex-1) symbolises all the mutineers and connotes the whole paradigm of the rebellion. The soldiers in their uniform with some of them being masked signify the ominous aura of the "closed space, closed time" of the conflict (ibid).

The symmetrical composition of the photograph with horizontal and vertical lines (of the gate) suggests a "static and self-contained" (Deacon et al., 1999: 194) presence of the main signifier i.e. the BDR soldiers in the "conflict arena" (Annex-1) are apparently unmoved, imbued with a goal 'to win' (ibid). The gate placed in the foreground of the composition symbol-

ically suggests a clear division and distance between “us and them” (ibid). The mid-long shot photograph, taken from an eye-level presumably with a telephoto lens, appears to be normal and objective and visually persuades us to “see ‘them’ as the problem” (ibid) on the other side of the fence.

The war-oriented first photograph is then juxtaposed with a relatively smaller ‘cut-out’ photograph of a negotiation team. The photo is both iconic and symbolic as the team symbolizes the ongoing negotiation efforts from the government. It is particularly interesting to note that although this smaller photograph is not physically connected with the bigger one, we subconsciously apply our common sense here and link the two photos in order to derive meaning from it. We tend to realize that the people in the second photograph are in fact heading towards the BDR compound to meet with the rebels. The strong diagonal lines (note the dots on the photo) in this ‘cut-out’ photograph make it dynamic and a part of “a continuous flow of action” (Deacon et al., 1999: 194) i.e. the negotiation efforts are in progress to bring an end to the mutiny. The main signifiers the woman and two men holding white flags connote a “solution-oriented approach” (Annex-1), highlighting peace initiatives.

One particularly striking signifier of the photograph is the woman in *sari* leading the team that contradicts with Bangladeshi “cultural codes” (Deacon et al. 1999: 141). In Bangladesh, women in general are chauvinistically perceived to be timid, frail, and dependent, and therefore incompetent in many cases. Therefore, this signifier manages to break the “tradition or social myth” (ibid: 139, 188) and immediately draws readers’ attention to the photo and its peace-oriented approach.

Unlike the headline, the two photos taken together, there appears to be a sense of balance and neutrality between the war-journalism oriented first photograph and the second one with peace-oriented features.

In the photo caption, the signifier ‘BDR men’ has metonymical connotation as if this small group of soldiers (in the photograph) signifies the whole of BDR men (soldiers) who are waiting for the negotiations team. At the same time it suggests war-oriented tone as the caption “see[s] ‘them’ as the problem, who prevails in war” (Annex-1). The other signifier in the same sentence “*their* Pilkhana headquarters” connotes an “us-them” and “conflict arena” orientation that ‘they’ had already taken over (zero-sum perspective) the compound and therefore it is ‘*their* headquarters’ which in reality does not belong only to them. However, the dominant theme of the first sentence is ‘negotiation’ which is an obvious element of peace-oriented journalism. The first part of the second sentence, especially the signifier ‘braves fear’, is quite intriguing as it significantly contributes to the visual treatment of the news item by drawing the readers to the second photo, already discussed above. The signifier ‘braves fear’ breaks the chauvinistic cultural code with regards to how women are typically perceived in Bangladesh society. This code-breaking adds an ‘unusually’ strong dimension to the second part of the same sentence that essentially promotes messages of peace with the signifier ‘white flag’ that both denotes and connotes peace.

It is interesting to note that the photo caption essentially attempts to “anchor”<sup>1</sup> peace-oriented message in order to narrow down the connotations the images carry (encoding) and encourage readers to activate (decoding) the particular associations the producers had in mind (Hall, 1980). In line with the connotations of the two photographs, the caption carries balance and neutrality as well. Both the photographs and the caption significantly differ from the war-journalism prone tone of the headline. However, what the photographs and caption share in common with the headline is that they are also “re-active”.

Taking the banner headline, the subheading, the photographs and captions together, the news item as a whole sends out a ‘mixed message’. Therefore, it is difficult to put this in a certain basket. Such findings call for further investigation as to why such opposing trends had been chosen; whether it was deliberate or not. The headline of the report could easily have been rephrased in line with the photograph and the caption that advocated for peace and negotiation. In that case, the same report could have conveyed an entirely different peace-oriented message. Given the strong presence of the peace-oriented photograph that managed to give a ‘balanced tone’ to the news, it can be argued that emphasis on the visual aspects is imperative in order to promote peace journalism (Ottosen, 2007). Moreover, choosing a war or peace angle “is essentially an ethical question” whether “to stimulate more violence or more peace” (Galtung, 2006: 5).

### 4.3 Gender focus

The gender perspective is interesting here. Both in terms of the discussion of the above analysed photo, of the fact that we have seen how a female journalist carried out some of the most dangerous interviews with the BDR *jawans* in the first period of the mutiny, and in relation to the representations of nation and grief in the analyzed media material.

