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No Peace for Afghanistan: A Case-Study of the Failure of Peace-Building Process in Afghanistan from a Transnational Feminist Standpoint

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I dedicated my research to my parents, Aziza Sobat and Abdul Samad Sobat, who sacrificed so many things in their lives for me to be able to live a different life, overcome the obstacles we face as women in society precisely one like Afghanistan, travel all the way to the other side of the world (the USA) to study, and leave a unique kind of a legacy after myself for other Afghan girls. As my constant sources of inspiration, they have given me the drive to follow my visions with bravery and determination. This project would not have been possible without their unconditional love and support. I also dedicate this work to the Afghan women whose voices, advocacies, and experiences have been unheard of and ignored throughout the history of Afghanistan. Finally, I dedicate this research to those Afghan girls who faced the closed doors of schools under the cruelty of the Taliban's rule and have been banned from entering their schools.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no material accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no material previously written and/or published by another person, except where an appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for the thesis is accurate:

Entire manuscript: 27518 words

Signed: 

Acknowledgments

It is evident that the research path is not an easy one. It is time and emotion consuming, specifically when your mind and shoulders are carrying out the weight of the pain and trauma of war, the loss of your country to a terrorist group, and so many more. Thus, getting through this research would not have been possible without the help and support of some extraordinarily kind and caring people in my life.

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Abstract

In early 2019, the United States officially started its direct negotiations with the Taliban to reach an agreement on a joint framework for a future peace deal in Afghanistan and inter-Afghan negotiations. Although debate continued over the size and duration of the US military presence in Afghanistan and the inclusion of the terrorist group the Taliban in the government of Afghanistan, what fell in and out of the headlines were the topic of women's presence, their rights, and two decades of advocacy and achievements in these peace-building efforts. While the United Nations Security Council's resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, set into motion a consistent global movement towards recognition of gender-based roles and experiences to end violence and build sustainable peace, during the recent process of peace in Afghanistan, Afghan women consistently remained underrepresented both by the United States and the Taliban. Consequently, they have been feeling the rage that reached its peak by the fall of Afghanistan into the Taliban's hands in August 2021. My research "No Peace for Afghanistan: Case-Study of the Failure of Peace-Building Process in Afghanistan from a Transnational Feminist Standpoint," addresses Afghan women's marginalization from the recent process of peace negotiations, offers a new narrative of their advocacies for their lives and being included in landmark decision-making processes during the past twenty years, and analyzes the international community's strategies in implementing peace negotiations with the Taliban, concerning women's conditions. Relying on case-study methodology as well as content analysis and virtual/patchwork ethnography by exploring online resources such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Zoom applications, I will discuss how Afghan women, victims of war crimes, and other minorities felt marginalized from the decision-making process of peace-building. With this research, I aim to find possible answers to the question of what went wrong during the recent process of peace in Afghanistan. This research challenges the United States' counterterrorism efforts and their impact on Afghan women's situation, and US-Taliban's exclusionary peace agreement through international human rights law and transnational feminism lens, and finally addresses the legal and feminist deficits of their agreement.

Introduction

In 1993, I was born when my family was on the run from Kabul's war and were trying to find shelter to save their lives, leaving our house, which was robbed and torn by the militias and other parties to the war. In addition, when I was one year old, my family and I got internally displaced. We had to flee from Kabul to a safer place in the West region of Afghanistan with the intention of seeking refuge in Iran. It was only until we learned that Iran had started to deport Afghan refugees and immigrants and send them back to Afghanistan. Consequently, my parents prevented us from being exposed to facing that kind of cruelty and misery by deciding to stay in Afghanistan. Thus, different generations of my family have lived through the last 40 years of war in Afghanistan. Being born and raised in a war-torn country like Afghanistan, there is no part of my life's history and identity intact of war and its trauma. That's why I have invested my life, education, and professional career and goals in reading, learning, and teaching anti-war ideologies and thoughts.

In 2021, the first year of my second Master's degree, I took a course on learning transitional feminism.[1] Throughout this course, I shared my experiences of war and my

[1] Transnational feminist perspectives focus on the diverse experiences of women who live within, between, and at the margins or boundaries of nation-states around the globe; they transcend nation-state boundaries and speak to a wide range of interacting forces that have an impact on gendered relationships and experiences in a geopolitical context. They also encompass "border work" and communication across traditional global boundaries; may occur in global, regional, and local contexts; and include the experiences of immigrants, refugees, displaced persons, those who have experienced forced migration, members of a cultural diaspora who may be dispersed across multiple regions, as well as those who identify themselves as third-culture persons and persons who are attempting to integrate multiple cultural identities. Transnational feminist theory and practice emphasize intersectionality, interdisciplinary, social activism, justice, and collaboration. They seek to destabilize notions that women around the world share the same types of experiences, oppressions, forms of exploitation, and privileges; they explore differences and inequalities between women, such as different priorities and ways of understanding gender issues and different ways of conceptualizing agency. Transnational and postcolonial feminisms highlight social-structural factors that exacerbate power differences, including colonialism and neocolonialism, economic realities, and global capitalism. Postcolonial feminisms resist

craving for peace. Transnational feminism's theory helped me solidify my thoughts around my research interests which include "gender dynamics of war," "peace," and "women's place and the situation concerning both." In this course, I learned that according to Valentine M. Moghadam there are four types of contemporary transnational feminist networks: those that target the neoliberal economic policy agenda; those that focus on the danger of fundamentalism and insist on women's human rights, especially in the Muslim world; women's peace groups that target conflict, war, and empire which is called feminism against war and conflict; and networks engaging in feminist humanitarianism and international solidarity (2015, 7-8).

My research could fit in any of these divisions. But mainly, I located my research to "feminism against war and conflict" and tried to approach it from a human rights law perspective. Furthermore, I want to add that, it hasn't been the easiest thing in the world to research and write about your experiences of war, trauma, and marginalization of women. But as an Afghan woman of color in the United States, I can say that my decision regarding my feminist research and activism has forever been impacted by imperialism and power structures that have changed my country into a war-torn one. Thus, as an advocate of women's human rights, I have always felt the responsibility of raising my voice against war and women's oppression; and kept myself accountable to all those Afghan women who are back home and expect me to give them a voice by bringing their experiences into discussions.

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colonial and imperialist forces; reject Euro-American feminisms that universalize women's oppressions; and are informed by the distinctive social, political, and historical contexts and oppression of women (Enns, 2021,11-13).

Initially, when I decided to write on women, war, and peace, Afghanistan was going through actual debates regarding the peace negotiations with the Taliban. Thus, at that time, my intention and purpose in writing on this topic were to advocate for the inclusion of women in this landmark decision-making process. But unfortunately, after the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban's hands on August 15, 2021, I decided to change the narrative of my research and analyze what went wrong with the recent process of peace that the people of Afghanistan had to live under the cruelty of the Taliban's rule once again, how Afghan women were marginalized from this process, and finally what is the role of the international community, international organizations, and transnational feminist networks in these regards.

In addition, with this research, I aim to change the narrative of Afghan women's advocacies for being included in the recent process of peace. In the world's eyes, specifically the west, Afghan women have been portrayed as passive victims, agency-less objects, and people in need of being saved even without having them share their experiences and standpoints. Western countries' fantasy over the idea of Afghan women's victimization and liberation has a longstanding history that mostly has overshadowed and overlooked Afghan women's subjectivities and agency. It is strange to state but, until before August 15, 2021, and after 20 years of the US, and its western allies' active presence in Afghanistan, the image of Afghan women in the western media, policies, and western/white/universal feminism is still dominated by a blue burqa (Fetrat, 2020). Thus, they haven't been given the proper recognition for their tireless work, activism, and resistance. This research, will introduce another aspect of Afghan women's

experiences and advocacies that will shift and change the narrative regarding their subjectivity and resistance. As well as will highlight the ways that Afghan women's voices, advocacies, and resistance were left unheard and ignored due to the available power structures, policies, and politics of the western countries toward the so-called "third world countries."

My preliminary research shows that when the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in October 2000, it set into motion a consistent global movement towards recognition that in war and peace, women and men have different roles and experiences from violence, victimization, survival, and peacebuilding. It formally recognized women's agency and roles as well as their inherent right to seek to end violence and in building a sustainable peace (Anderlini, 2020). Despite this acknowledgment and the reams of policy statements and resolutions that subsequently reiterated and reinforced this message, international diplomatic, development, and security sector practices have not put this political and normative shift into practice, and great reluctance still exists toward considering that focusing on gender dimension is essential for assessing the crucial topics of war, conflict, peace-building, and security agendas (Anderlini, 2020).

Since 2001, countries' different agendas have to a great extent, focused on the global fight against terrorism and have integrated very few contributions from women concerning peace and security. Thus, women remain absent from their countries' peace negotiation and decision-making processes (Anderlini, 2007, 54). Among others, Afghanistan is one of the countries where women have been hugely underrepresented and

systematically marginalized as core actors and peace agents in the peace negotiations with the terrorist group the Taliban. In addition, the small percentage of women who were given the right to be part of these negotiations, their role was limited, and the quality of their participation was extremely low (Steiner and Robertson, 2019).

In this thesis, I argue that even though women's contribution to peacebuilding and their impact on the ground is vital but national and international state actors do not usually recognize women's skills and strategies in addressing war, conflicts, and especially peace-building processes. Thus, undermining their role and impact has been one of the reasons that Afghanistan is suffering from the Taliban's rule once again. Accordingly, this paper covers the case study of Afghanistan regarding peace negotiations with the Taliban and the marginalization of women from having a meaningful presence and participation in this decision-making process. Moreover, in general, it highlights the need to recognize women peacebuilders, as core actors in the conflict settings, working directly on issues related to preventing resolving, and transforming them as their male counterparts to avoid the deterioration of the human rights situation in the countries involved. As well as it analyzes the failure of the peace-building process through the lens of human rights and international law by exploring the peace agreement between the Taliban and the USA.

This paper has three chapters. The first chapter has covered methodological statement and positionality. Here I have worked on explaining my research method, which is the case study methodology and virtual ethnography to analyze data sources closely, to respond, explain, and address the questions of what went wrong in the peace process of

Afghanistan, and discuss how women were left out of this landmark phase of the decision-making about the country. In addition, in the positionality section, I have located myself within and through this research and have tried to lay out the impacts of the different aspects of my identities as strengths and possible challenges in relation to my research. Following this, in the second chapter, I have located scholarly debates about the importance of women's meaningful representation in the process of peace, the strengths and challenges of the United Nations security council resolution 1325 regarding women's security, and women and peace-building from a transnational feminist perspective to highlight the theoretical framework for this research. In the final chapter, I have analyzed, compared, and connected the available data about Afghan women's systematic marginalization in the process of peace negotiation with the Taliban. Over and above that, using the abovementioned methodology, I have analyzed the failures of the resect process of peace through the lens of human rights and international law in regard to the agreements.

Chapter one: Methodological Statement and Positionality

This chapter consists of two main sections: the first section discusses methodological statements and reviews methods and research design. In addition, the second section of the chapter provides a brief analysis of my positionality as an Afghan woman and a researcher. This section, discusses different aspects of identity and how my positionality informs this research project.

Methodological Statement

The case study methodology is carried out in this research project. The case study methodology is widely recognized in the social sciences- especially when a holistic and in-depth investigation of a topic or case is required. The case study research method allows for the inclusion of different methods because what is paramount in this research method is understanding the complexity and uniqueness of the case, and a variety of methods offer different angles to comprehending complexity and uniqueness (Simons, 2009).

Zaidah Zainal states that there are several categories of case study methodology, including exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory case studies. Among other types, explanatory case study methodology has been widely recognized and used for implementing comprehensive and in-depth research, specifically in complex and multivariate cases. Zainal further points out that using the explanatory case studies examines the data closely to explain the phenomena, problems, and the question in the data (2017, 2). For this research, I applied an explanatory case study methodology to 1) analyze data sources closely to respond, explain, and address the questions of what went wrong in the peace process of Afghanistan, 2) discuss how women were left out of this landmark phase of the decision-making about the country. Moreover, under the umbrella of the explanatory case study methodology, I interpreted and evaluated the available data, including reports and agreements regarding to women's role in peace-building in Afghanistan. I identified and analyzed themes by developing conceptual categories and challenging the assumptions regarding the erasure of Afghan women (Zainal, 2017).

Furthermore, Helen Simon finds that case study methodology enables researchers to document multiple perspectives, explore contested viewpoints, and demonstrate the influence of key actors and interactions between them in telling complex stories (2009, 23). I believe that it helped me to do the same in telling Afghan women's stories of marginalization during the recent peace process.

Among others, one of the most important reasons for selecting the case study research method was that it allowed the exploration and understanding of complex issues such as the peace process of Afghanistan and how women were ignored throughout the process. Thus, through the case study method, I was able to understand the depth of the problems that existed in the process of peace and understand what some of the stories of women who had been precluded from the peace negotiations as active agents were. Therefore, I believe thorough an extensive analysis of Afghan women's role and marginalization through the case study research method helped explain both the process and outcomes of this process. Thus, in order to implement this research method and comprehensively investigate the case study of Afghanistan, peace, and women, I also implement content and media analysis. Content analysis is the systematic study of various forms of communication and aims at description rather than explanation. Patricia Leavy and Sharlene Hesse-Biber state that using this research method, researchers examine existing non-interactive texts, which classifies the research process as "unobtrusive." Many different kinds of texts and the already available data can be studied (Leavy and Hesse-Biber, 2006, 225-23). For the purposes of this research, I have conducted a feminist content analysis using multiple data sources and analysis techniques

for examining diverse data, including but not limited to articles written on the topic of Afghan women and peace, peace documents, and social media activity.