In earlier work on post conflict journalism it has been argued that women – and the female body not least – often is used to represent more than itself, and that we often find that women are used to represent the ‘good and respectable’ values

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1. *A Semiotic Analysis of a Newspaper Story* Helen Gambles <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/hlg9501.html> (Accessed 9 September 2010)

of the nation, not least in times of conflict and war (see e.g. Alison, 2007). This was to a large degree the case also here. In many articles from the Bangladeshi media under and especially after the BDR mutiny, the nation's suffering is illustrated visually by crying women searching for/ mourning their husbands, sons, brothers or fathers.

But, interestingly in relation to theories of masculinities and nationhood, conflicts and war, in the aftermath of the BDR there were also a lot of representations of suffering men and of suffering army men in the media reports. There were strong media visuals of the pain and agony felt by the men discovering the dead bodies. Both newspapers television and the internet showed images of male military personnel crying while burying their colleagues. The mediated images of how men represented the grieving of the nation were highly interesting, as this role traditionally is one left to women (see e.g. Orgeret, 2009). In an interview the editor of *Amader Shomoy* admitted that they had been too quick to place women in the victim's role:

„We did some mistakes in the printed press too. My newspaper for instance reported about rapes inside the BDR compound on the second day (26 February) and we should not have done that. We had no proofs. The wife of a Brigadier who was killed asked me – why did you report about rapes? She was there and nobody had been raped as far as she knew. We did excuse ourselves for that.“ (Interview, Khan, *Amader Shomoy*, 2009)

#### 4.4 Broader perspectives and the blogosphere

In the time of such deep national grief having a broader perspective and to provide “responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict” (Shinar 2007) was obviously difficult. It is easy to find examples internationally, even from recent history that when a nation experiences trauma and grief, professional, investigative journalism often loose terrain as it is even harder than normal to ask those critical questions. But conflict sensitive reporting does not involve ignoring difficult and disturbing questions.

„... in conflict situations the role of the media is critical in providing the public with full, reliable and non-partisan information to manage the conflict and make intelligent decisions. Conflict sensitive journalism empowers reporters to report conflicts professionally without feeding the flames. It enables journalists to report conflicts in depth, to cover all sides and ventilate issues related to the conflict.“ (Mwaura, 2008: 8)

It is exactly at times where one media frame seems to rule unanimously that other approaches should be sought for. A more balanced view also came to the surface in *The Daily Star's* monthly publication *Forum*, where the assistant editor *Hana Shams Ahmed* argued that

„... whoever are the architects behind this horrific killing at Pilkhana, they cannot have had the welfare of the BDR personnel in mind. The scale and nature of the killings has in fact created a strong backlash against all BDR *jawans*“ (*Forum*, 4 April 2009).

Rahnuma Ahmed (2009) points at how during the BDR mutiny it was mainly in the blogosphere, ‘calmer, more reasoned voices’ found an arena to argue that a military operation would “probably have resulted in more deaths, of hostage officers and their family members, and also of civilians, living in adjacent densely-populated neighborhoods”. The idea that the blogosphere was the arena for the more reasoned voices is interesting in light of the many discussions about the democratic potential of audiences’ digital participation.

Interactive media can be seen to increase people's participation as a “legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy” (Bucy and Gregson, 2001). On the other hand it has been argued that debates on the Internet tend to fragment and polarise the public discussion and that the participations often are characterised by weak quality (Wright and Street, 2007). At their worst, blogs provide a somewhat muddy stage for hate speech and several such examples were found in relation to the BDR mutiny too. However, Ahmed (2009) interestingly argues that it was in the blogosphere that voices stressing that news of an army operation could have led to a nationwide escalation since the rebellion had spread to other parts of the country came through. This view was further supported by interviews (Dhaka 2010).

## 5 Conclusion

This article has explored how the BDR incident was covered by the Bangladeshi media. The approach in the first part of the article was inductive and analysed the news stories on the BDR mutiny without *a priori* defined news frames in mind. The two main frames found here, the ‘Proletarian Revolution’ frame and the ‘Brutal Massacre’ frame, are pertinent only to the specific BDR case and may therefore be labeled ‘issue-specific frames’ (de Vreese, 2002). These frames emerged from the material during the course of analysis. Studies taking such an inductive approach have been criticised for relying on too small a sample and for being difficult to replicate (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). However in the context of this article, the inductive approach was crucial in analysing certain aspects of the media coverage of the BDR case, such as the construction of different narratives, the sudden shift of focus in the reporting, and the qualitative change of attention given to different kinds of actors in the news stories. The analysis improved our understanding of the BDR mutiny as a mediated process and

showed some interesting differences among the analysed media. Even though the Bangladeshi media in general applied both the 'Proletarian Revolution' and 'Brutal Massacre' frames in a rather unison manner, *The Daily Star* stood out as more nuanced or careful in the exercise of both frames, while at the same time having the highest amount of both war frames and peace frames of the three newspapers analysed in depth.

Looking into a selection of news stories from three Bangladeshi newspapers using a rather deductive approach, the second part of the article has investigated news frames that were defined and operationalised prior to the analysis, namely the 'peace frame', the 'war frame' and the 'neutral frame'. These frames are what de Vreese (2002) calls 'generic frames', they transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to various topics over time and in different cultural contexts.

The three newspapers had a dominant amount of 'war frames' as nearly two-thirds of the news reports and features showed a tendency to reduce conflicts to force and violence with little focus on addressing the complexities of a conflict (Kempf, 2007). Confined in the 'conflict arena' (Galtung, 2002) the coverage focused on tension, drama, and emotion perhaps to satisfy the news values (Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Thussu 2003, cited in Powers & el-Nawawy, 2009). Focus on descriptions of visible destruction like human casualty, or infrastructural damage was quite common. The 'us-them' dichotomy was also evident in the coverage with 'elite-oriented' slant where stories primarily focused on 'our sufferings'. On the other hand, one-third of the news reports and features had 'peace frame' where the conflict was presented in a way where more than two parties were involved. This frame aimed to expose untruth from all sides and remained impartial.

The findings also showed that online news had a higher percentage of war frame stories. We have discussed two reasons for this. The first is directly linked to being an *online* newspaper, which allowed the journalists to publish stories in real time. Hence the reports obviously focused on the events taking place instantaneously, with less time to investigate and discuss implications or the broader picture. Secondly, the analyzed online daily did not carry any editorials on the issue which could have presented a broader picture of the stories.

However, the semiotic analysis showed how war and peace journalism elements may co-exist in the same story and convey a 'mixed' message.

Interestingly on the other hand, all the editorials analysed from the two dailies were peace-oriented that somewhat challenged the notion of media being structurally and institutionally prone to escalation-oriented conflict coverage (Kempf, 2002). Editorials are opinionated news stories usually about a significant topic that has a current news angle and hence the BDR event was perfect material. Editorials are generally meant to influence public opinion and promote critical thinking. It is hence highly remarkable that the editors and journalists consciously or subconsciously resorted to peace journalism when writing the editorials. Such interesting findings feed into the discussion as to how journalists and editors themselves interpret, accept or challenge the process of conflict reporting, and call for further investigation so as to determine how such trends can be embraced, bolstered and multiplied in the mainstream media's conflict coverage in Bangladesh.

## Interviews

*Mahbubul Alam*, Editor *The Independent*, Dhaka, May 2009

*Mahfuz Anam*, Editor and Publisher *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, May 2009

*Monjurul Ahsan, Bulbul*, ex-Head of News, *ATN*, Dhaka, May 2009

*Moyen Zalal Chowdhury*, *Somewhereinblog*, Dhaka November 2010

*Naimul Islam Khan*, Editor *Amader Shomoy*, Dhaka, May 2009

*Shahedul Anam Khan*, Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, May 2009.

*Munni Saha*, Senior Reporter, *ATN Bangla*, Jakarta February 2011/ notes from interview in Dhaka 2010 provided by Munni Saha, Saha is currently working for *ATN News*.

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### Annex-1: Peace/conflict journalism and war/violence journalism table by Johan Galtung (2002)

Peace/conflict journalism	War/violence journalism
<p>I. Peace/conflict-orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– explore conflict <i>formation</i> x parties, y goals, z issues</li> <li>– general win-win orientation</li> <li>– open space, open time; causes and outcomes – anywhere, also in history/culture</li> <li>– making conflicts transparent</li> <li>– giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding</li> <li>– see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity</li> <li>– humanisation of all sides, more so the worse the weapons</li> <li>– <i>proactive</i>: prevention before any violence/war occurs</li> <li>– focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</li> </ul>	<p>I. War/violence-oriented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on conflict <i>arena</i>, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war</li> <li>– general zero-sum orientation</li> <li>– closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone</li> <li>– making war opaque/secret</li> <li>– 'Us-them' journalism, propaganda, voice, for 'us'</li> <li>– see 'them' as the problem, focus on who prevails in war</li> <li>– dehumanisation of 'them'; more so the worse the weapon</li> <li>– <i>reactive</i>: waiting for violence before reporting</li> <li>– focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</li> </ul>
<p>II. Truth-orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– expose untruths on all sides / uncover all cover-ups</li> </ul>	<p>II. Propaganda-orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expose 'their' untruths / help 'our' cover-ups/lies</li> </ul>
<p>III. People-orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children; giving voice to voiceless</li> <li>– give name to all evil-doers</li> <li>– focus on people peace-makers</li> </ul>	<p>III. Elite-orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on 'our' suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece</li> <li>– giving name of their evil-doers</li> <li>– focus on elite peace-makers</li> </ul>
<p>IV. Solution orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– peace = non-violence + creativity</li> <li>– highlight peace initiatives. Also to prevent more war</li> <li>– focus on structure, culture, the peaceful society</li> <li>– aftermath: resolution, reconstruction reconciliation</li> </ul>	<p>IV. Victory orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– peace = victory + ceasefire</li> <li>– conceal on peace initiatives, before victory is at hand</li> <li>– focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society</li> <li>– leaving for another war, return if the old flares up again</li> </ul>

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