In addition, I applied aspects of virtual ethnography as a research approach for exploring social interactions in virtual and online environments (Given, 2008). These interactions often occur on the internet on newsgroups, chat rooms, and web-based discussion forums. It is worth mentioning that the notion of virtual ethnography builds on existing principles for ethnographic research that stress the immersion of the researcher in the setting for extended periods and the aspiration to an in-depth holistic understanding of a concept (Given, 2008). Furthermore, according to Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe, in their piece *A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography*, immersion in the virtual environment and connecting the collected data with the available research in the field is recently has also been called "Patchwork Ethnography." Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe emphasize that this method of ethnography offers a new form of knowledge production. They also argue that patchwork ethnography enables the researchers to interpret the data, stories, and experiences; redefine what counts as knowledge and research; and finally, how to turn realities that present the constraints and limitations into prospects for new insights (Günel et al., 2020).

In this research, I have applied aspects of virtual ethnography based on the interpretations and interactions of Afghan women related to the process of peace, its impact on their lives, and their activism. My approach also centers on Afghan women's advocacies for being included in the process of peace shared on social media, including Facebook, a WhatsApp group named "Together Stronger," and Twitter. Among other

platforms, I focused on Afghan women's activism and advocacy through the "Together Stronger" WhatsApp group. This is a widely used group that has brought together Afghan women who had been working in the government of Afghanistan, NGOs, independent activists, journalists, human rights defenders, women's rights defenders, politicians, and leaders of different collective action projects both those who were inside Afghanistan and those in the diaspora. Furthermore, this group chat consisted of 131 members-all women members who are both inside of Afghanistan and parts of the diaspora working for the same goals and purposes: uplifting women's voices; and advocating for institutionalizing their place in the process of peace for their future.

At the beginning of 2021, I was invited to the group by my friend Malalai Habibi, an activist and member of the International Civil Society Action Group (ICAN) organization, located in the USA, which works to support women who lead peace initiatives in Afghanistan. From the beginning of the time, Afghan women felt sidelined and ignored in the process of peace this group has arranged and directed so many different women-led direct actions, petitions, and meetings to discuss the needs of women during the period of peace negotiation. I combined these data with the available research and reports on the ground using the virtual and patchwork ethnography techniques. Finally, after careful consideration, I decided that interviewing Afghan women would not be the suitable option that could give me the possibility of a structured and in-depth analysis of all the events related to the process of peace. In addition, the country's security situation has made it almost impossible to be able to conduct interviews and conversations with the Afghan women activists' without causing them harm, difficulty,

and insecurity from the Taliban. In contrast, the case-study method was an ideal method to explain and examine the aspects of the peace process in Afghanistan in an extensive way and without any harm to anyone. Thus, to prevent harm and for data analysis, I will keep the anonymity of the peoples' experiences and data collected from virtual ethnography shared in online spaces.

Positionality

Abigail Brooks and Sharlene Hesse-Biber emphasize the importance of positionality and reflexivity in research and knowledge production. Positionality and reflexivity consider the researcher's standpoint, social background, location, and assumptions that can influence the research and rejects the traditional idea of positivist and value-neutral research. More importantly, it's a way to account for their personal biases and limitations and examine the positive and negative effects these elements may or may not have on the research (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007). Likewise, feminist researchers such as Leavy and Harris have also argued that acknowledging and reflecting on researchers' connection to the research topic is crucial because it is a way for the researchers to examine their position in the context of their research topic and acknowledge their biases that might impact the research results and outcomes before the audience/readers. (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Leavy and Harris, 2019).

Reflecting on my own identities and positions as a Muslim, immigrant, Afghan woman of color, and researcher, I acknowledge that the elements of my identity can be instrumental and at the same time, a reason for the complexity and possible limitation in implementing this research. Only by reading these three sentences about my identity one

can easily feel that aspects of my identity position me as an insider and outsider researching this topic. Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle's statement in their article, *The Space Between Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,* argue that for the complexity of researchers' position, the space between insider and outsider, and its importance for the researcher's analysis, interpretation, and reading of the data and the case (2009, 54-63).

Furthermore, as an insider researcher, it is impossible for me to see myself apart from this research because I have been directly impacted by war, conflict, and the process of peace both as an Afghan national and a woman. As a child, I remember the cruelty of the Taliban's previous rule and the U.S. invasion. Also, I have lived through the bomb explosions, witnessed and worked on reporting the civilian causalities during the years after the US invasion. I have heavily felt marginalized from the process of peace. I can relate to war trauma and marginalization from the process of peace. When I speak about how Afghan women's representation and voices were ignored in the peace negotiation process, I'm talking about myself too, as I'm one of those Afghan women who felt sidelined by not having any meaningful part and active representative of my own at the peace table. Thus, my identity as an Afghan woman is inseparable from the topic of my research, the inequalities, and the marginalization that I'm writing about. Moreover, these experiences have put me in a position where I see things and feel them from my standpoint and via my experiences from war and peace.

On the other hand, there have been moments that my work and research have made me reconsider the politics of location and its impact on our life and the work that

Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes about in her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003, 43-84). For instance, the moments that I had to pause and reflect on my privilege of not spending the challenging times of the peace negotiation inside Afghanistan; the times that I felt the heaviness of the pain that Afghan women felt inside of Afghanistan differently because it was only via the news and social media; and the times that I didn't feel threatened and insecure as a result of sharing my anti-Taliban opinion on social media simply because I have been out of the reach of the Taliban's threat and living in the USA.

As pointed out earlier, I have earned a crucial portion of my academic degrees from the United States. Firstly, I got my first Master's degree, an LL.M. in International Human Rights Law from the University of Notre Dame, and the second one, a MA in Gender and Women's Studies from the Minnesota State University, Mankato. Throughout the process of these educational journeys in the USA, I have been trained about the importance of implementing the principles of human rights law in governance, war, and peacetime; the values of applying the theories of intersectionality[2] in research and activism; and the crucial role of understanding the transnationality of feminism and feminist activism. My standpoint, knowledge of Afghanistan's context, women's situation and frustration for being excluded from the society, and social backgrounds

[2] The term Intersectionality was coined by a black feminist legal scholar, Kimberly Crenshaw, in 1989 when she highlighted the intersection of race and gender in black women's employment in the USA. The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects (Nira, 2006).

were extremely helpful to be aware of how to incorporate and apply my knowledge of the theories in practice and concerning my research project.

Over and above that, fortunately, I was equipped with the knowledge of the English language, which opened the door to a tremendous number of academic resources for me to pursue these degrees and develop the current research project. Having the advantage of speaking in English specifically helped me with being able to use the academic resources written in English regarding the situation of Afghanistan's war and the process of peace considering women's representation and condition. This was crucial because there hasn't been much research and resources available regarding the issues mentioned above in the Persian language.

Furthermore, I'm grateful and confident that my identity put me in a suitable position for researching this topic throughout the research. As a positive point, my knowledge of the context, experiences, and closeness to this research allowed me to be aware of women's experiences, specifically, those who could be great peace negotiators but were marginalized, and their role was systematically ignored. I also want to acknowledge and recognize that my closeness to this research, war, and peace can be considered a limitation because of my point of view and biases that I might or might not have in this regard. But I emphasize that through this feminist research which is extensively focused and dedicated to highlighting women's marginalization from the process of peace and presenting their advocacies in these areas, using the case study method of analysis, I tried ethically benefit from my identities in my research and reduce the limitations they might have caused (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Leavy and Harris, 2019).

Furthermore, in the capacity of an Afghan researcher, I want to mention that I'm proudly biased in favor of peace, Afghan women's right to be included in decision making processes such as the peace process, and vigorously argue against war, women's marginalization, and ignorance toward their role in the process of peace.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty states that the western world and specifically western feminism appropriates and colonize the complexities of the lives of women from third world countries and ignores the differences in their experiences by the notion of the women as a homogenous category (2013, 967-91; Also see Mohanty, 2003, 39-42). As an Afghan woman, I can easily state that women from countries such as Afghanistan are deemed as "the other" and "the over there category" who have always been presumed as passives, agency-less, and victims who are in need of being saved by their savior (the west) and packaged in a blue burqa, presented to and by the west specifically the USA to justify the war of terror, invasions, the western Orientalist gaze, and to bring the fantasy of civilization to life which at times fed into the salvation attitude of western feminism as well (Fetrat, 2020).

Chandra Mohanty further argues that unlike the history of Western feminism, which has been explored in great detail over the last few decades, histories of the so-called Third World women's engagement with feminism and their activism are in short supply and have been left unheard, which needs to be highlighted and shared (2003, 47). Being aware of the fact that as an Afghan woman, I'm counted as a member of the so-called Third World women and the complex intersection of the identities, I offer a new narrative of Afghan women in which they are far beyond "only passive victims" but also

active agents who demanded and fought for their right to be included in the process of peace, even if the whole system was ignoring their role and importance of their experiences for building sustainable peace. In addition, I attempted to share their advocacies during the process of peace that will reject the presumption of the West about them "being only victims" and disrupt the comfortable, which is the traditional way of thinking about Afghan women.

Chapter two: Literature Review Chapter

In this literature review, I discuss and highlight the need to recognize women peacebuilders as core actors in the conflict settings, working directly on issues related to preventing, resolving, and transforming them as their male counterparts, to prevent from deterioration of the human rights situation of the countries involved. For example, among others, Afghanistan is one of the countries where women are hugely underrepresented as core actors in the process of peace negotiations with terroristic groups such as the Taliban. In addition, the small percentage of women who have been given the right to be part of these negotiations, their roles have been limited, and the quality of their participation has been extremely low. In the first section, I present a brief discussion about women's contribution to peace-building processes: what has been done? Next, I discuss women and peace-building from a transnational feminist perspective and women getting to the peace table: why it matters? What do they do? After setting the theoretical frameworks for understanding women's role in peace-building processes, I discuss human rights and peace: the role of the international community, organizations, powers of the region, and regional transnational feminist networks in forming inclusive peace

processes. Finally, I will briefly discuss the understanding of peace agreements under the rules of international law.

Women's Contribution in Peace-Building Process: What Has Been Done?

When the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in October 2000, it set into motion a consistent global movement towards recognition that in war, women and men have different roles and experiences from violence, victimization, survival, and peacebuilding. It formally recognized women's agency and roles as well as their inherent right to seek to end violence and in building sustainable peace (Anderlini, 2020).

According to Sanam Naraghi, despite this acknowledgment and the reams of policy statements and resolutions that subsequently reiterated and reinforced this message, international diplomatic, development, and security sector practices have not put this political and normative shift into practice, and great reluctance still exists toward considering that focusing on gender dimension is essential for assessing the crucial topics of war, conflict, peace-building, and security agendas (2020, 1). Anderlini further states in *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters that* since 2001, countries' different agendas have to a great extent focused on the global fight against terrorism and have integrated very few contributions from women concerning peace and security. Thus, women remain absent from their countries' peace negotiation and decision-making processes (2007, 54).

Carol Cohn and Cynthia H. Enloe emphasize that the starting point for thinking about women and wars must be that women's experiences and their relations to war are extremely diverse than men's. Women both try to prevent wars and instigate wars. They are not the sole passive victims of war, but also, they are politically supportive of wars and as well as they protest against wars (2013, 1). Similarly, when the war is over, women need to be considered for rebuilding their communities and countries. Again because of the different experiences of men and women during the wars and conflicts, they need to be equally considered in the rebuilding of the country through the process of peace (Cohn and Enloe, 2013). Additionally, peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men. Maintaining and promoting peace and security requires women's equal participation in every step of decision-making. This recognition of the necessity to advance women's equal involvement in all aspects of peacebuilding and reconstruction was underscored at the launch of the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (hereinafter SCR 1325 or resolution 1325), which represented a breakthrough in the Council's recognition of women's roles and experiences during conflict, its resolution, and post-conflict stabilization (Whittington, 2015).

Anderlini (2007) highlights that SCR 1325 calls for women to be directly involved as key players in national reconstruction following state/government's failure during the conflict. This resolution can serve as one of the essential achievements of the world and is a valuable instrument for putting women's views and priorities, and their skills, experiences, and capacities at the center of peacebuilding efforts (2007, 53). Article 8 of

the resolution 1325 specifically calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including addressing special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction (Patton, 2017). It also requires the introduction of "measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution," as well as the direct and meaningful involvement of women "in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements" (Anderlini 2007, 2). Accordingly, years after adopting the resolution, one can ask, whether the SCR 1325 brought women to the peace table? indeed, since it was passed, women's demands for inclusion have been in the discussions more often. But a question remains: has the SCR 1325 effectively and practically brought women to the peace tables and been implemented as it should have? Not at all. There is still plenty of foot-dragging among politicians, diplomats, and the capitalist/imperialist systems regarding the implication of the SCR 1325 (Anderlini, 2007, 73).

Women and Peace-Building from Transnational Feminist Perspective: Institutions and Representation

Over two decades, diverse actors have been fashioning a collective response to the disproportionate impact of modern war on women. Motivating factors have included an emerging recognition of the need for human security and the growing awareness that military force is insufficient. Where women are concerned, the women, peace, and security (hereinafter WPS) agenda have become a key mechanism in the pursuit of inclusive policies. For example, survivors of the 1990s Bosnian genocide have

campaigned for UN action to ensure women's full participation in security decisions by employing the principles of WPS in their advocacy. Moreover, the experiences of women in conflict, coupled with their exclusion from formal processes, have inspired a groundswell of political activism among women (Hunt and Nderitu, 2018).

According to Jennifer F. Klot (2015), for transnational feminists, SCR 1325 bestowed unprecedented legitimacy on an international peacebuilding agenda for women. It established new norms and standards for UN peace operations by mandating the consideration of gender equality in all Security Council actions to build peace and resolve conflicts. Considered the single greatest achievement in "engendering" global security policy, SCR 1325 is celebrated as a triumph for women's peace movements and transnational feminist organizing. Alongside the expansive catalog of achievements regarding the SCR 1325, however, there is growing skepticism about SCR 1325's potential to advance feminist and peacebuilding agendas and visions. A burgeoning corpus of academic and policy analysis, feminist theorizing, national action plans, policy guidance, and case studies provides a rich but uneven account of its impact in areas ranging from violence & conflict prevention and women's political participation to post-conflict issues (Klot, 2015). For instance, transnational feminists, including Soumita Basu and Akhila Nagar, have argued that SCR 1325 does not confront the structural roots of gender inequality, including entrenched understandings of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarized power. Whereas mainstream security discourse identifies the state as its referent object, a feminist understanding and interpretation of security aims to not only eliminate all forms of violence but also the ideology of militarism in itself. Doing so, they

try to provide the world with an alternate and transformative vision of security. However, how UNSCR 1325 is discursively reproduced serves to legitimize war and militarized security. Such militarized understanding of peace does not conform to ending wars in themselves but rather the practices within warfare (Basu and Nagar, 2021).

Furthermore, transnational feminists are openly skeptical about the potential for UN peace operations to address women's concerns and have always been pointing to the institutional and political reasons behind this issue. Institutionally, Charlotte Bunch distinguishes among "four somewhat separate, sometimes intersecting tracks at the UN including human rights; development; security; and humanitarian assistance." According to Bunch, bringing these tracks together raised the concern for women's rights activists that "human rights of women might fall out of the picture." She explains that "the peace and security people and women's human rights people are not the same groups, and do not work together very much, in the structures of the UN, they tend to be separate" (Klot, 2015).

Over and above that, Jacqui True emphasizes that debates around the "third world" woman have addressed the issue of the dual colonization of women, oppressed by both native and foreign patriarchies. Based on Mohanty (2003), discursive colonialism critiques both "global sisterhood" and the othering of the "third world" woman, highlighting the problematic history of feminism as imperialism, where feminists have been complicit in both the production and the marginalization of the gendered subaltern. Feminist criteria to bolster the civilizing mission of Western states were not only applied

during the colonial rule but continue to inform postcolonial politics enacted through the WPS "agenda." There is a scramble to establish the efficacy of WPS in bringing gender equality and justice to women in conflict areas (True, 2016, 307-323; Also see Otto, 2016; Pratt, 2013; Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011). Specifically, there is considerable pressure to improve a lot of the women "out there," from state agencies, neoliberal global institutions, and even corporate interests, who fund both WPS research and practical initiatives (Pratt, 2013).

Finally, it can be concluded that transnational feminists have important considerations regarding women's role in peacebuilding, their agency, and representation, as well as the efficiency of different institutions such as the UN and legal instruments such as the SCR 1325. They advocate for the right and meaningful representation and inclusion of all diverse experiences in the process of decision making, such as peace, etc.

Women Getting to The Peace Table: Factors of Ignoring Women's Role in Peace-building

According to Anderlini (2007), a recurring theme among the women's grassroots organizations is their resistance to war and militarization. Often the same women who initially take a stand to prevent war are the first ones to regroup and call for a negotiated peace and end to war. These efforts and the search for a moderate peace are never easy paths. The simple act of meeting each other at a time of fear, mistrust, and insecurity reign can be life-threatening. It is always a struggle to move beyond religious, ethnic, or familial affiliation to focus on peace and coexistence. Yet, as women know that their

perspective and point of view need to be included in these processes, they are stepping into the fray and trying to find common grounds (Anderlini, 2007).

Despite women's efforts, they haven't always meaningfully been included in the decision-making processes. Anderlini further states that some activists claim misogyny and sexism for women's exclusion from the peace process (2007, 58). In a similar argument, Joana Cook, in her book *A woman's place: US counterterrorism since 9/11,* refers to the paucity of women in leadership positions in political parties, the state, or non-state groups as one of the reasons for their absence from the peace-building processes (Cook, 2021). More importantly, a common refrain among policymakers and power structures involved in the peace talks is that the peace table is not a venue for discussing gender equality or women's issues. These are important issues, they say, but should come at a later stage. Implicit in such comments is the notion that women only care about issues of gender equality and that women's issues are their sole concern. There is even less consciousness of and much skepticism about women's capacities, knowledge, and experiences to engage and contribute effectively to negotiating and building peace and security. Usually, parties to the negotiations determine who represents them (Anderlini, 2007).

The international community and third countries involved in the process can provide guidance or advice on the inclusion of women or general adherence with Resolution 1325. Yet these countries seem to forgo such actions, and demands for compliance with the standards are rarely, if ever made. In addition, the credibility of women's civil society

and politicians is often questioned. They don't represent the broad population or the most affected women by war. They are the elite, and their views or interests are way too different than the perspective of the highly affected by wars and socially excluded from the society during the opposition group's regime. Moreover, there is also a prevailing belief that peace accords are gender-neutral. In general, policymakers highlight reference to human rights and justice broadly, suggesting that they encompass everyone, including women (Anderlini, 2007).

Despite the factors mentioned above, women have adopted different approaches in targeting the political arena and demanding negotiations. At the risk of stating the obvious, women's wartime and post-war activism is not homogenous but has multiple expressions. Yet an overview of the literature shows that women's war-time activism tends to share similar goals in terms of encouraging awareness of women's rights; expanding women's inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives and other decision-making fora; and addressing women's conflict as well as post-conflict insecurities (Cardenas and Hedstrom, 2021). Some draw from or build on women's rights movements, with an explicit message of equality and demands for the right to participate in decision-making processes and the firm belief that the peace process should promote more equitable relations between women and men. Others build on their socially accepted identities as mothers, daughters, or along ethnic, religious, or tribal lines and focus on critical peace and security issues. The challenge for women in both ways is not only to open the political space but also to create a solid public constituency that gives credibility to their demands (Anderlini, 2007).

For the women who have won the battle to get to the peace table, the struggle takes an entirely new turn as negotiations begin. On the one hand, they face the challenge of maintaining their presence and not being subject to the whims or pressure of political or military factions to marginalize them. On the other hand, they have to demonstrate their ability to influence and make a difference. Therefore, the challenge is not only to tackle the critical agenda items but also to raise other issues missing from the peace talks (Anderlini, 2007). Moreover, it is vital to emphasize women have an important role in expanding the agenda of the peace process by bringing their perspectives and voices, which have stem from the experiences they are the closest to, raising the voices of the victims of wars and building trust among the parties of the negotiations (Anderlini, 2007). In addition, according to Anderlini 2020, both qualitative and quantitative research over the past 20 years shows that: when women participate meaningfully, the chances of peace agreements failing decrease by 35 percent, and when women's civil society movements are engaged in peace processes, there is a notable increase in the implementation of the provisions in peace accords over the subsequent 10-year period (2020, 6).

Human rights and Peace: Role of the international community, organizations, powers of the region, and regional transnational feminist networks in forming inclusive peace processes

The international human rights law (hereinafter IHRL) has played a significant role in the development of feminist approaches to international law for resolving issues of peace and conflict. Some of the very first publications by feminist international lawyers focused on IHRL, seeing it as both reflective of the gendered nature of international law and a tool

that could be used to bring about gender equality. IHRL has also been at the center of discussions of diversity in feminist approaches to international law. There are three trends in approaches to IHRL in feminist peace and conflict resolution. In some scholarship, IHRL is central and seen as a powerful tool in addressing conflict. However, other feminist legal scholars take a more equivocal approach, recognizing IHRL's inherent weaknesses but acknowledging that it has some role. In publications specifically on the United Nations Security Council's WPS agenda, references to IHRL are almost absent (Ogg and Craker, 2021).

A strong theme across this literature is that the feminist scholars pushing for IHRL to play a central role in addressing conflict and women's role in peacebuilding are not blind to its shortcomings. Instead, they argue that while advocating for IHRL's more substantial role, critiques can also be addressed. For instance, Chinkin and Charlesworth (2007) acknowledge that the criticisms of IHRL in the UN security council's resolutions on WPS can serve as a form of neo-colonialism. However, they cautioned that resistance to IHRL-based reforms is often due to elites wanting to re-establish traditional systems and hierarchies and powers not wanting to be held accountable for their action concerning women and other minorities' marginalization. Instead, they argue that IHRL and its institutions must be reimagined in creative ways, such as comprehensive recognition of women's role and their social and cultural rights in the aftermath of armed conflict and peacebuilding processes (Ogg and Craker, 2021).

Among others, Isobel Renzulli argues that despite the critiques regarding IHRL's function, from a substantive point of view, the human rights infused WPS agenda can be premised on a clear understanding of gender equality and the underlying conceptions. Is this to be understood as consistency in treatment, granting equality before the law, irrespective of the difference in terms of access to power, opportunities, resources, or should gender equality be based on a more substantive view focusing on and addressing the causes of inequality to eliminate them? Reference is made to a holistic approach to conflict prevention and maintenance of peace underpinned by inclusive socioeconomic development, creation of opportunities, and elimination of marginalization. The UN global study on the implementation of Resolution 1325 also endorses a substantive approach to equality, for example, when referring to long-term strategies to address 'the root causes and structural drivers of conflict' and structural inequality (Renzulli, 2017).

Furthermore, the UN global study also highlighted as a crucial area of intervention the bolstering of the role of international human rights mechanisms and creating avenues and processes that are gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive. While strengthening human rights mechanisms and bodies at the different levels is an essential component of a preventive WPS agenda, this cannot be done in isolation. It needs to be embedded within the broader framework of the UN's peace and security work and its network of relationships with regional and sub-regional organizations. It is suggested that a shift from a reactive to a proactive paradigm at the international level requires an active endorsement and systematic inclusion of a human rights-infused WPS agenda by the UN in its regional peace and security agreements. At the regional level, the link between

regional peace and security policies and the human rights legal and institutional frameworks should receive greater attention and be developed further (Renzulli, 2017).

Renzulli (2017) further stated that while international human rights mechanisms such as CEDAW, treaty bodies, and the UN special procedures play a pivotal role in drawing international attention to issues within the WPS agenda, the UN can do more to ensure that this information and analysis reaches global peace and security decision- making bodies, including the Security Council. The study suggests the establishment of formal channels for the exchange of information between the UN human rights experts and the UN political organs. Systematic exchange of information could contribute to the formulation of decisions and policies by the UN political organs and provide a forum to debate and devote specific attention to Resolution 1325 and women's human rights. Where the work of the various human rights bodies and experts overlap, there might be a need to coordinate among themselves and agree on priority gender-sensitive areas to bring to the attention of the UN political organs and the relevant specialized agencies (2017, 221).

While the UN must endorse more explicitly within the organization itself a gender equality and human rights approach as part of the preventive pillar of the WPS agenda, it is submitted that it is equally crucial that the strategy is acknowledged when advocating for greater engagement with the WPS agenda in regional peace and security cooperation agreements. The Security Council recognized that 'regional organizations are well-positioned to understand the root causes of armed conflicts owing to their knowledge of

the region', stressed 'the importance of a coordinated international response to causes of conflict', and importantly identified the link between the need for the development of effective long-term preventive strategies and strengthening development cooperation and assistance and promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, the statement makes a scant reference to the WPS agenda and avoids elaborating on how to go about its implementation. These types of agreements could be an opportunity not only to mainstream the WPS agenda but also to advocate for the implementation of women's human rights and gender equality as part of the preventive pillar of the WPS agenda (Renzulli, 2017).

In a similar argument, according to Jaroslav Tir and Johannes Karreth, third party contributions, including international organizations and powers of the region, include a variety of approaches such as mediation, peacekeeping, and many more ways of putting pressure on the parties of wars, conflict, and peace negotiations have frequently helped in the progress of these processes (2018, 119-121). In addition, history proves that third parties have continuously contributed to providing more stable transitions of the civil war-plagued countries toward normalcy and prevention of civil war recurrence (Philpott and Power, 2010). Moreover, many policymakers and academics have emphasized the importance of the UN's role, other international organizations, and powers of the regions as effective means of elevating women's voice and legitimacy in situations in which their national leaders or the powers involved in the processes of peace negotiations, ignore them (Anderlini, 2007).

Ignorance regarding women's role in peace negotiations has been a long-lasting issue. Throughout history, women have reacted to this issue in many ways. One of which has been women's antiwar movement building. In addition, women's antiwar or peace movements have been associated with nonviolent resistance against state authority, pacifism, and civil disobedience (Etchart, 2015). Joy Onyesoh refers to transnational feminist networks (hereinafter TFN) as structures organized above the national level that unite women from three or more countries around a common agenda such as peace-building (2018, 438-448). Moreover, transnational feminist practices are recognized as a shift in analysis from local, regional, and national cultures to processes and relations across cultures that take cognizance of the local concerning the more extensive cross-national processes. Similarly, Amrita Chhachhi and Sunila Abeysekera emphasized the importance of the regional or cross-border movement building and solidarities which can be constructed by recognizing multiple identities, mutual interests, and the need for joint action for the promotion of women's rights and freedom (2014, 1).

Understanding peace agreements under international law

According to the American Bar Association (ABA), under the international legal system, peace agreements are usually concluded between hostile states or governments to end a state of war. Nevertheless, these agreements are also being reached between governments and non-state groups and are given internationally legally binding status as "internationalized" agreements. According to Nicholas Haysom and Julian Hottinger in their piece titled *Do's and Don'ts of Sustainable Ceasefire Agreements,* under international law, peace agreements should ideally be void of ambiguity and must contain

necessary details. Dates and times should be precisely specified and conformed. To prevent the breach of any provision by the parties and ensure the successful implementation, peace agreements must also contain “provisions for monitoring”. The existence of monitors will restrain on the actions of forces and force members under peace agreement obligations. For this reason, almost all contemporary peace agreements provide for monitoring the terms of the agreement (2010, 6).

It is stated in Haysom and Hottinger 2010, that it may be possible to provide for the forces themselves either jointly or separately to monitor the agreement. Still, it is much more common for the parties to insist on an independent agency or monitor from independent countries. In this regard, the agreement must reflect that the parties have jointly identified who the monitors will be or from which countries they would be drawn. Nicholas and Julian further mention that it is more difficult to find such an agreement after the ceasefire agreement has been concluded. It is not only the identity of the monitors that must be agreed upon. There should be an upfront agreement on the powers of the monitors regarding their access to relevant sites and the obligation of all parties to assist the monitors. Such upfront agreement on the powers of the monitors may extend to guaranteeing access not only to members of the belligerent forces, hotspots, and contact zones but also to documents relating to the management of the armed forces (2010, 7).

In addition to the abovementioned rules of international law concerning peace agreements, according to Oxford public international law, *Pacta Sunt Servanda* (Agreements must be kept) is another important principle to be analyzed in

cases of peace and ceasefire agreements. The pacta sunt servanda rule embodies an elementary and universally agreed-upon principle fundamental to all legal systems (General Principles of Law). Although its good faith (*bona fide*) element runs through many aspects of international law and the legal effect of certain unilateral statements rests on good faith, it is of prime importance for the stability of treaty relations (treaties). The oft-quoted Latin phrase means no more than those legally binding agreements must be performed. Based on this norm, each party is *per se* obliged to avoid activities that defeat the purpose and provisions of the agreement. Therefore, the involved parties are bound to fulfill their commitments according to the agreement. Furthermore, according to the international legal system, the Geneva Conventions emphasize the necessity of protecting civilians during the war. Article 3.1. of the Geneva Conventions requires the parties to abstain from harming individuals who do not take an active role in the conflict. In addition, Article 3.C. of the Convention prohibits any attack on buildings allocated to the public service and historical monuments (O'Connell, 2015).

Chapter 3: Analysis Chapter

Following the second chapter, which described the context and available literature in the area of my research, this chapter will have an analytical approach and direction by digging deeper into the issue of Afghan women's marginalization from the recent peace negotiations among the US, government of Afghanistan, and the terrorist group of the Taliban. My analysis in this chapter focuses on responding to what went wrong in the peace process in Afghanistan and how Afghan women were left out and marginalized

from this landmark phase of decision-making in the country. Additionally, I will connect, compare, and highlight the connection between the theoretical frameworks referenced in the literature review and practice, which are the collected data from different articles, reports, the peace agreement, online platforms, etc. This chapter consists of three sections which are: Brief History of Afghan Wars, which also includes Afghan Women's post-war participation in the society: between 2001 to 2021(Between War and Peace); Women's Peace Efforts; Afghan Women's online peace activism, and The Failure of the Peace Negotiations.

Brief History of Afghan Wars

Asking how men and women are differently positioned in conflict, war, and peace not only helps in the understanding of what conflict is and how it is practiced; but also helps to understand how gender dynamics are constituted by conflict and vice versa. However, asking the question of how men and women are differently situated along with the different levels of war and conflict is only helpful if this question is paired with an exploration and explanation of how power dynamics between masculinities and femininities work in constructing and maintaining those different positions (Cook and Kerns, 2018). Carol highlights the importance of 'power imbalance' in defining the various relationships of women and men during the war (Cohn, 2013).

During hostilities and combats, combatants and male civilians are most seriously affected by armed conflict and face risks of death, injury, torture, summary execution,

and mistreatment. The law of armed conflict (hereinafter LOAC)[3] provides detailed provisions dealing with all these situations. However, women experience distinctive post-conflict situations as they are more likely to get exposed to sexual violence, starvation, and other hardships during and after the conflicts. They are particularly vulnerable to the disintegration of societal structures that accompanies armed conflict due to the endless discrimination they experience in almost all societies, which renders them less able to cope with its challenges. Armed conflict aggravates existing oppression experienced globally by women. It may lead to new forms of discrimination against them, such as in the allocation of scarce emergency relief in conflict situations where women are frequently disadvantaged, either deliberately or because their needs are not adequately understood, and ignorance about the inclusion of their experiences of war into the peace agreements (Gardam, 2017).

Nevertheless, the general provisions of LOAC remain gender-blind. Women's representation in LOAC is mainly restricted to their perceived physical and psychological weakness and their sexual and reproductive functions. Among forty-two provisions of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols specifically deal with women and the effects of armed conflict, nineteen concern women as "expectant mothers," "maternity cases," or "nursing mothers." The protection of the unborn child and small children is the rationale for many of these provisions. Women are included in

[3] According to The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict: The law of armed conflict (LOAC), as its name suggests, is that part of international law that regulates the conduct of armed conflict. Its aim is to protect persons who are not or are no longer directly participating in the hostilities and to restrict the means and methods of warfare available to the warring parties (Ní Aoláin et al., 2018, 36-45).

their scope as they are integral to that protection (Gardam, 2017). Accordingly, women's agencies, their roles as agents and advocates for preventing armed conflicts, and peacebuilders remain overlooked. Afghan women's disadvantaged position as a result of continuous wars and invasions in Afghanistan is analyzed as follows:

Afghanistan's history of wars and conflicts includes Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, which started on December 24, 1979; the civil war between 1989-and 1996; the Taliban era from 1996-to 2001; and October 2001, which was the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Afghan women and their lives have continuously been overshadowed and impacted by war through all these periods. During their rule between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban perpetrated the most vicious acts of violence against women as part of a "war against women." Taliban deprived women of their rights to employment and education, banned them from meaningful participation in society, and prohibited them from appearing in public spaces without a male relative and wearing a *burqa*. Women accused of breaking these restrictive rules would severely face corporal punishments (Crsreports, 2021). The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (hereinafter RAWA), established in 1977 as one of the first feminist organizations in the country, has addressed the Taliban's restrictions on women and their consequences in rigorously destroying women's social and private lives on many levels:

"*A complete ban on women's work outside the home, a complete ban on women's activity outside the home unless accompanied by a mahram (close male relative such as a father, brother or husband), ban on women buying from male shopkeepers, ban on women being treated by male doctors, ban on women studying at schools, universities, or any other*

educational institution while boys were allowed to do so, forcing women to wear Burqa, whipping, beating and verbal abuse of women who were not clothed in accordance with Taliban rules, or of women unaccompanied by a mahram, whipping of women in public for having non-covered ankles, public stoning of women accused of having sex outside marriage, ban on the use of cosmetics (many women with painted nails have had fingers cut off), ban on women talking or shaking hands with non-mahram males, ban on women laughing loudly (no stranger should have heard a woman's voice), ban on women wearing high heel shoes, which would make sound while walking (a man must not hear a woman's footsteps), ban on women riding in a taxi without a mahram, and etc" (RAWA, 1).

Furthermore, now that the Taliban are ruling Afghanistan again, they have managed to remain vague about women's role in a Taliban-governed society. In February 2020, deputy Taliban leader Sirajuddin Haqqani wrote that under their envisioned Islamic system, women's rights, from the right to education to the right to work, are protected. Skeptics note that a pledge to safeguard women's rights "according to Islam" is subjective and echoes similar meaningless guarantees and promises made by the Taliban in their previous time in power. Not surprisingly, in areas under the Taliban's rule, since May 2021, they forced girls over the age of 12 to marry Taliban members, imposed multiple layers of restrictions on women's rights, and targeted women rights activists for femicide (Afghan Women and Girls: Status and Congressional Action 2). The recent act shutting down secondary schools for Afghan girls is only another symptom of the old problem (Al Jazeera, 2022).

In the previous regime of the Taliban, by the time the Taliban fell in November 2001, years of war had taken a tremendous toll and weight on Afghanistan's population and the whole structure of the society. As the World Bank wrote in March 2002, Afghanistan's humanitarian, reconstruction, and development needs were immense. Its economy was in a state of collapse, its infrastructure had been destroyed, its formal state institutions were severely undermined or nonexistent, and its social indicators were the worst in the world (World Bank, 2002). Over and above that, according to the World Bank's Databank, Afghans had no experience participating in elections, much less administering them. There were no independent media, and civil society was anemic. Life expectancy was 56 years, lower than 83 percent of countries, and the mortality rate for children under five was in the bottom 15 percent of countries globally. In addition, women and girls were officially banned from schools and the workforce, and only 21 percent of eligible children were enrolled in primary school. As late as 2005, 64 percent of Afghan men and boys were illiterate, as were 82 percent of Afghan women and girls (Bamberger, 2022).

Despite all the difficulties mentioned above, for many Afghans who had experienced the Taliban regime, whether inside the country or as part of the diaspora, specifically Afghan women, October 2001 was an opportunity to start building up what they lost throughout the years of war. After the fall of the Taliban's regime, the Afghan government, international and local NGOs, and the UN have employed various techniques and innovative strategies to help empower Afghan women. These bodies established fundamental structures and institutions that attempt to build women's

capacity, highlight their advocacies, and engage them in the political process in postwar Afghanistan. More importantly, Afghan women themselves had taken responsibility for lifting themselves and other women from the downward spiral of every facet of their lives. Among other efforts, the Afghan Women's Bill of Rights was an important step that women took for themselves (Afghan Women's Network, 2022). On September 5, 2003, Afghan women demanded that these rights should not only be secured in the constitution but also needs to be implemented:

1. Mandatory education for women through secondary school and opportunities for all women for higher education.
2. Provision of up-to-date health services for women with particular attention to reproductive rights.
3. Protection and security for women: the prevention and criminalization of sexual harassment against women publicly and in the home, sexual abuse of women and children, domestic violence, and "bad blood-price" (the use of women as compensation for crimes by one family against another).
4. Freedom of speech.
5. Freedom to vote and run for election to office.
6. Equal pay for equal work.
7. Right to financial independence and ownership of property.
8. Right to participate fully and to the highest levels in the economic and commercial life of the country.
9. Mandatory provision of economic opportunities for women.

10. Equal representation of women in the Loya Jirga and Parliament.

11. Full inclusion of women in the judiciary system.

12. Guarantee of all constitutional rights to widows, disabled women, and orphans.

13. Full rights of inheritance.

14. Trials of war criminals in international criminal courts and the disempowerment of warlords.

The legal gains made for Afghan women in this period were impressive, particularly when examined against the backdrop of women's complete subjugation during the Taliban period, even though lack of the rule of law was one of the most significant issues in Afghanistan and the implementation of the protection laws for women was questionable (Sultan, 2005). But solely the recognition of women's rights and the existence of these laws, including but not limited to the Law on Elimination of Violence against women and Anti-Harassment Law for Women and Children, were huge successes made by women in the process of recognizing and institutionalizing women's rights. (Sultan, 2005).

In the past 20 years, life for many people in Afghanistan improved. Among others, women have seen some of the most significant changes due to their efforts and hard work. The fall of the Taliban regime allowed some considerable change and progress in terms of women's rights and education. According to the world bank, back in 1999, there was not a single girl enrolled in a primary and secondary school. Furthermore, by 2003, 2.4 million girls, who are 6% of the school-age girls, were in school. By 2017, that figure

changed to around 3.5 million, which was 39%, and around a third of students at public and private universities were women (The Visual Journalism Team, 2021). As mentioned above, now that the country is under the Taliban's rule once again, they claim that they no longer oppose girls' education. Still, according to Aljazeera news, Taliban officials in the areas they control have not allowed girls to attend school past puberty (Aljazeera, 2022).

Women's activism and efforts had also taken them far regarding employment and inclusion in society. According to UN/World Bank/Amnesty International, from 2001 to 2021, women have also been participating in public life, holding political office, and pursuing business opportunities. More than 1,000 Afghan women had started their businesses by 2019 - all previously prohibited activities under the Taliban. As a result of women's activism and collective actions, the constitution was changed to say women should hold at least 27% of seats in the lower house of parliament. In July, they held 69 of the 249 seats (The Visual Journalism Team, 2021).

Finally, it can be said that in the period between war and peace, Afghan women made sure to study, work, and build their capacities for being included in the society, politics, and social life of the country. They demonstrated that their participation could meaningfully contribute to promoting democracy. Trends were emerging to illustrate the promise and potential of women's full participation in Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction and, specifically, governance. Women in Afghanistan have been helping counter the tendency towards political extremism, fostering recognition for ethnic

minorities and minority rights, contributing to the fight for moderation and human rights, providing critical services to promote development, and ensuring the productive capacity of Afghanistan by building on their experience in meeting basic needs even during extended periods of conflict (Sultan, 2005).

Peace Buildings and End of the International Military Presence

Afghanistan's recent so-called peace process started in 2018 when Trump's administration announced its intention for a sudden and complete withdrawal of the United States troops from Afghanistan. The proposal to initiate peace negotiations between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban had since then shaped new discussions around peace, stability, and war. The decision to implement an urgent peace between the Taliban and the Afghan government created questions, uncertainties, and fears (Fetrat, 2020). These uncertainties and fears were particularly strong and vivid among women, specifically those who had actively fought for women's rights during the past two decades. United States decision also flagged crucial debates on the protection of women's rights, principles of human rights, rights of minorities, and achievements of the last two decades upon the Taliban's return. These topics were explicitly the center of focus and discussion at national and international levels as Afghan woman's image shrouded in the burqa had played a leading role in various public arguments seeking to justify U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks and fed the savior ego of the "white men" for "saving brown women from brown men (the Taliban)" (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Kevin, 2005).

This rhetorical construction of Afghan women as objects of knowledge legitimized U.S. military intervention under the ideology of "liberation" at the same time that it overshadowed the root causes of structural violence, oppression, and continuous conflict in Afghanistan. It has been emphasized that the pursuit of gender security must always be backed up by considering the diverse ways in which the neocolonialism of western discourses about third-world women, in this case, Afghan women, creates the epistemological conditions for material harm (Kevin, 2005). Allowing the Taliban to have an official office in Doha-Qatar, and then the leverage to negotiate with the United States while the government of Afghanistan was excluded from the process, giving the ideologically strident militant group a public venue to appear as “very well-dressed people, with smartphones, speaking diplomatically in front of the international media.” For the Taliban, it offered a glimpse of international legitimacy and granted the right to negotiate and justify their agendas in the name of resisting the Afghanistan government’s political opposition **(**Kirby, 2021).

Peace talks and conversations around that also incited conversations about women’s participation in and support of the national peace effort. People of Afghanistan and specifically Afghan women, started to flag that women’s both quality and quantity-based participation in the peace negotiations is crucial to ensure their effective implementation, durability, and sustainability. Between 1990 and 2014, 130 peace agreements were signed, with only 13 peace agreements with women in a signatory authority, all of which lasted longer than the agreements only signed by men. Additionally, the involvement of women in peace processes resulted in a more robust

integration of human rights, transitional justice, national reconciliation, and subsequent women's participation in the decision-making processes at the local and national levels (Krause, 2018).

A research report by Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit and funded by the UN Women found that Afghan women have always been prepared and willing to participate in the recent national peace effort. They mentioned the importance of following training and seminars conducted by local and international organizations. This research presents the findings from 77 qualitative interviews with women and men in Kabul, Bamiyan, Balkh, and Nangarhar provinces selected to represent as widely as possible the Afghan population. To understand the issue deeply, the qualitative data of this research was collected through in-depth and semi-structured interviews with key informants, both men and women in the governmental and non-governmental organizations, and focus group discussions with women (Azadmanesh and Ghafoori, 2020).

Women with a political background and experience in peace-related issues were the primary respondents of this study. The study also shows that male and female religious scholars further debunked the traditional religious arguments against women's participation in the national peace effort. Finally, looking at the past, the participants of this report have highlighted numerous cases of women's involvement in conflict resolution and peace negotiations. Most respondents of this study believed that the role of women in the national peace effort was essential. They thus demanded that the international community and the government give them an opportunity and a meaningful

role. However, very little has been done under the governmental structure for the peace effort. Despite relatively improved security and an increase in women's participation in decision-making, women still lack a substantial role in the political processes and the national peace efforts such as the recent one (Azadmanesh and Ghafoori, 2020).

In early 2019, the United States resumed its direct and exclusive negotiations with the Taliban, to reach an agreement on a joint framework for a future peace deal in Afghanistan and inter-Afghan negotiations. Although debate continued over the size and duration of the US military presence in Afghanistan and the inclusion of the terrorist group the Taliban in the government of Afghanistan, what systematically fell in and out of the headlines was the topic of women's presence in these peacebuilding efforts (Steiner, 2019). These significant talks between the Taliban and the US government resulted in a draft framework for peace, but the most controversial part of these negotiations was that they excluded the government of Afghanistan; and the general public, especially Afghan women, families of the victims of war crimes, and other minorities. One of the most extensive critiques of the US negotiations with the Taliban was their exclusive agreement which had become a worrying sign for women's rights in the country given the lack of any indications that these rights and the achievements of the last two decades will be safeguarded (Cook, 2020).

The Failure of the Peace Negotiations

I'm arguing that Afghan women were put in a situation to be impacted by the quality and quantity-based discrimination in the recent peace process with the Taliban.

According to the text of the Doha Agreement[4] and the Joint Declaration,[5] there has been no indication or reference to safeguarding Afghan women's rights and rights of minorities, including women in the process, and preventing the ongoing violation of the human rights in the country. Only as a formality, few women were included in the process of peace negotiation one hardly could expect them to resist a whole room of people like the Taliban and be able to defend women's rights effectively and meaningfully on behalf of the entire country. Moreover, I'm emphasizing that Afghan women's activism and advocacies for having a meaningful role in the process of peace were systematically ignored by all parties, including the international community, which played a double standard in this regard, and thus women's voices were left unheard. Also, during the process of peace negotiation, not only the importance of women's role was ignored, but also there was an imminent underestimation of regional powers' roles, such as Iran, Pakistan, and China, in disrupting or strengthening the process of peace and women's role in this process in Afghanistan.

Following SCR 1325 resolution, UN member states, including Afghanistan, intended to take practical steps to adhere to their women's rights obligations and contribute to maintaining peace and security. To this end and implement UNSCR 1325, the Government of Afghanistan developed a National Action Plan. Afghanistan's NAP on SCR 1325 women, peace, and security is designed to address the challenges women

[4] Agreement For Bringing Peace to Afghanistan Between the Taliban and the United States, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf.
[5] A Declaration Between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and The United States for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/02.29.20-US-Afghanistan-Joint-Declaration.pdf.

faced in the aftermath of war and conflict in this country. This document has been called the best tool for realizing the resolution's objectives, which aim to increase women's participation in peace processes and the security sector and address issues around their protection in these processes (NAP, 2015).

Before the country's collapse into the Taliban's hands, according to Afghanistan's NAP 2015-2022, it was believed that despite the challenges, the status of women has improved since 2001. While there was more to be achieved, increased access to education, healthcare, justice, employment, freedom of expression, and other fundamental rights had made it possible for Afghan women to participate more in public and political life. However, even then, the existent statistics showed that women remained considerably excluded from the political life and decision-making processes regarding their security and well-being. Thus, women's participation in official peace-building initiatives, the peace process, and security sector reform has highly and systematically been overlooked and limited (NAP, 2015, 4-5). While Afghanistan NAP's main goal was to increase the effective participation of women in the decision-making levels of the security agencies and the peace processes, among the 70 members of the previous High Peace Council of Afghanistan, only 9 of them were women, which highly shows the lack of a fair and meaningful inclusion of women and highlights the question of efficiency of SCR 1325 and Afghanistan's NAP in implementation of it (High Peace Council, 2017).

Moreover, the High Council of National Reconciliation (Hereinafter HCNR),[6] which was decided to be led by Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, had a consultative role. This council is supposed to consult the negotiator team to talk with the Taliban. Basically, it meant HCNR would give the redline of the negotiation to the negotiator team. Observing the structure, goals, and responsibility of the HCNR raises questions about the role of women in this council. Since this council consisted of all jihadi political parties, a concern would come on the issue of women's role and participation in national peace efforts. As all political parties have always been male-led, at the time, a woman politician and women's rights activist made the following observation: "*It seems that still President Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah have a disagreement on the division of power, and women's participation in peace is not their priority. The main focus seems to be only on parties' ethnic, regional, and political participation. If they assign a woman in a key position in this council, it will be based on issues I mentioned, not based on women's participation in peace efforts*" (Azadmanesh and Ghafoori, 2020, 7).

More importantly, women's concern over their participation in the HCNR was affirmed by a former candidate for the parliamentary election who said that women's concerns regarding their role in the HCNR had been confirmed. She mentioned that Women had a role in peace efforts, but their roles were not meaningful. Thinking about the HCNR, they demanded that two of the council's deputies should be women. But

[6] The political issue of the country had put the intra-afghan peace talks into a deadlock, so finally, after the agreement between former President Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah established the high council of national reconciliation for smoothing the difficulties (Azadmanesh and Ghafoori, 2020).

unfortunately, based on reports from the recognized media such as BBC, one could see that people who had been engaged in the war were members of the HCNR, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and others. Up until before the collapse of the country, one could see no representatives of women, victims of war, and civil society in this council. According to those mentioned above, the strong impact of political parties on the HCNR had made women's role fragile in national peace efforts (Azadmanesh and Ghafoori, 2020).

In addition, the failure of the peace efforts in Afghanistan didn't only stop at the abovementioned pre-peace negotiation stages, but also women and their role were ignored during the process itself too. Among others, a three-day conference between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban was launched in Moscow-Russia. Still, Afghan human rights activists were alarmed that the delegates included just one female representative. Habiba Sarabi, an activist, and politician, was the only female delegate on the 12-member team representing the Afghan government and political leaders in Moscow. The 10-member delegation sent by the Taliban had none. The physical representation of Sarabi in that dialogue did not mean that she was given an equal opportunity to discuss and represent the demands of Afghan women. The Taliban approved Sarabi's participation in the dialogue. Therefore, there was an obvious power imbalance in the room (The Guardian, 2021). In this conference, Sarabi addressed a vast circular table of male counterparts and stated that: *"why should I be the only woman in the room? We have not been part of the war, but we can certainly contribute to peace,"* according to a tweet from a fellow negotiator that she shared. Sarabi's sole existence had

been “permitted” by the Taliban, yet her participation in the conversation would have been denied without this group’s approval (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Besides, there are many individual stories of Afghan feminists and women’s rights defenders that comprehensively criticize the lack of women’s presence in political and decision-making processes, specifically the recent peace process in Afghanistan due to the lack of the rule of law, and weak political intention, power structures, etc. Among others, Farahnaz Frotan, an Afghan feminist and Journalist, who recently fled her country afterlife threats by the Taliban, in an interview with The New York Times on April 21, 2021, began her story by saying that: “as men continue to bicker over the future and control of Afghanistan, I have already lost my home and my country. I worked in Kabul as a television journalist for 12 years and finally left in November 2020 after threats to my life.” She further stated that she had to leave the country because the Taliban’s vision of Afghanistan had no place and space for her body and personality (The New York Times, 2021).

As a woman who thrived to build her capacity over the last 20 years despite political instability, conflict, the heightened risks, immense challenges, and the ever-present threat of gender-based violence resulting from wars and conflicts, she expected to be counted as an agent of peace and change. Still, the experience of encounter with Suhail Shaheen, the spokesperson for the Taliban during the peace negotiations in Doha-Qatar says otherwise. Frotan added that she approached Mr. Shaheen for an interview. He couldn’t hide his disdain at her presence and set about ignoring her, but she didn’t budge

and refused to be invisible and continued to direct her questions to him. According to her, Afghan women have always lived with a sense of being invisible. Their voices go unheard in workplaces or meetings like this, and their existence barely gets recognized. She further stated, "*This encounter filled me with rage and terror. When he finally answered one of my questions, his eyes moved in every direction but mine: he examined the walls, the carpet on the floor, the chairs, the door. He couldn't look at me, even while I stood in front of him. It was as if he saw me as an embodiment of sin and evil. I felt unsafe, even in a room full of people, thousands of miles away from Afghanistan"* (The New York Times, 2021).

Frotan further criticized the lack of women's presence in decision-making processes by stating that "the wars that men started and fought in Afghanistan have disproportionately devastated women's lives. Yet the compositions of the peace delegations from Afghanistan reveal that women are barely considered worthy of having a say. It is this knowledge and the memory of the Taliban rule in the 1990s that make Afghan women scared for their future. Moreover, the Taliban have come close to achieving their goals through the use of force and military supremacy. In Frotan's opinion, the United States couldn't win the war in Afghanistan, even after two decades of fighting the Taliban, and that is why they entered into negotiations with them. That decision offered the Taliban greater legitimacy than they had ever enjoyed, which is a scary warning and trauma triggering to any woman living in Afghanistan (The New York Times, 2021).

Farahnaz Frotan is not the only Afghan woman who raised her voice and warned about her experience of marginalization from the process of peace. Shahrzad Akbar's statement about the Taliban's attitude toward women's rights during the peace negotiations and talks says a lot. Ms. Akbar, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, was present in the inter-Afghan peace dialogues on July 7-8, 2019, in Doha. In an interview, Ms. Akbar affirmed the systematic ignorance about women's role in the peace process by stating that:

"*In Doha, I witnessed their arrogant unwillingness to compromise. Their answers to legitimate questions from the Afghan delegation on women's rights, governance models, elections, international treaties to which Afghanistan is a signatory, and other key issues, were vague and well-rehearsed. They did not show any willingness to enter into a fruitful debate which was a worrying sign for their willingness to compromise on some of these key topics in future intra-Afghan negotiations"* (Fetrat, 2020, 47-49).

In October 2021, Amnesty International conducted interviews with 16 Afghan women who discussed their advocacies for being included in the process of peace and fears for their future in Afghanistan under the Taliban's rule (Amnesty International 5). Of the interviewees, Elaha Sahel, a journalist and women's rights defender, expressed her dissatisfaction with the process of peace and the way that the government of Afghanistan and the international community dealt with it by stating that:
"When the peace talks started two years ago, Afghan women kept calling on the international community to ensure that women's rights were protected during and after

the peace process. Unfortunately, no one listened to us. Westerners kept stamping us with the brands of 'elite women' and not being truly representative of Afghan women. They did so to silence us and make sure that we were not heard. We were betrayed by the people who told us they were here because of Afghan women. In the past two months, we heard very little criticism from the international community towards the Taliban's conduct against women, which is upsetting" (Amnesty International, 2021, 13).

Shukria Barakzai, a former member of parliament and Afghanistan's former ambassador, was also interviewed by Amnesty International. As one of the experienced politicians involved in drafting several articles concerning the elimination of violence against women and fighting to have women, she criticized the peace process and exclusion of women in this process by stating that: "I never had trust in the peace process [between the Taliban and the previous Afghan government]. The government had a fragile position, and the Taliban had a lot of leverage because of the recognition they had [from the US]" (Amnesty International, 2021, 21-23). Finally, despite all the tensions and challenges, the peace agreement consisted of four sections between the US and the Taliban, which was eventually signed on February 29, 2020, in Doha. To point out the most apparent problems, the government of Afghanistan was not a part of this agreement. Afghan women and their human rights; and accountability for violation of human rights and humanitarian principles were missing; there was no indication of safeguarding the human rights of the victims of war crimes; and finally, having a cease-fire was called as only an option to be considered but not a must and a requirement for institutionalizing the process of peace (The Agreement for Bringing Peace, 2020).

The intentional negligence and ignorance of the crucial demands of Afghans by the parties of these talks led to disappointments and distrust of the people of Afghanistan and specifically Afghan women towards US Foreign Policy, the Taliban's intention of having a meaningful and sustainable peace, and the level of strength in Afghanistan government's statements and actions. On the other hand, despite these issues and challenges, Afghan women continued their efforts to revive their role as peacemakers and agents of change. It is worth mentioning that realization of the power imbalance within Afghan society, the painful past with the Taliban, the growing distrust towards the Afghan government, and US foreign policy led them to take more action and call for solidarity among women in this particular period (Fetrat, 2020). These efforts have shown signs of shifting perceptions of women's expanding role within the societies and could signal more progress toward a broader gender equality vision across the country. But a national-level peacebuilding agenda will need to address women's rights in a systematic, structured, and meaningful way, one that both takes into account the specific post-conflict needs of women and recognizes the roles they can play in advancing the country's security by being included to the process (Steiner, 2019).

Afghan Women's Digital Activism for Peace

For decades, Afghan women have been at the forefront of calls for recognition of the gendered nature of peace and conflict and for the protection of women's rights. However, stereotypes such as the permanently subordinated Afghan woman walking through dusty hills, caged in the oppressive blue burka, or the strong vocal woman speaking out for women's rights in only a headscarf is

slightly pulled back, are all too common (Rivas and Safi, 2022). The colonial resonance of the use of Afghan women's position in the society as a constant trope of the rationale for the US-led invasion to "save Afghan women" without including them and their experiences in the process; presumption of their need to be talked on their behalf; and for ignorance in regards to their role and impact on the process of peace as active agents highly needs to be interrogated. It is precisely because there are many stories that show Afghan women advocating for ending war and promoting peace as active agents of change via different platforms. Among others, online platform/social media has become one of the prominent ones for their activism and advocacies.

The increasing popularity of online platforms/social media has led to increased social and feminist activism happening throughout social media sites. Some of these social actions have been organized by groups such as non-profit organizations, and others have been initiated by individuals who were victims of those social issues or are simply passionate about bringing social change and helping in promoting social justice (Li et al., 2020). Studies show that feminists have increasingly turned to digital technologies and social media platforms to dialogue, network, and organize against contemporary sexism and misogyny. Digital spaces are often highly creative sites where the public can simultaneously learn about, intervene, and become involved in promoting and advocating for their rights[7] (Mendes et al., 2018). Similarly, Afghan women have been relying heavily on virtual/online platforms to share their experiences, mobilize, and organize

[7] Internationally, the #MeToo movement in 2017 was one of the strongest and most high-profile examples of digital feminist activism that institutionalized the power of online platforms and social media in expanding feminist activism and social justice (Mendes et al. 237).

their feminist advocacies. Their activism and advocacies on social media have had a growing line despite the insecurities, the Taliban's threats, war, invasion, and many more reasons to prevent them from advocating for their rights and beliefs. Among these, I can point out to widespread and well-recognized online campaign "#whereismyname?" This campaign was initiated by young Afghan women and women's rights activists in 2017 (Mashal, 2017). Participants of this campaign were advocating for a change in the custom of eliminating women's names.[8] Two prominent online activism of Afghan women for peace include "MyRedLine, a social media campaign," and "Together Stronger, a WhatsApp group for feminist organizing around the topic of peace."

MyRedLine

MyRedLine is a Social Media campaign that aimed to bring the voices of the Afghan people, particularly their RedLines, during the recent peace negotiations between the Taliban, the United States, and the Afghan Government to the fore. According to this social media/online campaign, the Taliban had only ruled Afghanistan for five years; however, in that period, they managed to leave a lasting impression on the lives of the Afghan people. One of the purposes of this campaign was to re-affirm the fact that every Afghan can recall at least one terrible, frightening experience from the years under the Taliban rule that they don't wish to revisit or be thrown back into it as a result of an

[8] Based on the ruling beliefs in Afghanistan, many Afghan men are reluctant to say the names of their sisters, wives, or mothers in public. Women are generally only referred to as the mother, daughter, or sister of the eldest male in their family, and Afghan law dictates that only the father's name should be recorded on a birth certificate. The activists' aimed both to challenge women to reclaim their most basic identity and to break the deep-rooted taboo that prevents men from mentioning their female relatives' names in public. This online campaign had taken so much attention and widespread recognition on social media and other online platforms as much as the Afghanistan Central Civil Registration Authority (Accra) was looking into the possibility of amending the country's Population Registration Act to allow women to have their names on their children's ID cards and birth certificates (Nowrouzi, 2020).

unstructured peace deal. Thus, they want to be the platform the people of Afghanistan and specifically, Afghan women, can talk about their demands from the process of peace and be involved as active agents of peace in decision making (The Voice of Afghanistan for Sustainable Peace, 2022).

Hundreds of thousands of Afghan women have joined an online campaign, #MyRedLine, to speak about the freedoms and rights they are not willing to give up in the name of peace with the Taliban. Moreover, a hashtag was launched by Farahnaz Forotan, #MyRedLine Campaign Ambassador, with the help of the UN Women's office in Kabul. With this online campaign, Forotan aimed at raising awareness for Afghan decision-makers to know that peace cannot be achieved at the expense of the rights, freedoms, and happiness of the nation's women (Najibullah, 2019). She writes: "As a journalist, I am privileged to listen to what people have to say, to know what matters to them, to understand what they need. And from this privileged position, I can say that the Afghan citizens want peace they can all enjoy. And this is how this campaign "MyRedLine" came about" (#Myredline, UN Women, Asia-Pacific, 2022).

In this campaign, activists created videos from all around Afghanistan amid U.S. efforts to negotiate peace with the Taliban, featuring several young Afghan women and men describing their "red lines," often regarding democratic staples like education, freedom of speech, and gender equality. In addition, Forotan, herself too, shared her red line as a journalist and advocate of freedom of expression. She courageously stated that her red line for the process of peace is her "pen and freedom of expression," two crucial things in her life that she wouldn't want to be sacrificed while negotiating peace with the

Taliban (Najibullah, 2019). Virtual feminist activism has proved to build solidarity and support and transform into a feminist consciousness amongst hashtag participants, which allows them to understand the concept in a broader context and connect it to the root causes and structural oppressions rather than only focusing on personal problems (Mendes et al., 2018). Women using *#MyRedLine* reiterated their demands and connected their past experiences to structural systems of oppression, discrimination, and patriarchy by expressing their fear regarding the Taliban's possible return to power which will be a strong point of threat to the freedoms of Afghan women attained following the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 (Najibullah, 2019). This campaign initially started as a small initiative on social media and became a nationwide phenomenon that offered Afghan women a platform to share their concerns about the return of the Taliban back power (#Myredline, UN Women, Asia-Pacific, 2022).

Together Stronger

In this section, I will discuss the collective work of Afghan women during the process of peace via a WhatsApp group chat named "Together Stronger." At the beginning of 2021, I was introduced, invited, and included in this group chat by my friend Zahra Sharifi (Alias: for security reasons), a women & peace activist who supports women-led peace initiatives in Afghanistan. This group was created in March 2019 by a group of Afghan women (their names aren't shared for security reasons). From the beginning of the time that Afghan women felt being sidelined and ignored in the process of peace, this group has brought its attention to this topic by arranging and directing so many different women-led direct actions, writing and sharing petitions and statements, and holding meetings to discuss the needs of women during and after the period of peace

negotiations with the Taliban. It is worth mentioning that this group chat consists of 131-all women members who are both inside of Afghanistan and parts of the diaspora working for the same goals and purposes: uplifting women's voices; and advocating for institutionalizing their place in the process of peace for their future (Together Stronger WhatsApp group, 2019). In addition, the general "Together Stronger" WhatsApp group is then divided into smaller focus and working groups, including but not limited to "media working group" and "advocacy working group." According to the description of the groups, women are being involved in these working groups based on their specialty and profession to work on establishing a solid base for the causes they work for. (Together Stronger WhatsApp group, 2019).

This WhatsApp group chat is a virtual space for activism, resistance, organizing, support, and a platform for mobilization during and after the process of peace. Through this WhatsApp group and platforms like this, Afghan women worldwide are trying to present a different narrative and story of their advocacies for women's rights. Thus, they claim space, subjectivity, agency, and influence and demand their voices to be heard through their activism and collective action projects. Among other efforts, this group coordinated and distributed petitions such as "Supporting Afghan Women's demand for a just peace guaranteeing the rights of all people," which was accessed on August 2021 and was created by Guissou Jahangiri**,** the Executive Director of Armanshahr and OPEN ASIA, to the human rights defenders and civil society around the world (Jahangiri, 2021).

In this collective work, Afghan women strongly raised their voices. They claimed the space for people to hear them by stating that: "hopes for a better life, which had

emerged after the continuous years of war political turmoil, were again destroyed with war and occupation. The flames of war have been reignited throughout the country, and the Taliban has re-emerged as a result of America's irresponsible departure, the weakness of the central government, and inaction or support for the Taliban by neighboring countries, leaving the future and lives of women under serious threat once again" (Jahangiri, 2021). They further courageously criticized the peace talks process and claimed that alongside the war and increasing violence, rather than being centered around improving the situation in Afghanistan, the peace talks moved toward legitimizing numerous perpetrators of war crimes and human rights catastrophes in Afghanistan. The voices of independent Afghan society and the women who are being lashed, stoned, and forced to marry the Taliban combatants haven't been heard during the peace talks. The negotiations do not include much on peace and appear more as bargaining for a power grab and political positions (Jahangiri, 2021).

Women have an important role in expanding the agenda of the peace process by bringing their perspectives and voices which have stem from the experiences they are the closest to, raising the voices of the victims of wars, and building trust among the parties of the negotiations (Anderlini, 2007). Similarly, in this collective work, members of the WhatsApp group not only emphasized gender equality among citizens by stating that the protection of women's rights should be a unanimously agreed guarantee of all parties during any peace talks but also demanded from the United Nations Security Council and the parties of the peace talks to consider an immediate ceasefire; refrainment from using military tactics and strategies that endanger the lives of civilians; accountability for past

and current war crimes and atrocities; provision of the election for political change; elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women, freedom of expression; etc. which highly points to the expanding role of women during the process of peace (Jahangiri, 2021).

This WhatsApp group has been working on many other different collective projects to institutionalize women's voices during the process of peace and after the Taliban's insurgency took over Afghanistan in August 2021. As a result of these women's collective actions, they integrated some of the most essential documents regarding women and peace, including but not limited to the civil society declaration of the people's uprising in Afghanistan**;** this document was accessed on 10 September 2021 and covered the nature of women's protests in Kabul and all over the country for demanding the right to be included in the peace negotiation and after-peace talks and negotiations (Civil society declaration, 2021).

In addition, a letter was sent to the Minister of South Asia and the Commonwealth, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development. This letter was incorporated by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) on September 15, 2021. It covered the conversation around the fact that Afghan women themselves and alone risk their lives to question and challenge the Taliban's notion and ideology of culture and religion regarding women's situation and their place in the society and public life (ICAN, 2021).

Finally, they prepared a letter to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This letter was organized by the Together Stronger WhatsApp group, AWSDC, Afghan Women for Change, the Liberty Coalition, Women Commission of the Afghan Global

Diaspora Council, and Afghan Youth Empowerment on 20th December 2021. It covered the 19th December 2021, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan's statements over the fact that: "Imran Khan made statements in an international forum on why the current regressive policies of the Taliban in Afghanistan, especially towards girls and women during and after the peace talks, must be accepted by the OIC and the international community. His statement was yet again a reminder of the country's strategic depth since the Cold War, where a policy of dividing Afghans along ideology, ethnicity, or religion is at the core of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. Women activists in this letter re-claimed their agency, involvement, and entitlement to the situation of the country by calling upon the OIC to take note of such irresponsible statements from the Prime Minister during the sensitive times of the peace talks and the collapse of the country; and sincerely hoped that they do not become the basis of the OIC's outlook on Afghanistan (AWSDC et al., 2021).

In addition, as a conclusion point about the importance of these online platforms concerning women's activism around the topic of peace and women's rights, I want to refer to Mary Akrami's statement in one of her interviews. She is one of the board members of the "Together Stronger" and the creator of "Our voice for our future" WhatsApp groups. She proudly contended that these groups have now changed to women's coalitions and platforms of organizing for peace. As an example, she then added: "During the Moscow peace dialogues, women were not consulted for representation, to show our objection, through this group, we managed to have four massive meetings with women in one week. Around 70 women who are in the leading positions in every relevant sector, starting from the Human Rights commission to all the

local organizations, the Minister of Women's affairs, and the three other female ministers, took part. Thereby we announced women's statement regarding women's representation in the peace talks in Moscow" (Fetrat, 2020).

Thus, the abovementioned examples of women's tireless efforts, advocacies, and activism for being included in the process of peace through online/digital platforms. These efforts are parts of a larger story for Afghan women's advocacies regarding women's rights and specifically the peace process as active agents, not only "agency-less victims," highlighting experiences of Afghan women's advocacies as active agents of peace.

International Human rights Law and Peace

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, third party contributions (including but not limited to the international community, international organizations such as the UN, other powers involved such as the USA and Russia in the case of Afghanistan, and powers of the region such as Iran, Pakistan, and China) include a variety of approaches such as mediation, peacekeeping, and many more ways for putting pressure on the parties of war and peace negotiations. It is also worth mentioning that these kinds of contributions (if following the proper strategies of peace-building) can effectively bring fair and just processes of peace, which highly emphasize elevating women's voices, specifically in cases in which their national leaders ignore them. I believe this kind of contribution could have been efficient for providing a smooth transition of Afghanistan toward peace, giving meaningful representation to Afghan women during peace negotiations, and raising the question of accountability for war crimes that have happened

throughout the conflict in this country. Thus, in this section, I will briefly touch upon the role of the international community, regional powers, and structure of the US-Taliban peace under the lens of international law. Finally, I will focus on how transnational feminist networks can help Afghan women and their causes.

Role of the International Community and Powers of The Region

The world powers have always shown great interest in Afghanistan due to its strategic position. The Soviet Union and the United States are examples of foreign invasions in Afghanistan (Mustafa et al., 2020). Among other countries involved in Afghanistan's process of peace, including Iran, Pakistan, China, Russia, and Turkey, hosted a peace summit for Afghanistan from April 24 to May fourth to start efforts to sketch out a possible political settlement. According to a news article from Al Jazeera accessed on April 13, 2021, Turkey's foreign ministry stated that the Afghan government and the Taliban would attend the 10-day summit in Turkey. But the Taliban later said that they would not participate in any summits on Afghanistan's future until all foreign forces leave the country. The meeting would include the United Nations and Qatar to advance stalled Doha talks for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. The overriding objective of the Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan's Peace Process was to accelerate and complement the continuing intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha on achieving a just and durable political settlement. The conference is supposed to focus on helping the negotiating parties reach a set of shared, foundational principles that reflect an agreed vision for a future Afghanistan, a roadmap to a future political settlement, and an end to the conflict. However, the process was stalled entirely because of the Taliban's

unwillingness to attend the summit. Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, an independent negotiating body, established in 2010, is expected to present its own set of proposals after consulting different political parties and civil society members. Officials were worried that violence in the country would surge if an agreement was not reached soon before September 11, the date for withdrawal of the troops from Afghanistan (Al Jazeera, 2021).

In her interview with the BBC Persian, Malalai Habibi, an Afghan analyst on peace and international relations, identifies the pivotal role of regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran, India, China, and Russia in both peace and the continuation of the wars and conflicts in Afghanistan. She explained that Turkey's peace summit was one of the most critical steps in the negotiations between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. However, there were many challenges and intentional shortcomings, such as the uncertainty of the Turkey summit's date and time, the unclear nature of the women's presence both quantitively and qualitatively in this summit, and the focus of the Taliban on only releasing the Taliban's prisoners by the government of Afghanistan. Habibi points to these challenges as considerable barriers to the summit's success and highly impactful on the people of Afghanistan's expectations regarding the outcomes of the peace talks (BBC Persian, 2021).

Accordingly, it is evident that minimizing the USA's influence in Afghanistan and the region has been the primary motivation for the engagement of these powers in Afghanistan's peace-building process. China has participated in several world meetings

in Afghanistan. However, China had no vast experience in resolving disputes on the international level, and the Chinese tilt and tendency towards Pakistan and its intentions regarding Afghanistan's peace affected these mediations (Mustafa et al., 2020). Additionally, in *The Taliban: A New Proxy for Iran in Afghanistan,* the authors have identified and discussed the double standard of the theocratic regime of Iran in Afghan peace processes through a contradictory policy. On the one hand, Iran has established its political-economic and cultural ties with the government of Afghanistan. On the other hand, it has kept its ties with the hard-core Taliban militants (Mustafa et al. 425). The Iranian regime also started to support the Taliban due to their deteriorated relationship with the USA to minimize America's influence in Afghanistan. (Mustafa et al., 2020, 429).

As the next influential neighboring country, Pakistan involves strongly in the matters of Afghanistan's war and peace. Ahmed Rashid addresses Pakistan's double play with the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan (2008, 20-40). Afghanistan has always been the battleground for a proxy war. In this proxy war, Pakistan has been a vital ally of the Taliban's insurgency before 9/11 and has continued to back the Taliban insurgents since then. Though Pakistani officials have denied funding the Taliban's movement on several occasions, there is overwhelming evidence that the Taliban continue to receive haven and military and financial assistance in Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan's historical record of intervention in Afghanistan has caused a general distrust among Afghans (Dormandy, 2007).

Finally, in early 2019, former Afghan "Mujahedeen" leaders met in Moscow to discuss matters of war and peace with the Taliban. For Russia, this was the culmination of a long evolution from being a marginal post-Soviet player into a prominent diplomatic actor in Afghanistan and a supporter of a negotiated settlement involving the Taliban. While secondary to the US–Taliban talks held since 2018 and to the official inter-Afghan talks that started in September 2020, Moscow-sponsored regional peace consultations and informal inter-Afghan dialogue merit attention in terms of how they contributed to the search for peace in Afghanistan and fit into Russia's broader foreign policy patterns (Stepanova, 2021). Russia has already enjoyed good working relations with Pakistan, China, India, and Iran: these powers needed to play an influential role in the political settlement to be made in Afghanistan (Stepanova, 2021). Moscow provided a broad and region-centered framework for peace consultations on Afghanistan. Space was provided for regional powers to discuss prospects for peace in Afghanistan at a macro-regional, South/Central Asian/Eurasian level. Thus, the talks were regionally inclusive yet focused on political struggles and power-sharing (Stepanova, 2021).

One can recognize an ongoing discussion regarding the inclusion of the international community, international organizations, including the UN, and powers of the region in the peace negotiations between the USA, Taliban, and the government of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, none of these interventions proved to be effective in monitoring and pressure on parties of the negotiations regarding meaningful participation of women at the peace table, protection of women's rights, investigation of war crimes, provision of an immediate ceasefire, and prevention of human rights violation in the

country as it was expected. In her interview with the BBC Persian, Habibi calls for accountability of the Taliban, the government of Afghanistan, and the USA for providing an inclusive peace in which women, minorities, victims of war, and the general public's voices could have been heard (BBC Persian, 2021). Similarly, Mahboba Saraj, head of the Afghan Women's Network organization, in an interview with the TRT World, criticizes the international community, international organizations, the USA, EU, and other involved stakeholders in Afghanistan's past 20 years and the recent peace process. She opens up about her frustration and disappointment with the ways the world handled Afghanistan's process of peace and current political situation (TRT World, 2021).

US-Taliban Peace Under the Lens of International Law

US-Taliban's bilateral peace agreement named "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" was signed on February 29, 2020. Based on the published version of this agreement, it is comprised of four sections as follows (Agreement for Bringing Peace, 2020):

1- Guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies.

2- Guarantees, enforcement mechanisms, and announcement of a timeline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

3- Guarantees and announcement that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will start intra-Afghan negotiations with Afghan sides.

4- A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms, which will be announced along with the completion and agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

The enforcement of the US-Taliban agreement for bringing peace can be critiqued from different aspects. Firstly, a brief reading of the US-Taliban agreement for bringing peace shows that the nature of this agreement is also something around the topic of power-sharing and only on the points of interest for the Taliban and the USA. Thus, the people of Afghanistan, specifically Afghan women, are not at the center of its attention at all. As mentioned above, while there is a reference to "intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations" in section three of the agreement, there is neither an indication of guaranteeing women's meaningful presences and participation in the process of peace and nor any sort of pressure and assurance is given regarding protection of women's rights, human rights, follow up on cases of the victims of war crimes, and many more during the intra-Afghan negotiations (The Agreement for Bringing Peace, 2020).

Over and above that, I'm critical of the amount of leverage that has been given to the Taliban from the USA in this agreement. Section four of the agreement states that: *"A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations* (The Agreement for Bringing Peace, 2020, 1). While a

ceasefire was the most urgent need of the people of Afghanistan who have been losing their lives as a result of the deadly acts of the Taliban at the same time that the peace negotiations were the ongoing USA, as the source of authority in this case only decided to keep this issue as "an item," or basically an option that may be referred to, not a condition or requirement in return to the many demands of the Taliban, including but not limited to the withdrawal of the foreign troops, the release of more than 5000 of their prisoners, etc. (Al Jazeera, 2021). Thus, from the wording of this section one can easily read that there hasn't been enough and strong intention for having a proper and inclusive process of peace for the Afghan people. But it has always been a matter of closing the case and telling the world that the USA has finished the project in Afghanistan. Besides, as Maryam Jami, in her piece *The Ceasefire or the "Peace" Fire?: Taliban's Abrupt Takeover of Afghanistan from an International Legal Perspective* stated that it is emphasized that the Taliban would refrain from committing further violence in Afghanistan and using the Afghan soil for terroristic purposes in many sections of the agreement. But considering the recent coup of the Taliban for seizing the rule over Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan in early July 2021, it is proved that not only they didn't focus on a ceasefire but also, they increased their violence in the country (2021, 1).

Furthermore, as mentioned in the literature review chapter, under the rules of international law, peace agreements should ideally be void of ambiguity and must contain necessary details. Dates and times should be precisely specified and conformed to. By signing the bilateral agreement, the US legally committed itself to pull out troops from

Afghanistan within 14 months after February 2020. However, the withdrawal took place abruptly and with a three-month delay. The Taliban had warned that they would not participate in any conference regarding Afghanistan in case the foreign troops do not exit Afghanistan. This counts as a violation of the parties' time-related provision of the agreement, which further prevents the timely implementation of the agreement. The language of the agreement is also vague on the part of the US, and the US has not legally pledged itself to take on any responsibilities while exiting Afghanistan. Having said that, the US officials have always voiced concerns that a post-withdrawal Afghanistan may once again turn into a safe haven of terrorism; they did not anticipate any conditions and required standards for a cautious and responsible withdrawal (Jami, 2021). Thus, it can be said that this agreement also hasn't left much of a practical impact on Afghan women's causes and their meaningful participation in the process of peace.

Transnational/beyond border Feminist Networks

Finally, after analyzing the case study of Afghanistan's recent peace process to find how Afghan women were marginalized, I want to suggest building transnational/beyond border feminist networks as an important way that can help Afghan women to highlight their advocacies and efforts for being included in decision-making processes in Afghanistan. It is precisely of utmost importance now that history has repeated itself and the Taliban are ruling Afghanistan once again. For proving this point, I want to reference the two critical South Asian feminist interventions within two broader social movements that can be examples for Afghanistan; the Pakistan-India peace movement and the movement for a People's Union of South Asia. Many transnational feminists have

emphasized that the regional or cross-border feminist movements could help women of these countries to raise their voices and be included in the processes (Chhachhi and Abeysekera, 2015).

Similar to this argument, I believe there is a need for transnational feminists to structurally stand with Afghan women by establishing a regional/beyond borders feminist movement for creating new spaces for democratic deliberation which works for the inclusion of Afghan women and their perspectives in essential decision-making processes. In addition, according to Amrita Chhachhi and Sunila Abeysekera, while establishing a regional or cross-border deliberation is a costly, time-consuming, and challenging task but it's an extremely effective way of enabling feminists of the same cultures with similar issues and interests to exchange help and knowledge with each other as well as to put pressure on their governments for more effective intervention and advocacy for women's rights (2015, 8-14). In the same line with what Chhachhi and Abeysekera stated, I think for a very long time, Afghan women and their causes have been decided on their behalf by the westerners without feeling the need to consult and hear from Afghan women themselves about their struggles, and with allowing them to lead the advocacies. Thus, I argue that building these beyond border feminist networks can be crucial elements for Afghan women's advocacies to be heard through more prominent platforms and get highlighted by feminists of different countries while still keeping Afghan women as a leading part of the advocacies to share their experiences with the world through their lens and find efficient solutions.

My research shows that Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (hereinafter WILPF) has been one of the few beyond borders feminist organizations that have been closely working with Afghan women and has highlighted their advocacies in a specific section of their website and reports during the last few months WILPF's methods of work include analysis, awareness-raising, advocacy, activism, and building alliances (WILPF, 2022). One of their main visions has been to build coalitions and partnerships, share knowledge, and convene women from all around the world by creating bridges and spaces for discussion so that women can play their rightful role in decision-making and help shape the responses that affect their lives and communities (WILPF, 2022). In addition, their website shows that they have implemented this vision of theirs regarding Afghanistan by amplifying Afghan women's voices and their advocacies through their platform. Among other advocacies, they have been trying to highlight the importance of Afghan women's role as leaders of their way into the process of peace by stating that:

> *"Afghan women activists must continue to initiate and lead the way. The presence of women at the negotiating table with the Taliban in Oslo should translate into a comprehensive feminist approach to the crisis in Afghanistan, as seen by Afghan women themselves"* (WILPF, 2022).

Over and above that, it is worth mentioning that, in solidarity with Afghan women and their marginalization from the process of peace, not only WILPF has dedicated a specific section to Afghanistan's peace process, which includes data around different topics such as "feminist peace," "militarized masculinity," and "demilitarization," but

also, they have emphasized on lifting Afghan women's advocacies and changing the mainstream narrative in their 2021 annual report named "stories of feminist peace" (WILPF Report, 2022, 4-7). While these kinds of activism are not precisely what we can call structured transnational feminist networks, they helped serve the purpose at different levels that can or may end up initiating transnational/beyond border feminist networks.

Conclusion

I started writing this thesis while I was tirelessly trying to find a way to evacuate my family, colleagues at Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), and other women's human rights defenders from Afghanistan, where they were highly exposed to the cruelty of the Taliban and trauma resulted from the recent illegitimate takeover of Afghanistan by the terrorist group of the Taliban on August 15, 2021. As a woman and an Afghan, writing about war and the failures of the so-called process of peace that resulted in putting my country, family, colleagues, friends, innocent people of Afghanistan, and the achievements of the Afghan people in the past few years in grave danger was challenging and emotion consuming. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, I felt the responsibility to lift the voices of my people, specifically Afghan women who have systematically been sidelined and pushed away from the process of decision-making concerning peace. Being aware of these emotional tolls, I tried to be more aware of my privileges over other Afghan women and human rights defenders who had to hear the sounds of gun fires and bomb explosions, change their locations to keep themselves safe and witness the loss of their achievements. Accordingly, I took it upon myself to work on this research and how war, trauma, power structures, and power fantasies of the western countries positioned Afghan women in the society.

While a simple search of Afghanistan's name will bring so many different researches about war, conflict, and peace, I'm confident that there is little research on war and peace concerning women, specifically from a transnational feminist point of view.

Over and above that, this thesis is timely research that tries to change the ruling narrative about Afghan women's advocacies for being included in the process of peace negotiations with the Taliban and making the world hear their stories as well as their experiences of war, trauma, and conflicts over the past years. I have tried to do this from the standpoint of an Afghan advocate of transnational feminism, just and fair peace, and anti-war policies and practices in the most uncertain times and the most crucial stage of decision-making in Afghanistan.

Obviously, whether by choice or necessity, war and conflict bring women to the fore, and it changes social and gender relations. As devastating war and conflict are for women, there are also times that women step into the fray and empower themselves. Unfortunately, they can be easily crushed when peacetime arrives by being recognized as victims only and not active actors or negotiators. In this thesis, I argued that even though women's contribution to peacebuilding and their impact on the ground is vital but national and international state actors haven't usually recognized women's skills and strategies in addressing war, conflicts, and especially peace-building processes. Among others, I worked closely on analyzing the case study of Afghanistan regarding Afghan women's systemic marginalization from the recent peace process with the Taliban. I comprehensively analyzed the failures of the peace negotiations and the peace agreement from a human rights law, international law regarding agreements, and a transnational feminist perspective. Thus, I emphasized the importance of the role of the international organizations, powers of the region, and regional, transnational feminist networks in highlighting these deficiencies in the process of peace and lifting Afghan women's voices

as well as forming inclusive peace processes with the practical and meaningful presence of women.

Following chapter one, in which I portrayed the methodological statement and located myself through my research by analyzing the impact of my identities in carrying out this research, in chapter two, I incorporated the available literature around the topic of women's contribution to the peace-building process focusing on what has been done in this regard in national and international settings. Among others, I focused on SCR 1325. I covered how transnational feminists are skeptical of the potential for UN peace operations to address women's undermined positions pointing to the institutional and political reasons behind this issue. Later on, I pointed out some of the factors of ignoring women's role in peace-building, including but not limited to the practices of the policymakers and powers involved in the peace talks in pushing gender equality or women's issues away from the negotiations or peace table stating that these topics should come at a later stage; non-implementation/ adherence with the Resolution 1325; etc. Finally, this chapter covered some crucial rules and principles of international law that need to be considered while incorporating peace agreements. Some of which are clarity of the peace agreements regarding the responsibilities of the parties involved and having a monitoring authority or body to guarantee the proper incorporation and implementation of the peace agreements.

Furthermore, chapter three extensively covered the analysis piece of the thesis by connecting the theories to the practice and the available data regarding Afghan women's marginalization and advocacies for being heard during the process of peace. In this

chapter, a brief history of war and trauma in Afghanistan showed that women and men have different war experiences and have been impacted by these notions differently. But despite all the challenges that Afghan women have gone through, they have continued their tireless efforts to build their capacities, benefit from their right to education and employment, and reform the legal system for providing more legal protection for women's inclusion in the society. Also, I have covered how Afghan women and their experiences have been overgeneralized by the western countries and feminism, which resulted in them justifying the US invasion of Afghanistan based on the ideologies of "saving the passive, victim, and agency-less Afghan women." Thus, despite the advocacies of Afghan women, including the virtual and non-virtual collective activism, the same practice from the parties involved in the process of peace and the international community was implemented regarding women's representation in the process of peace. Accordingly, Afghan women's voices were left unheard, and not only their experiences but also the experiences of the victims of war crimes and other minorities were left out and ignored throughout the process of peace. Following this, failures of the peace process were also analyzed through the lens of human rights law and international law regarding the incorporation of peace agreements. The findings showed that the peace agreement between the Taliban and the USA has been exclusionary not only because it totally overlooked to set aside some guarantees for women's rights and human rights of the people of Afghanistan, but also it didn't condition the peace negotiation to implement a ceasefire and respect for non-violation of the fundamental right of the people in

Afghanistan. As well as, this agreement failed to provide clarity about different aspects of the negotiations and comprehensively leveraged one side of the conflict, the Taliban.

Over and above that, this chapter covered the role and impact of the powers of the region and the world, including but not limited to Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and China, in building sustainable peace in Afghanistan and ensuring meaningful participation of Afghan women. As well as it emphasized the implementation of the principles of human rights law during and after the negotiations. Unfortunately, the findings showed that while these powers had the means and resources to help Afghanistan and its people with the abovementioned, almost all of their efforts have been focused on the ideologies of power-sharing and strengthening their influence in Afghanistan in competition with one another. Thus, there hasn't been any sign of help concerning women's condition from them as well. Consequently, I have concluded this chapter by emphasizing the importance of building structured transnational feminist networks that will be able to work side by side with the Afghan women without deciding on Afghan women's behalf and highlight their advocacies through their platforms. On the one hand, this will allow Afghan women to lead their destiny and, for once, decide about their lives considering their experiences of war, trauma, and marginalization from decision-making processes. On the other hand, transnational feminist networks will become an efficient body that not only can lift each-others voices but also put pressure on different countries involved in decision-making processes such as the recent peace process to include women, respect human rights, and implement the principles of

international law to prevent failed processes of decision-making such as the one in Afghanistan that led the country to go back to its dark years.

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Annexes

Annex one: Text of the Doha Agreement

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan
between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America
February 29, 2020
which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar
and Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar

A comprehensive peace agreement is made of four parts:

1. Guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies.
2. Guarantees, enforcement mechanisms, and announcement of a timeline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.
3. After the announcement of guarantees for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces and timeline in the presence of international witnesses, and guarantees and the announcement in the presence of international witnesses that Afghan soil will not be used against the security of the United States and its allies, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will start intra-Afghan negotiations with Afghan sides on March 10, 2020, which corresponds to Rajab.
4. A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms, which will be announced along with the completion and agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

The four parts above are interrelated and each will be implemented in accordance with its own agreed timeline and agreed terms. Agreement on the first two parts paves the way for the last two parts.

Following is the text of the agreement for the implementation of parts one and two of the above. Both sides agree that these two parts are interconnected. The obligations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban in this agreement apply in areas under their control until the formation of the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations.

PART ONE

The United States is committed to withdraw from Afghanistan all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel within fourteen (14) months following announcement of this agreement, and will take the following measures in this regard:

A. The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will take the following measures in the first one hundred thirty-five (135) days:
   1) They will reduce the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to eight thousand six hundred (8,600) and proportionally bring reduction in the number of its allies and Coalition forces.

   2) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will withdraw all their forces from five (5) military bases.

B. With the commitment and action on the obligations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban in Part Two of this agreement, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will execute the following:

1) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete withdrawal of all remaining forces from Afghanistan within the remaining nine and a half (9.5) months.
2) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases.

C. The United States is committed to start immediately to work with all relevant sides on a plan to expeditiously release combat and political prisoners as a confidence building measure with the coordination and approval of all relevant sides. Up to five thousand (5,000) prisoners of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and up to one thousand (1,000) prisoners of the other side will be released by March 10, 2020, the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations, which corresponds to Rajab 15, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 20, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar. The relevant sides have the goal of releasing all the remaining prisoners over the course of the subsequent three months. The United States commits to completing this goal. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban commits that its released prisoners will be committed to the responsibilities mentioned in

this agreement so that they will not pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies.

D. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States will initiate an administrative review of current U.S. sanctions and the rewards list against members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban with the goal of removing these sanctions by August 27, 2020, which corresponds to Muharram 8, 1442 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Saunbola 6, 1399 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

E. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States will start diplomatic engagement with other members of the United Nations Security Council and Afghanistan to remove members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, which corresponds to Shawwal 6, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Jawza 9, 1399 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

F. The United States and its allies will refrain from the threat or the use of force against the

territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.

PART TWO

In conjunction with the announcement of this agreement, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will take the following steps to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qa'ida, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies:

1. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qa'ida, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.

2. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will send a clear message that those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies have no place in Afghanistan, and will instruct members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban not to cooperate with groups or individuals threatening the security of the United States and its allies.

3. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will prevent any group or individual in Afghanistan from threatening the security of the United States and its allies, and will prevent them from recruiting, training, and fundraising and will not host them in accordance with the commitments in this agreement.

4. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban is committed to deal with those seeking asylum or residence in Afghanistan according to international migration law and the commitments of this agreement, so that such persons do not pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies.

5. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will not provide visas, passports, travel permits, or other legal documents to those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies to enter Afghanistan.

PART THREE

1. The United States will request the recognition and endorsement of the United Nations Security Council for this agreement.

2. The United States and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban seek positive relations with each other and expect that the relations between the United States and the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations will be positive.

3. The United States will seek economic cooperation for reconstruction with the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations, and will not intervene in its internal affairs.

Signed in Doha, Qatar on February 29, 2020, which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar, in duplicate, in Pashto, Dari, and English languages, each text being equally authentic.

Annex two: Text of the Joint Declaration

[Issued February 29, 2020]

Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, a member of the United Nations and recognized by the United States and the international community as a sovereign state under international law, and the United States of America are committed to working together to reach a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement that ends the war in Afghanistan for the benefit of all Afghans and contributes to regional stability and global security. A comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement will include four parts: 1) guarantees to prevent the use of Afghan soil by any international terrorist groups or individuals against the security of the United States and its allies, 2) a timeline for the withdrawal of all U.S. and Coalition forces from Afghanistan, 3) a political settlement resulting from intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and an inclusive negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and 4) a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. These four parts are interrelated and interdependent. Pursuit of peace after long years of fighting reflects the goal of all parties who seek a sovereign, unified Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States have partnered closely since 2001 to respond to threats to international peace and security and help the Afghan people chart a secure, democratic and prosperous future. The two countries are committed to their longstanding relationship and their investments in building the Afghan institutions necessary to establish democratic norms, protect and preserve the unity of the country, and promote social and economic advancements and the rights of citizens. The commitments set out here are made possible by these shared achievements. Afghan and U.S. security forces share a special bond forged during many years of tremendous sacrifice and courage. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan reaffirm their support for peace and their willingness to negotiate an end to this war.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan welcomes the Reduction in Violence period and takes note of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, an important step toward ending the war. The U.S-Taliban agreement paves the way for intra-Afghan negotiations on a political settlement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its readiness to participate in such negotiations and its readiness to conclude a ceasefire with the Taliban.
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan furthermore reaffirms its ongoing commitment to prevent any international terrorist groups or individuals, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS-K, from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States, its allies and other countries. To accelerate the pursuit of peace, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan confirms its support for the phased withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement and any agreement resulting from intra-Afghan negotiations.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States therefore have made the following commitments:

PART ONE

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States recognize that al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K and other international terrorist groups or individuals continue to use Afghan soil to recruit members, raise funds, train adherents and plan and attempt to conduct attacks that threaten the security of the United States, its allies, and Afghanistan. To address this continuing terrorist threat, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States will continue to take the following steps to defeat al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and other international terrorist groups or individuals:

1. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its continued commitment not to cooperate with or permit international terrorist groups or individuals to recruit, train, raise funds (including through the production or distribution of narcotics), transit Afghanistan or misuse its internationally-recognized travel documents, or conduct other support activities in Afghanistan, and will not host them.

2. The United States re-affirms its commitments regarding support for the Afghan security forces and other government institutions, including through ongoing efforts to enhance the ability of Afghan security forces to deter and respond to internal and external threats, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments. This commitment includes support to Afghan security forces to prevent al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals from using Afghan soil to threaten the United States and its allies.

3. The United States re-affirms its readiness to continue to conduct military operations in Afghanistan with the consent of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in order to disrupt and degrade efforts by al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals to carry out attacks against the United States or its allies, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments and with the existing understanding that U.S. counterterrorism operations are intended to complement and support Afghan security forces' counterterrorism operations, with full respect for Afghan sovereignty and full regard for the safety and security of the Afghan people and the protection of civilians.

4. The United States commits to facilitate discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan to work out arrangements to ensure neither country's security is threatened by actions from the territory of the other side.

PART TWO

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States have consulted extensively on U.S. and Coalition force levels and the military activities required to achieve the foregoing commitments including through support to Afghan security and defense forces. Subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, and the Coalition jointly assess that the current levels of military forces are no longer necessary to achieve

security objectives; since 2014, Afghan security forces have been in the lead for providing security and have increased their effectiveness. As such, the parties commit to take the following measures:

1. The United States will reduce the number of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 and implement other commitments in the U.S.-Taliban agreement within 135 days of the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will work with its allies and the Coalition to reduce proportionally the number of Coalition forces in Afghanistan over an equivalent period, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement.

2. Consistent with the joint assessment and determination between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete the withdrawal of their remaining forces from Afghanistan within 14 months following the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement.

3. The United States re-affirms its commitment to seek funds on a yearly basis that support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of Afghan security forces, so that Afghanistan can independently secure and defend itself against internal and external threats.

4. To create the conditions for reaching a political settlement and achieving a permanent, sustainable ceasefire, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will participate in a U.S.-facilitated discussion with Taliban representatives on confidence building measures, to include determining the feasibility of releasing significant numbers of prisoners on both sides. The United States and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will seek the assistance of the ICRC to support this discussion.

5. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan commits to start diplomatic engagement with members of the UN Security Council to remove members of the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, and in any case no later than 30 days after finalizing a framework agreement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

PART THREE

1. The United States will request the recognition and endorsement of the UN Security Council for this agreement and related arrangements.

2. The United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are committed to continue positive relations, including economic cooperation for reconstruction.

3. The United States will refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.

4. The United States will continue to work to build regional and international consensus to support the ongoing effort to achieve a political settlement to the principal conflict in Afghanistan.

Annex three: Summery

Method	Data Source	Type of Data Source
Case Study		
Content Analysis	#MyRedLine	Social Media Campaign on Twitter
Patchwork Virtual Ethnography	Together Stronger	WhatsApp Group

List of Reports and Documents Analyzed:

1. Afghan Women and Girls: Status and Congressional Action
2. From Rhetoric to Reality: Afghan Women on the Agenda for Peace
3. 2012 Women's Participation in the Afghan Peace Process
4. Doha Agreement and the Joint Declaration
5. UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan 2015-2022
6. Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan
7. A Declaration Between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and The United States for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

List of Organizations

Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF)