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The Early Casualties of War and Peace

Victimisation and Tokenism as Echoed Shortcomings of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Security Council Reports From the 2018–2021 Afghan Peace Process

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Abstract:

This thesis examines how the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security was implemented during the Afghan peace process 2018–2021. Through a deductive qualitative content analysis this thesis analyses the United Nations Security Council General Assembly reports on Afghanistan from 2018 to 2021 to assess the two key shortcomings of the Resolution.

This study adopts victimisation and tokenism as its theoretical framework to analyse how certain ideas of women in conflict manifest themselves in the Resolution and are echoed in the reports. First, it examines how the language in the Security Council reports on Afghanistan's peace process undermines the Resolution's pillar on participation by consistently portraying women as victims of conflict. Second, it addresses the tokenism inherent in the Resolution by analysing how the pillar on participation is superficially implemented in the reports.

The findings reveal that while frameworks like Resolution 1325 aim to promote women's inclusion, the language reinforces women's dependency and victimhood rather than recognising their inherent rights and agency. Women are frequently grouped with children or girls, further diminishing their agency and reducing their diverse roles in conflict to a narrow and dependent narrative. The reports largely overlook the varied contributions of women during armed conflict.

To add, the findings of this thesis reveal the evident tokenism of the Resolution, as both the international community and the Afghan government strongly emphasise the need for women's inclusion in the Afghan peace process but fail to move beyond rhetorical commitments. Despite calls for inclusive peace negotiations, women's actual representation in key decision-making roles was minimal. The reports also reflect the Resolution's vague and ambiguous language, which complicates its practical implementation.

While the reports highlight the limited agency of women in formal peace processes, they also demonstrate the more significant roles women played within informal systems. This is one of the key findings of the thesis, since the Resolution encourages Security Council missions to engage with both local and international women's groups to encourage local women to participate in the informal peace process. The reports echo this sentiment and confirm that this was achieved in the Afghan peace process

– which can be seen as a success for the implementation of Resolution 1325. However, for the full implementation of Resolution 1325, women's contributions cannot be confined to informal settings.

Afghanistan's peace negotiations offer a compelling contemporary case study to assess how Resolution 1325 has been incorporated into a modern conflict resolution effort, where both national and international actors are actively involved. Examining women's participation in peace processes is crucial, as it allows for the identification and critique of shortcomings within existing frameworks. Given its prominence as a framework for promoting women's inclusion in international peacebuilding, Resolution 1325 must be critically evaluated to address the gaps in its implementation.

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1 Introduction

> The past is full of examples of neglecting or ignoring women; the present is filled with the consequences. So, the future must be focused on listening to, investing in, and supporting women as well as including them.[1] – Sima Bahous [2]

On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), marking a historic step for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This resolution was driven by over two decades of advocacy from women peace activists and organisations worldwide. [3] The adoption of Resolution 1325 marked the first time the United Nations Security Council directly addressed the subject of women and armed conflict and acknowledged the importance of women's active participation in decision-making on peace and security issues. [4]

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda, that is implemented through Resolution 1325, identifies key priority areas, known as pillars, that are essential for promoting international peace and security. These pillars include participation, which emphasises women's leadership and involvement in peace and security decision-making; prevention, focusing on strategies to combat violence; protection, aimed at safeguarding women's rights and physical well-being; and relief and recovery, addressing the needs of conflict survivors, especially those affected by sexual violence. The WPS framework, established through ten United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) since 2000, is legally binding for UN member states.[5]

This study examines the implementation of the participation pillar of Resolution 1325 during the Afghan peace process from 2018 to 2021. This pillar specifically aims to enhance women's roles in peace negotiations. My argument is, that the successful implementation of Resolution 1325's pillar on participation is defeated by the inherent victimisation and tokenism of the Resolution. The Resolution that is meant to empower women's participation, victimises women

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[1] Bahous, S. (2023). Speech: The women's rights crisis: Listen to, invest in, include, and support Afghan women. Remarks delivered at the UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan, UN Headquarters. Posted 26.9.2023. Accessed 2.4.2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/speech/2023/09/speech-the-womens-rights-crisis-listen-to-invest-in-include-and-support-afghan-women

[2] UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director.

[3] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan (2015). Afghanistan's National Action Pan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security. Ministry for Foreign Affairs. http://pwnap1.tetra.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NAP-Afghanistan.pdf

[4] Cohn, C., Rai, S., Waylen, G., & Rai, S. M. (2008). Mainstreaming Gender in UN Security Policy: A Path to Political Transformation? In Global Governance. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 185.

[5] George, N. & Shepherd, L. J. (2016). Women, Peace and Security: Exploring the implementation and integration of UNSCR 1325. International Political Science Review, 37(3), 297.

through its language and semantic fields, while its vague and ambiguous language and lack of accountability mechanisms allows the tokenistic implementation of the WPS agenda of member states.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

International peace and security remain a very gendered field, where women, and their expertise and experiences, are still excluded.[6] When women are involved in peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, their unique experiences and priorities contribute to more inclusive governance and lasting peace. In national peace negotiations, women have successfully advocated for the integration of gender equality into constitutional, judicial, and electoral frameworks, ensuring that peace accords reflect the needs of women and girls. Recognising the gendered impacts of conflict and integrating this awareness into peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts is essential for achieving successful peace processes and lasting stability.[7]

Research shows that women's participation in peace processes significantly improves the chances of long-term success. Including women increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by twenty percent and fifteen years by thirty-five percent. Analysis of forty peace processes since the Cold War reveals that when women exert strong influence on negotiations, agreements are almost always reached. Additionally, peace agreements are sixty-four percent less likely to fail when civil society representatives are involved. However, decision-making in national dialogues often remains dominated by small groups of male leaders, as seen in fifteen out of sixteen cases examined.[8]

Although women's participation in peace processes has been proven to significantly improve the likelihood of achieving lasting peace, they continue to be excluded from these processes. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), in 2023, women made up only nine percent of negotiators, thirteen percent of mediators and twenty-six percent of signatories to peace and ceasefire agreements. In 2023,

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[6] Council on Foreign Relations. Women's Participation in Peace Processes. Accessed 14.12.2024. https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/

[7] Gumru, F. B. & Fritz, J. M. (2010). Women, Peace and Security: An Analysis of the National Action Plans Developed in Response to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Societies Without Borders, 4(2), 209–225.

[8] O'Reilly, M., Súilleabháin, A. Ó., & Paffenholz, T. Chapter 3: Women's Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political (in Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Process). A Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 40–42. WPS UN Women. Accessed 30.9.2024. https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/

only twenty-six percent of peace and ceasefire agreements mentioned women, girls, or gender.[9] In 2022, women represented only sixteen percent of negotiators in active peace processes led or co-led by the United Nations (UN), which was a decline from twenty-three percent in 2020.[10]

Afghanistan's peace negotiations offer a compelling contemporary case study to assess how the WPS agenda, established through Resolution 1325 in 2000, has been incorporated into a modern conflict resolution effort, where both national and international actors are actively involved. Examining women's participation in peace processes is crucial, as it allows for the identification and critique of shortcomings within existing frameworks. Given its prominence as a framework for promoting women's inclusion in international peacebuilding, Resolution 1325 must be critically evaluated to address the gaps in its implementation.

Political history explores the evolution of economic, social, and cultural structures as both the conditions and subjects of politics. The discipline encompasses the study of international relations, including foreign policy, diplomacy, wars, shifts in the international system, and the role of non-state supranational actors. Traditionally, political history examines power relations, with a particular focus on groups that have been underrepresented in historical research, such as women. This thesis aligns with the current trend in political history, which emphasises the study of conflicts through the lens of women's agency. Additionally, it analyses the Security Council (SC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, as well as reports by the United Nations – a non-state supranational actor – while also addressing themes of diplomacy and war.[11] Therefore, this thesis is well-positioned within the field of political history.

1.2 Research Questions

There are multiple reasons why the implementation of Resolution 1325 remains inadequate, including criticisms of the Resolution's viability as a framework. This study, however, focuses on two specific aspects. First, it examines how the language in the UNSC reports on Afghanistan (2018–2021) undermines the Resolution's pillar on participation by consistently portraying women as victims of conflict. Second, it addresses the tokenism inherent in the

[9] UN Women (2024). Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security. Peace and Security. Page updated 18.10.2024. Accessed 20.12.2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures
[10] Council on Foreign Relations.
[11] University of Helsinki. Political history. Faculty of Social Sciences. Accessed 8.1.2025. https://www.helsinki.fi/en/faculty-social-sciences/research/disciplines-and-research-units/political-history

Resolution by analysing how the pillar on participation is superficially implemented in these reports.

I have analysed the United Nations Security Council General Assembly reports on Afghanistan from 2018 to 2021 to assess the two key shortcomings and answer the following research questions: How do the United Nations Security Council reports echo the identified shortcomings of UNSCR 1325? To address this, the study poses two additional key questions: How are women portrayed in the reports? And how has the implementation of the Resolution's pillar on participation been realised according to the reports?

Using qualitative discourse analysis, the findings reveal that while the Resolution's principles are echoed in the reports, they primarily portray women as victims of war. These portrayals often depict women's rights as either taken away by perpetrators or granted by protectors. Women are frequently grouped with children or girls, further diminishing their agency and reducing their diverse roles in conflict to a narrow and dependent narrative. The reports largely overlook the varied contributions of women during wartime, such as their roles as combatants, activists, and community leaders.

The tokenism of the Resolution is evident in the reports, as both the international community and the Afghan government strongly emphasise the need for women's inclusion in the peace process but fail to move beyond rhetorical commitments. Despite calls for inclusive peace negotiations, women's actual representation in key decision-making roles was minimal. The reports also reflect the Resolution's vague and ambiguous language, which complicates its practical implementation. Based on these findings, this thesis argues that the UNSC reports on the situation in Afghanistan echo both the victimisation of women and the tokenistic implementation of the pillar on participation of Resolution 1325.

What is noteworthy, is that this study does not claim that the victimising language and the tokenistic nature of Resolution 1325 is the sole or primary reason for the challenges in its implementation. There are pre-existing factors within the field of international peace and security that significantly influence the Resolution's execution, such as lack of gender equality and deeply rooted militarism. Instead, this study demonstrates how the victimising and the tokenistic implementation of the Resolution was reflected in the UN reports on the Afghan peace process from 2018 to 2021. Consequently, the findings emphasise the importance of critically evaluating the frameworks used in international peace and security to avoid perpetuating ineffective and impractical approaches. Lastly, it should be noted that I emphasise

that this thesis does not examine if the other three pillars of the Resolution were implemented successfully during the Afghan peace process – this thesis focuses solely on the pillar on participation.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts victimisation and tokenism as its theoretical framework to analyse how certain ideas of women in conflict manifest themselves in UNSCR 1325 and are echoed in the UN Security Council reports on Afghanistan from 2018 to 2021. To effectively utilise these terms as theoretical tools, it is essential to first trace their origins, exploring the theoretical debates and disciplines from which they have emerged. This chapter defines victimisation and tokenism both through the perspectives of earlier scholars and within the specific context of this study.

1.3.1 Victimisation

The concept of a victim originates from ancient societies, where it was tied to the idea of sacrifice. Initially, a victim referred to a person or animal offered in religious ceremonies to appease deities or supernatural forces. Over time, the term has evolved to encompass anyone who suffers injuries, losses, or hardships for any reason.[12]

Feminist perspectives continue to influence the study of victims, largely due to the enduring presence of positivist legacies that uphold a "male standard." Early efforts to distinguish victims from non-victims have evolved into a hierarchy of victimisation. Some women are deemed "ideal victims," while others are seen as less deserving, often portrayed as culpable or provocative. Assumptions persist that all victims of sexual violence are female – and all perpetrators male – neglecting the reality that men can also be vulnerable, fearful, or at significant risk of victimisation. This has led to the obscuring of the sexual victimisation of men from public discourse and recognition.[13]

The suffering of victims and survivors has long been a prominent theme for political and religious leaders, who typically address it through a subjective lens. This approach emphasises morality, ethics, philosophy, personal reactions, and intense emotions. Victimologists,

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[12] Karmen, A. (2010). Crime victims: an introduction to victimology / Andrew Karmen. (7th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 1–2.
[13] Davies, P. (2017). Feminist voices, gender and victimisation. In Handbook of victims and victimology. Routledge, 7.

however, bring a new perspective to these issues, examining them through the framework of social science. This approach prioritises objectivity, which serves as the cornerstone of any social scientific inquiry.[14] Even though contemporary victimisation is positioned within the fields or criminology and sociology, the early notions were made by poets, writers, and novelists.[15]

Victimology, the scientific study of victimisation, emerged as a distinct discipline around 1970. Its foundation, however, was laid earlier by pioneers like criminologist Hans von Hentig (1941) and legal scholar Benjamin Mendelsohn (1947). In 1968, Stephen Schafer's influential book "The Victim and His Criminal: A Study into Functional Responsibility"[16] further solidified victimology as an independent field of research.[17] Victimology, as a scientific field, examines the physical, emotional, and financial harm individuals endure due to illegal activities. Its primary focus is on understanding the victims' experiences and the impact of offenses on those targeted.[18]

Today, victimology is divided into two main branches: penal victimology and general victimology. Penal victimology focuses on victims of incidents formally defined as crimes under criminal law. General victimology, on the other hand, adopts a broader perspective, examining victims of various harmful events, including accidents, disasters, and human rights abuses, with an emphasis on treatment and the prevention or mitigation of adverse effects.[19]

A key debate within victimology concerns its scope: should it remain confined to criminal victimisation, or should it encompass broader definitions, including victims of human rights violations? Scholars like R. Elias (1985)[20] have argued for a human rights-based approach, proposing that victimology address the human consequences of abuses by both citizens and governments, moving beyond the limitations of criminal law.[21]

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[14] Karmen (2010), 3.
[15] Fattah, E. A. (2000). Victimology: Past, present and future. Criminologie, 33(1), 22.
[16] Schafer, S. (1968). The Victim and His Criminal: A Study into Functional Responsibility. New York, NY: Random House.
[17] Van Dijk, J. J. (1999). Introducing victimology. Caring for crime victims, 1–2.
[18] Karmen (2010), 1–2.
[19] Van Dijk (1999), 1–2.
[20] Elias, R. (1985). Transcending Our Social Reality of Victimization: Toward a New Victimology of Human Rights. Victimology, 10(1/4), 6–25.
[21] Van Dijk (1999), 7.

According to Andrew Karmen (2010) victimisation refers to an unequal and harmful relationship – between the victim and the perpetrator – that is abusive, destructive, and unjust.[22] While John PJ. Dussich (2006) sees that victimisation refers to incidents where individuals, communities, or institutions experience significant harm or injury. Those affected endure violations of their rights or substantial disruptions to their well-being. Dussich continues by explaining how globally, the nature and extent of victimisation remain poorly understood. Millions of people suffer harm due to crime, abuse of power, terrorism, and other severe misfortunes. Unfortunately, the rights and needs of these victims have not been sufficiently acknowledged or addressed.[23]

This thesis builds on existing definitions of victimisation as the process of becoming a victim but adopts a slightly modified perspective. Here, victimisation is defined as the state or process in which an individual is deliberately portrayed or treated as a victim based on external factors, such as gender. This definition allows the thesis to critically assess whether the Resolution and reports contribute to the victimisation of women, thereby undermining their agency in conflict settings.

1.3.2 Tokenism

To understand tokenism as a term and use it as a theoretical framework for this thesis, it is crucial to understand where and what kind of discussion tokenism has emerged from. In everyday language, the term token carries diverse and often neutral meanings. A token can be an object symbolising a relationship, such as a wedding ring or a lock of hair, or a gesture signifying regard, like attending a funeral or wedding. It may also represent broader systems, such as coins and checks serving as tokens of monetary value. While in literature, tokens can carry symbolic weight.[24]

According to Blight Grant & Fathali M. Moghaddam (2017), the term tokenism takes on a distinctly negative connotation when used in sociology and political science. This concept is explored in two main contexts. The first is rooted in sociological literature, particularly the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), where tokenism reflects societal structures and outcomes.[25]

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[22] Karmen (2010), 2.
[23] Dussich, J. P. (2006). Victimology–past, present and future. Resource Material Series, 70, 118, 124.
[24] Grant, B., & Moghaddam, F. M. (2017). Tokenism. SAGE Publications. In The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior, vol. 2, 834.
[25] Kanter, R. M. (1977). Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women. The American Journal of Sociology, 82(5), 960–990.

The second context examines tokenism in political institutions and practices, focusing on authority and its exercise in society. Here, tokenism is contrasted with symbolism and realism in political discourse to clarify its implications.[26]

The sociological theories of tokenism are deeply rooted in the foundational work of 1800s and early 1900s sociologists, particularly Émile Durkheim[27] and Robert K. Merton[28]. Like these classical thinkers, theories of tokenism explore the interplay between morality, social structure, and social mobility. However, departing from Merton's broadly functionalist perspective, the critical scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s reframed tokenism as a mechanism that perpetuates systemic inequalities in capitalist, patriarchal, and White-dominated societies.[29]

Kanter built upon this foundation, incorporating insights from Merton and sociologist Georg Simmel to develop a numerical theory of token-dominant behaviour. Her analysis focuses on women in "token" positions – those who are alone or nearly alone in male-dominated settings, such as management, professions, or traditionally male fields. However, Kanter emphasizes how the concept of tokenism extends beyond gender. [30]

Kanter examined how varying proportions of dominant and minority groups affect social dynamics, focusing on individuals defined by "master statuses" such as sex, race, or ethnicity. Her theory emphasised the behavioural patterns and power relationships between "dominants" (the majority) and "tokens" (the minority) within various settings, such as workplaces, social organisations, or nation-states. This framework highlights the role of proportional representation in shaping group behaviour and maintaining societal inequalities.[31]

In summary, when politics is defined as the pattern of outcomes produced by a society, tokenism refers to the practice of superficially addressing the moral requirement to include structurally disadvantaged groups in more privileged spaces. This creates the illusion that upward mobility is accessible to all, even when it is not.[32] A second understanding of tokenism emerges in the dynamics between dominant groups and tokens within specific group settings,

[26] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 834.
[27] Durkheim, É. (1997). The division of labour in society. New York, NY: Free Press.
[28] Merton, R. K. (1968). Social theory and social structure. New York, NY: Free Press.
[29] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 835.
[30] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 835.
[31] Kanter (1977), 960–990.
[32] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 836.

as described by Kanter. These interactions similarly perpetuate the facade of opportunity while effectively restricting genuine mobility.[33]

Some social scientists argue that all events are inherently political, rejecting the notion of a distinct political realm. However, political scientists often define their field as focusing on institutions and practices of politics, distinct from other societal domains such as the family or economy. Within this specifically political realm, tokenism reflects the broader phenomenon of superficial inclusion, often aimed at placating demands for representation. Grant and Moghaddam present an example of accused "female tokenism" when David Cameron appointed two junior women ministers in 2014, or the Republican Party fielding an African American candidate against Barack Obama in 2004.[34]

In politics, tokenism extends beyond simple representation to serve a rhetorical function. Jeff Archer's work on symbolism highlights its centrality in politics, noting that myths and symbols are crucial precursors to political action, evoke strong emotional responses, and demarcate competing ideas.[35] Symbolism often underpins political contestation, where opposing sides deploy myths while claiming to rely on facts. Tokenism, in contrast, is perceived as a morally inadequate act of placation, insufficient both in substance and sincerity.[36]

The distinction between symbolism and tokenism, though subtle, is significant. Symbolism can carry legitimacy, as seen in the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials post-World War II, where the prosecution of select individuals was viewed as symbolic of justice. However, prosecuting only a few for widespread crimes can also risk being dismissed as tokenism, depending on context and intent. This fine line underscores the complexity of distinguishing meaningful symbolic acts from superficial gestures in politics.[37]

This thesis defines tokenism based on Grant & Moghaddam's (2017) definition, where tokenism in political discourse is divided into two distinct interpretations. The first applies to a broad view of politics, encompassing the outcomes produced by a society, both material and otherwise. In this context, tokenism refers to the superficial inclusion of individuals from structurally disadvantaged groups in more privileged circles, creating the illusion of equal social

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[33] Kanter (1977), 960-990.
[34] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 836.
[35] Archer, J. (1997). Howard, Hanson and the importance of symbolic politics. In B. Grant (Ed.), Pauline Hanson, one nation and Australian politics. Armidale, Australia: University of New England Press, 88-99.
[36] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 836–837.
[37] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 837.

mobility when such mobility is not genuinely accessible. The second interpretation narrows the focus to formal political institutions and practices, contrasting them with civil society and the family. Here, tokenism is understood as an act of appeasement – responding to demands for specific actions in a way that is perceived as both inadequate in substance and morally insufficient.[38]

1.4 Previous Research

This subchapter examines previous research on UNSCR 1325, with a specific focus on critiques related to the Resolution's victimisation of women and the tokenism evident in its implementation. The text offers a brief overview of early critiques of women's roles in conflict and peace, followed by a more in-depth discussion of Resolution 1325 itself. The subchapter is structured in three parts: the first presents literature that supports the Resolution and its implementation, while the second focuses on critiques, particularly those highlighting the victimisation of women and the tokenistic approach to the Resolution's application generally, as the last addresses this shortcoming specifically in the case of Afghanistan. Given the extensive range of previous research, this subchapter focuses exclusively on the studies most relevant to this analysis.

It is important to note that, due to the recent nature of the Afghanistan peace process, there is less academic research specifically addressing Resolution 1325 in the Afghan context compared to general studies on the Resolution. Consequently, this study has also relied on non-academic sources, including research centre studies, news media articles, and reports from international institutions. Non-academic sources have primarily been used to analyse the phases of the Afghan peace process, while academic sources have been mainly employed to evaluate the Resolution and the findings from the reports. Additionally, I want to note that while this subchapter presents critiques of Resolution 1325, all the literature discussed acknowledges the Resolution as groundbreaking. The Resolution had a significant impact on integrating women and women's rights into the field of international security politics.

Historically, international relations, security and militarism have all been considered male-dominated fields – to some extent they are still presumed as such. The early 1990s marked the watershed, when scholars began to discuss the way in which security, militarism and conflict

[38] Grant & Moghaddam (2017), 834.

impacted men and women in different ways.[39] Feminist scholars like Anne Tickner and Cynthia Enloe drew attention to the absence of women from the security field, whether as soldiers, policymakers or academics.[40] Enloe challenged the masculinised world of international politics and security, by asking where the women are, since they remained invisible in the international arena of security politics.[41]

It is undeniable, that the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was a groundbreaking resolution for women's comprehensive participation, maintenance and promotion of peace and security.[42] The Resolution has created a framework for the international community and brought women's rights into the mainstream, it has identified women as active agents in peace and war, as well as activated the international community on the inclusion of women in peace and security issues.[43]

Since its inception, one of the UN's most significant contributions has been the promotion and dissemination of transformative ideas. Scholars such as Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, and Thomas G. Weiss (2009) have emphasised the UN's role in promoting groundbreaking ideas, with Resolution 1325 serving as a key example. By formally connecting sociopolitical concerns with security issues, the Resolution laid a critical foundation for new norms in peace and security.[44]

Torunn Tryggestad (2009) emerges as a prominent advocate for the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and its implementation through Resolution 1325. She argues that the adoption of the Resolution marked a significant milestone by formally linking the advancement of women's rights to international peace and security. This connection bridged the divide between traditionally "soft" sociopolitical issues and "hard" security concerns, creating a crucial foundation for the development of new norms in the global peace and security landscape.[45]

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[39] Tickner, J. A. (1992). Gender in international relations: feminist perspectives on achieving global security / J. Ann Tickner. Columbia University Press.
[40] Willett, S. (2010). Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325: assessing the Impact on Women, Peace and Security. International Peacekeeping (London, England), 17(2), 144–145.
[41] Enloe, C. H. (2014). Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics / Cynthia Enloe. (Second edition, completely revised and updated.). University of California Press.
[42] Tryggestad, T. L. (2009). Trick or Treat? The UN and Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Global Governance, issue 15, 540.
[43] Reda (2018). https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/44587/UN-Resolution-1325-Significant-but-lacking
[44] Jolly, R., Emmerij, L., & Weiss, T. G. (2009). UN ideas that changed the world / Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij, and Thomas G. Weiss; foreword by Kofi A. Annan. Indiana University Press, 79.
[45] Tryggestad (2009), 541.

Critiques often view the Resolution as more of a symbolic gesture by the Security Council than as something substantive, referring to its minimal tangible impact on advancing women's roles in peacebuilding. Tryggestad, however, argues that the Resolution has played a pivotal role in bringing women's concerns to the forefront of the UN's security agenda. All while the broader political and legal constraints that hinder its rapid and complete implementation are overlooked in critique. While Resolution 1325 has not yet fulfilled its potential, Tryggestad highlights its role as part of a gradual process, akin to other international treaties and conventions that started as normative ideals fostered under UN guidance. The Resolution represents a foundational step in the evolution of international norms related to gender, peace, and security. [46]

Since the adoption of Resolution 1325, an expanding body of literature has cast a progressively critical light on the Resolution and its implementation. Among others, Dianne Otto (2006) has criticised the Resolution for being strongly gendered. Otto believes that to overcome the limits placed on what women can contribute through formal participation, the gendered assumptions underlying their activism must first be challenged. The core dilemma lies in women mobilising based on their current gendered experiences that are rooted in inequality, while seeking transformative change. This creates a contradiction: efforts to foster inclusion often rely on the same gender identities that have legitimised militarism and women's exclusion. Even reframing traits like mediation or compromise as strengths risks reinforcing rigid gender norms and the idea that anti-militaristic thinking is uniquely tied to women. [47]

She further critiques the deeply ingrained gendered assumptions within global politics, emphasising that Resolution 1325 cannot move "beyond" gender without still invoking traditional binaries. Otto warns that by treating gender as a fixed, biological category, the Resolution risks being co-opted into bureaucratic frameworks, reducing its transformative potential to mere metrics. This, she argues, could inadvertently reinforce global hierarchies and inequalities rather than challenging them.[48]

Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings (2004) have argued that as long as UN discourse continues to rely on idealised, "utopian" visions of women as peacemakers, genuine transformative agency may remain unattainable. Furthermore, the failure of Resolution 1325 advocates to critically engage with structures of global capitalism, imperialism, and (neo)colonialism – systems deeply

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46 Tryggestad (2009), 541.
47 Otto, D. (2006). A Sign of "Weakness"? Disrupting Gender Certainties in the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325. Michigan Journal of Gender & Law, 13(1), 167–168.
48 Otto (2006), 173–174.

intertwined with the permanent members of the UN Security Council – ultimately constrains women's agency in addressing and ending war and conflict.[49]

In addition to its gendered nature and the victimisation of women, Resolution 1325 has been widely criticised for its tokenistic approach. Critics argue that the Resolution often serves as a symbolic gesture rather than a transformative tool. Women are frequently included in superficial ways, lacking meaningful participation or genuine influence in decision-making processes, especially in peace negotiations.

Suan Willett (2010) has argued how since its adoption, Security Council Resolution 1325 has remained more symbolic than actionable. Willett finds the Resolutions implementation largely inadequate, with women still lacking the political space, resources, and recognition needed to voice their lived experiences and offer solutions to conflict and reconciliation. Despite making up over half the global population and often serving as both victims of war and agents of peace, women remain excluded from formal peace negotiations and decision-making processes that shape their futures.[50]

To address global security challenges more equitably, Willett advocates empowering women, especially those most affected by conflict, to actively participate in problem-solving. This requires decision-makers to genuinely value women's knowledge and support their peacebuilding efforts. Although gender mainstreaming was intended to address these issues, Willett finds it limited by essentialist views of men's and women's roles in war and peace. Achieving a secure and equitable world, she concludes, demands dismantling oppressive gender hierarchies and adopting an inclusive approach where men and women share responsibility equally to create a fairer and safer future.[51]

In their 2016 article, Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd discuss the inconsistent engagement with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in terms of theory, concept, and practice. They note that there is no consensus on the desired direction for progress or on which aspects of the agenda are most crucial for achieving it. The article also argues that the effectiveness of

[49] Cohn, C., Kinsella, H., & Gibbings, S. (2004). Women, peace and security resolution 1325. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 6(1), 130-140.
[50] Willett (2010), 156-157.
[51] Willett (2010), 157.

women's participation in peacekeeping missions depends more on understanding the complex gender dynamics involved, rather than simply achieving a balanced male-female ratio.[52]

This is not the first study to use Afghanistan as a case study in research on Resolution 1325. The implementation of the Resolution, as well as its portrayal of women as victims, has been previously discussed within the context of Afghanistan. For example, Jorrit Kamminga (2019) has traced the confluence of the protection of women's rights and progress in Afghanistan, which he defines to be fuelled by the simplistic representation of Afghan women in the West, where Afghan women are portrayed as either passive victims of oppression and violence, or as active role models or heroes.[53]

Kamminga has identified that the real improvements in women's access to their rights since 2001, has become exploited as a useful instrument to mask the complex nature of international missions or the lack of results in other areas. The study does argue that the WPS agenda has through the Resolution had a significantly positive impact on drawing international attention to the rights of Afghan women. However, emphasising how the implementation of the Resolution in Afghanistan has suffered from serious challenges.[54]

Akbari and True (2024) have emphasised in their study, how twenty years of international engagement could not have been expected to transform Afghanistan's traditional gender order and bring about a gender-inclusive peace process, they do argue that the regression to a gender apartheid regime with the return of the Taliban does represent a major failure to conceptualise an approach to WPS that could have gained meaningful support from local communities and power brokers as well as international diplomatic networks. The study also valuably notes the scope of women's rights in Afghanistan, that varies due to ethnicity, rural or urban demography, and educational status.[55]

A study by Shukria Azadmanesh and Ihsanullah Ghafoori (2020) on women's participation in the Afghan peace process highlights that women's involvement was crucial for sustaining peace in Afghanistan. Achieving this required active support from both the government and the

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[52] Kirby, P., & Shepherd, L. J. (2016). Reintroducing women, peace and security. International Affairs (London), 92(2), 249–252.
[53] Kamminga, J. (2019). Women, peace and security: The uphill battle of transforming Afghanistan through women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and security. In Rebuilding Afghanistan in Times of Crisis. Routledge, 105–122.
[54] Kamminga (2019), 105–122.
[55] Akbari, F., & True, J. (2024). Bargaining with Patriarchy in Peacemaking: The Failure of Women, Peace, and Security in Afghanistan. Global Studies Quarterly, 4(1), ksae004, 1–12.

international community to secure women's seats at the table and ensure their meaningful participation. However, interviews conducted for the study reveal that women's roles in the peace efforts were largely symbolic. Despite this, women demonstrated resilience and ingenuity by finding creative ways to maximise their influence within the limited spaces available to them. Their contributions ranged from basic awareness-raising about peace to engaging in direct talks with anti-government elements, establishing local non-governmental peace councils, and participating in conflict resolution, particularly in cases of family violence, violence against women, and other domestic issues. Women's rights activists and civil society institutions also organised workshops, conferences, and advocacy programs to promote women's participation in national peace efforts.[56]

While a substantial body of literature critiques the Resolution for both the victimisation of women and the tokenism of its implementation, no study has previously exclusively analysed these two categories of criticism together. Most existing research either examines a broader range of critiques or focuses on just one of these aspects. Additionally, other studies tend to examine Resolution 1325 in its entirety, not just one pillar. This study has deliberately chosen to focus exclusively on the pillar of participation, enabling a more in-depth analysis of how the shortcomings of this specific pillar are evident in the Afghan peace process. This narrower focus was deemed more appropriate for achieving the objectives of this research.

Additionally, much of the prior analysis discusses the Resolution in general terms, without anchoring it to a specific country context. However, some literature uses case studies, including Afghanistan, often reviewing the country's National Action Plan (NAP) to assess the Resolution's implementation. This thesis differs from previous research by concentrating solely on victimisation and tokenism in the context of the Afghan peace process 2018–2021, while also examining distinct sources that provide a nuanced perspective.

1.5 Sources

To analyse how the victimisation of women and the tokenism in the implementation of Resolution 1325's pillar on participation were evident during the 2018–2021 Afghan peace negotiations, this study examines eight United Nations Security Council General Assembly reports on the situation in Afghanistan published during that period. UN Secretary-General,

[56] Azadmanesh, S., & Ghafoori, I. (2020). Women's Participation in the Afghan Peace Process: A Case Study. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit and UN Women. Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace & Security.

António Guterres (2016–), issues regular reports on Afghanistan, titled "The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security." The reports are prepared pursuant to relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.[57]

The reports are submitted in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 68/11[58] – as well as one other Security Council resolution, that differs on every report, which requested the Secretary-General to report every three months on the developments in Afghanistan. The reports outline recent developments in Afghanistan as well as United Nations' political, humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the previously published report.

During the 2018–2021 period, four reports were published annually, and this study analyses half of them. Two reports from each year were selected based on their summaries and the extent to which they addressed the Afghan peace process. Summaries of these reports are included in the References. The excluded reports occasionally mentioned the peace process but did so in a far more limited and marginal manner compared to the selected reports.

The structure of each report is the following: (I.) introduction, (II.) relevant developments, (A.) political developments, (B.) security, (C.) regional cooperation, (III.) human rights, (IV.) (implementation of the Kabul Process and[59]) coordination of development assistance, (V.) humanitarian assistance and refugees, (VI.) counter-narcotics, (VII.) mission support, and (VIII.) observations. The last point – number eight – is written in each report through the first-person perspective of the General-Secretary Guterres himself.

One report each year includes an annex, that includes an evaluation of progress made towards achieving the established benchmarks and indicators. I've chosen to exclude the annexes from this analysis, since it only appears in one report each year and is essentially a thorough summary of what has been established in the reports already.

This study has chosen to analyse United Nations Security Council reports to evaluate how the United Nations and the Security Council have sought to implement their own resolution during the Afghan peace process. While it is reasonable to question whether using UN reports to analyse the implementation of a UN resolution is appropriate, this approach was deemed the

[57] UNAMA. Reports of the UN Secretary-General. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. https://unama.unmissions.org/reports-un-secretary-general
[58] Resolution on the situation in Afghanistan adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 2013.
[59] This whole title is only used in the reports from 2018. From 2019–2021 category four is titled "Coordination of development assistance".

most logical for this study. The reports offer the United Nations' perspective on the conflict and provide valuable general information. Moreover, the analysis reveals that these reports themselves reflect the shortcomings of the Resolution, echoed in the Afghan peace process.

This study provides an original contribution to the discourse on women's agency in peace and security operations by identifying victimisation and tokenism as key shortcomings of Resolution 1325 and analysing their presence during the Afghan peace process. What sets this research apart from others in the field is its unique use of sources. First, no other study has examined how Resolution 1325 is reflected in the UNSC reports from 2018–2021 or assessed whether its implementation is evident in these reports. Second, no other study has analysed how the Resolution's shortcomings are specifically manifested within these reports. As a result, this research offers a new perspective and draws on entirely new sources, distinguishing it within the field.

1.6 The Structure

This thesis seeks to answer the question: How do the United Nations Security Council reports echo the identified shortcomings of UNSCR 1325? To address this, the study poses two additional key questions: How are women portrayed in the reports? And how has the implementation of the Resolution's pillar on participation been realised according to the reports?

The thesis begins with providing background to the study. Chapter 2.1 examines women's rights in war and peace, while the following Chapter 2.2 presents how the WPS framework is implemented through Resolution 1325 and how the Resolution is further implemented through National Action Plans with a special focus on Afghanistan's NAP (2.2.1). The Chapter continues by examining the history of women's rights in Afghanistan throughout the 1900s until the U.S. invasion in 2001 (2.3) as well as the efforts of both international and local actors to improve women's rights from 2001 to 2021 (2.3.1). Chapter 2.4 examines the phases of the Afghan peace process both prior to 2018 and during the analysed period of 2018–2021 and the extent of Afghan women's participation in the peace process (2.4.1).

To address the research questions, this thesis employs a deductive qualitative content analysis in Chapter 3, detailed further in Subchapter 1.7. The analysis begins by analysing Resolution 1325 and how the concepts of victimisation and tokenism are embedded in the Resolution (3.1) and how the UNSC has critically evaluated the Resolutions since its adaption (3.1.1). Chapter

3.2 analyses how the victimisation of women is apparent in the reports through three Subchapters on how women are perceived as vulnerable individuals in need of protection (3.2.1), how they are grouped together with children or girls (3.2.2), and how their active agency is limitedly portrayed (3.2.3). Chapter 3.3 analyses how the Resolution's tokenism is evident in the reports through three Subchapters on how Afghan decision-makers and the international community only symbolically wished for the presence of women at the negotiation table (3.3.1), the extent to which women were included in the formal peace process (3.3.2) and what women's agency was like through informal peace efforts (3.3.3). The thesis ends with a comprehensive Conclusion.

1.7 Qualitative Content Analysis

To answer the three research questions, I have conducted a deductive qualitative content analysis (QCA). Qualitative content analysis is a research methodology that analyses and interprets the content of qualitative data, in this research case; Resolution 1325 and eight UNSC reports on the situation in Afghanistan published between 2018 and 2021. With qualitative content analysis I can systematically categorise and interpret data with the aim to identify patterns, themes, and meanings that emerge during analysis.[60]

Qualitative Content Analysis is a method suited for analysing data that requires interpretation to uncover meaning. Meaning is not inherent in data but is constructed by recipients through their perceptions, knowledge, context, and emotional state. This perspective, introduced by psychologist Fredric Bartlett in 1932, has become foundational in theories of reading and text comprehension.[61]

QCA is particularly useful for analysing rich, complex data, especially verbal material, including data collected directly by the researcher. Its primary goal is to systematically describe specific aspects of the material relevant to the research question. While QCA does not aim to provide a holistic overview of all meanings within the material, it allows for focused analysis of selected themes or dimensions. If new aspects emerge during analysis, the coding framework can be adjusted to include them, ensuring flexibility while maintaining a targeted approach.[62]

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[60] Delve, H. L., & Limpaecher, A. (2023). Inductive Content Analysis & Deductive Content Analysis in Qualitative Research Delve. Published 10.3.2023. Accessed 13.12.2024. https://delvetool.com/blog/inductive-content-analysis-deductive-content-analysis

[61] Schreier, M. (2012). Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice. (First edition.). SAGE Publications, 11.

[62] Schreier (2012), 11–13.

This focus on selected aspects sets QCA apart from other qualitative methods. Rich qualitative data often contain more information than can be fully captured. By narrowing the analysis to specific aspects, QCA provides a structured and practical approach to managing and interpreting extensive, complex material effectively. [63]

Qualitative content analysis can follow either an inductive or deductive approach, both involving three main phases: preparation, organisation, and reporting. In the preparation phase, researchers collect appropriate data, interpret its meaning, and determine the unit of analysis. In the inductive approach, the organisation phase involves open coding, forming categories, and abstracting key themes. By contrast, the deductive approach uses a categorisation matrix, reviewing the data to identify and code content that corresponds to predefined categories. The validity of the matrix depends on whether the categories accurately reflect the intended concepts Finally, in the reporting phase, results are presented using the content of the categories, interpreted through either the inductive or deductive lens to describe the phenomenon under study.[64]

The analysis of this thesis is contained entirely within Chapter 3. To conduct a deductive qualitative content analysis of how Resolution 1325's pillar of participation was implemented in the Afghan peace process, I followed Schreier's (2012) seven-step model for QCA.[65]

First, I formulated preliminary research questions to guide my analysis and align with the predefined categories of victimisation and tokenism. These questions helped me identify suitable sources for the study. After a thorough review of all available reports, I selected eight out of the sixteen UN Security Council reports for detailed analysis. This decision was based on careful consideration of their relevance to my research focus. Once the sources were finalised, I systematically categorised the findings under the two predefined themes, which are the theoretical framework: victimisation and tokenism, allowing for a focused examination of how these issues were reflected in the reports.

Before conducting an in-depth analysis of the reports, I first examined the Resolution itself. I analysed how victimisation and tokenism were embedded in the Resolution to identify similar patterns in the reports. To structure this analysis, I categorised these themes into subcategories,

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[63] Schreier (2012), 13.
[64] Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utrainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness. SAGE Open, 4(1), 1–2.
[65] Schreier (2012), 15.

most of which were later used in examining the reports. However, some predefined subcategories were not reflected in the reports. For instance, the phrase "the special needs of women and girls," which had been identified as a subcategory, was not repeated in the reports.

For the analysis of the reports, I initially explored additional sub-units, some of which were predefined. For tokenism, one predefined sub-unit was the lack of concrete action by the international community and the Afghan government. For victimisation, a predefined sub-unit focused on the categorisation of women as a homogeneous group, often grouped with girls or children – all of which were based off findings in the Resolution. The other final categories were created as I found re-occurring meaning units within the reports, that were evident in the Resolution itself as well.

I also considered including an additional sub-unit for victimisation based on the reports' emphasis on separate councils or groups, such as the High Council for Women, established by the Afghan government to protect and maintain women's rights. This practice reinforced the idea that women's rights were treated as separate from mainstream concerns. However, I ultimately excluded this sub-unit, as it was not fully relevant to the thesis, the preliminary research questions, or the main argument. Refining these categories helped me finalise and sharpen my research questions.

To address my research question on how women are portrayed in the reports, I examined whether they were depicted as individuals in need of protection, how their agency was represented, and whether they were grouped together with other categories such as "children." The findings were organised into coding units, as illustrated by the example below.

Meaning unit	**Condensed meaning unit**	**Sub-category**	**Category**	**Main category**
"I welcome the continued efforts by the Government to promote and protect women's rights and women's participation in the peace process, and the development of a second phase of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan."[66]	The Afghan government shall continue its efforts to protect women's rights and their participation in the peace process through a NAP.	Afghanistan must protect its women to safeguard their participation in	If women are not protected, UNSCR 1325's pillar on participation	The reports convey an idea where women's participation in the peace process is seen as something allowed by

[66] June 2019, Observations VIII(61).

"Protecting women from violence and holding perpetrators to account are essential to ensuring women's meaningful participation in socioeconomic, political, peace and security processes. […]" [67]	By protecting women their meaningful participation in the Afghan peace processes is secured.	the peace process.	cannot be fully implemented.	others and not an inherent right.

To assess tokenism in the reports, I analysed how the international community, the Afghan government, and other stakeholders demonstrated their intent or commitment to include women in formal peace negotiations, as well as the actual extent of women's inclusion. Additionally, I examined how the reports portrayed women's agency outside the formal peace processes and evaluated the opportunities available to them when the Resolution was only partially implemented. The findings were organised into coding units, as illustrated in the example below.

Meaning unit	**Condensed meaning unit**	**Sub-category**	**Category**	**Main category**
"The 2020 Afghanistan Conference convened on 23 and 24 November by Afghanistan, Finland and the United Nations […] the participants called for an immediate, permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and a meaningful peace process, with the participation of women and young people, as well as ethnic, religious and other minorities. […]" [68]	The international community called for the participation of women and other minorities in the Afghan peace process.	The international community continued to nominally support women's participation and an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process.	The implementation of UNSCR 1325 pillar on participation gained international support, yet lacked the measures to successfully do so.	The reports prove that the inclusion of women gained international and national support, however lacked genuine measures.
"This consensus on peace in Afghanistan was further strengthened at a conference […] which was attended by high-level representatives of 23 countries, as well as the European Union and the United Nations. The participants reiterated their support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace	The international community reiterated their support for an Afghan-led and Afghan owned peace process, leading to an			

[67] June 2018, Observations VIII(60).
[68] December 2020, Coordination of development assistance IV(48).

process, leading to an inclusive peace agreement between the Government and the Taliban. […]" [69]	inclusive peace agreement.			

It should be noted that understanding and interpreting meaning in everyday contexts is influenced by individual factors such as personality, needs, moods, and situational circumstances. For example, a comment might provoke a strong reaction in one person but go unnoticed by another, depending on their personal experiences or mood at the time.[70] An essential consideration when discussing the trustworthiness of findings in qualitative content analysis is that there is always some degree of interpretation when approaching a text. Therefore, all researchers must consider how to confirm the credibility and conformability of the categorisation and the final interpretation of the sources.[71]

In QCA, the aim is to move beyond such subjective, momentary interpretations by testing for consistency. This involves ensuring that the interpretation aligns with how others might understand the same material or remains consistent when revisited at a different time. This consistency, referred to as reliability, originates from quantitative research, where it assesses the accuracy of instruments. In QCA, reliability is measured by checking the consistency of coding, either between multiple coders or across different instances of analysis. While individual interpretation is valuable in developing a coding framework, QCA emphasises transcending subjective perspectives to achieve a systematic and reliable classification of material. [72]

To test the consistency of my analysis, three other people besides me have read through the analysis, to help me identify if the contents for the reports are understood by others as I have interpreted them.[73] Unfortunately, none of whom were familiar with this topic from before. However, those who read this analysis, did agree with my interpretations of the sources. Additionally, I read through my own analysis five times and agreed with it each time, which proved the consistency of my analysis.

[69] June 2018, Regional cooperation C(24).
[70] Schreier (2012), 14.
[71] Elo et. al. (2014), 5.
[72] Schreier (2012), 14.
[73] Elo et. al. (2014), 5.

1.8 Ethical Factors

As discussed in the methodology section of this study, it is crucial for me, as a researcher conducting a qualitative content analysis (QCA), to remain conscious of the perspective I bring to my interpretation of the findings. A QCA is inherently influenced by the researcher's background. Factors such as my nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, and education inevitably shape the way I understand and analyse the data. Therefore, it is essential that I strive to remain as neutral and objective as possible, allowing the findings to guide my conclusions rather than imposing my own biases upon them.

When studying Afghanistan, I am conscious that I am writing about a country in the Global South while coming from the Global North. This requires me to be mindful of the tone I use in my thesis, ensuring it avoids any form of Western bias in interpreting or representing experiences. Furthermore, as I do not speak the local language or have personal connections to the country, my understanding of Afghan society, governance, and history relies entirely on the sources I have consulted.

It is important to emphasise that there is no single, unified opinion or voice among Afghan women. Perspectives on the Taliban, the current situation in Afghanistan, participation in the peace process, and the measures needed domestically and internationally vary widely. These differences often depend on factors such as geographical location, with views from women in the diaspora potentially differing significantly from those of women living in Afghanistan. Similarly, within Afghanistan, opinions can vary greatly between women in urban areas and those in rural regions. This diversity highlights the complexity of Afghan women's experiences and perspectives. It is not the intention of this thesis to suggest or imply a homogenous viewpoint among Afghan women. Rather, this observation serves as a cautionary note to acknowledge and respect the plurality of voices within the broader discourse.

Finally, this thesis acknowledges that it presents a binary view of gender, focusing solely on the categories of "female" and "male" in its discussions. As a researcher, I am fully aware of the existence and significance of gender diversity beyond this dichotomy. However, none of the earlier research cited in this study, nor the sources used for analysis, have emphasised gender identities outside “woman” and “man.” For the sake of clarity and consistency within the context of this thesis, I have chosen to adhere to this binary framework.

2 Background to the Study

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000, stressing the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making regarding conflict prevention and resolution.[74] Even though Resolution 1325 was a significant step forward in recognising women's contribution to peacebuilding, there were – and there still are – challenges in the implementation of the Resolution, including limited political will.[75]

The situation of Afghan women during 2018–2021 was no exception. There were persisting challenges for Afghan women to access decision-making forums and shaping peace agreements concerning their own position. Afghan women were excluded both by challenges in their own patriarchal society, as well as by the willingness of the international community to include them. Frameworks and initiatives aimed at advancing the agenda of Women, Peace, and Security in Afghanistan gained international attention and support, yet the implementation failed to address the root causes of gender inequality in the country. There is a need for a more comprehensive and transformative approach to women's inclusion in peace-making processes.

Afghanistan is a complex country to study due to its multifaceted history. However, I have chosen to focus on Afghanistan because its peace negotiations provide a compelling case to examine how UNSCR 1325 has been integrated into a modern conflict resolution effort involving both national and international actors.

Afghanistan has been a theatre for international politics since the 1800s. Afghanistan lays at the centre of three major cultural and geographical areas, where Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East meet. Afghanistan's geographical location exposed the country to the great power rivalries between British India and the Russian empire during the 1800s. While the nation remained neutral during both World Wars, it became a pawn in the great power politics of the Cold War. Both the Soviet Union and the United States had interests in Afghanistan, which led to the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979. A proxy war was fought on Afghan soil until

[74] United Nations (2000). Resolution 1325. United Nations Security Council, 31.10.2000. Accessed 23.3.2024. https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n00/720/18/pdf/n0072018.pdf?token=z7hkCbWXrlUkNf3caM&fe=true
[75] Cohn, Kinsella & Gibbings (2004), 130–140.

1989. The country was left in turmoil, which led to a civil war and shortly afterwards to the Taliban's coup d'état.[76]

Some might argue that Afghanistan is not an ideal case for studying the implementation of Resolution 1325 due to its tumultuous history, including the Mujaheddin and Taliban regimes, which are marked by violence against women and the systematic denial of their rights. This historical context could make such an analysis challenging. However, it is important to note that Afghanistan's history also includes periods of progressive freedoms for women, particularly during the early 1900s, up until the Soviet-Afghan war began in 1979.

Women's rights in Afghanistan were supported by earlier frameworks and constitutions that recognised their equality in social, economic, and political institutions, as well as in urban culture. Therefore, I find it both relevant and justified to study the implementation of Resolution 1325 in Afghanistan's context.

This chapter establishes the background for the thesis by examining both the Resolution and Afghanistan as the case-study. The chapter explores women's rights in war and peace, Resolution 1325 and Afghanistan's National Action Plan, women's rights in Afghanistan both before and after the U.S. invasion in 2001 as well as the peace process and Afghan women's participation in it.

2.1 Women's Rights in War and Peace

Oxfam International has described women's rights to be the early casualties of war.[77] Women are seldomly active participants or instigators of conflict, yet they become highly exposed to the consequences of war. There is a variety of ways women are impacted by armed conflicts, nevertheless, they are all rooted in prevalent gender discrimination.[78] Elements such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, age, disability, and sexuality, alongside the key factor of gender, all shape and impact women's experiences during war.[79]

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[76] Barfield, T. (2010). Afghanistan: a cultural and political history. Princeton University Press, 12–16.
[77] Oxfam International. Women's rights are early casualties of war. Accessed 1.4.2024. https://www.oxfam.org/en/womens-rights-are-early-casualties-war
[78] Gautam, D., Ryan, G. A., McAuliffe, F. M., & Purandare, N. (2023). Armed conflict – Women: Most affected but least responsible. International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics, 160(2), 450–451.
[79] Gardam, J. G., & Jarvis, M. J. (2001). Women, armed conflict, and international law / by Judith G. Gardam and Michelle J. Jarvis. Kluewer Law International, 19.

As said, conflicts harm women in many ways – affecting their myriads of rights. Conflict and insecurity severely limit women's freedom of movement, which then limits their access to education, healthcare, and the labour market.[80] Additionally, women face the risk of becoming casualties of war, victims of deliberate killings, and targets for their professional roles in fields like medicine, teaching, journalism, and law, as well as for community leadership or resistance to imposed gender roles. Women represent the majority of civilian deaths, as civilian casualties surpass those of combatants in armed conflicts.[81]

Women often gain the most from economic development, while suffer the most from war economy, where resources are diverted into war efforts. In patriarchal societies, such as Afghanistan, women are responsible of the increasingly difficult task of running the household and meeting the needs of their families during war. While some gain temporary societal roles by taking on responsibilities traditionally held by men, their domestic duties remain unchanged, further exacerbating their struggles.[82]

If the man of the family is killed during conflict, the security of women can become threatened.[83] Displaced and refugee women become exposed to threats such as domestic and sexual violence, prostitution, patriarchal structures and roles, and lack of necessities, such as hygiene products. It's shown that women have difficulties to both qualify for asylum status due to restrictive definitions that inadequately recognise gender-based persecution as well as to resettle in other countries.[84]

During armed conflict, women become increasingly victims of sexual violence, to an extent where it become the rule rather than an expectation. While statistics on sexual violence against women in warfare are increasingly available, other distinctive consequences of armed conflict are not as easily identified and measured. Traditionally, men have been the ones to provide the reports and documentations during armed conflict – leaving women subsumed under general categories such as civilians and combatants. Consequently, the numerous ways that women's lives are detrimentally affected become largely undocumented in mainstream accounts.[85]

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[80] Gautam, Ryan, McAuliffe & Purandare (2023), 450–451.
[81] Gardam & Jarvis, 21–25.
[82] Gardam & Jarvis, 40–42.
[83] UNAMA & OHCHR (2021). Chapter II: Women and Armed Conflict. Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Annual Report 2020, 26–29. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_protection_of_civilians_report_2020_revs3.pdf
[84] Gardam & Jarvis, 25–37.
[85] Gardam & Jarvis, 19–20, 25–37.

Armed conflicts reinforce gender stereotypes, that contribute to the subordination of women. During war, there is a considerable emphasise on women as wives and mothers, responsible for the breeding of soldiers. This generates new forms of discrimination against women, where women are seen as a homogenic entity, who must remain pure, nurturing and inherently peaceful. Moreover, domestic violence increases in war zones and societies that are recovering from armed conflict.[86]

Armed conflicts have a profound impact on women, who suffer grave socio-economic, physical, and psychological consequences in conflict zones.[87] However, one should refrain from the tendency to view women in conflict merely as victims, since it overlooks their potential as agents of change in peace-building initiatives. A limited portrayal of women perpetuates stereotypes and hinders progress towards more inclusive and sustainable peace.[88]

While women and men have different experiences of war, the same is true for experiences of peace.[89] In the disciplines of international relations and peace studies, peace negotiations are generally understood as a series of socio-political agreements and actions designed to end armed conflicts and prevent their recurrence, with a history spanning over a century.[90] Women and girls are still excluded from conflict prevention and peace mediation efforts. Despite increased awareness and mobilisation at the local and international levels, there is still a lack of high-level leadership committed to integrate women's rights in Security Council negotiations and peace talks.[91]

Women can participate in peace processes in several ways. They might be delegates representing one side in the conflict, technical experts helping with the mediation process, or simply observers – either formally or informally. Their involvement can also be based on their belonging to specific groups (e.g., advocating for their ethnic group) or on broader issues, like promoting gender equality. When it comes to peace agreements, there's a difference between those that just mention the well-being of women and girls without giving clear instructions and

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[86] Gardam & Jarvis, 25–37.
[87] Gautam, Ryan, McAuliffe & Purandare (2023), 450–451.
[88] McKay, S. (2004). Women, Human Security, and Peace-Building: A feminist Analysis. Conflict and Human Security: A Search for New Approaches of Peace-Building, 19, 152–170.
[89] Kouvo, S., & Levine, C. (2008). Calling a Spade a Spade: Tackling the 'Women and Peace' Orthodoxy. Feminist Legal Studies, 16(3), 363–367.
[90] Galtung, J. (1984). There are alternatives!: four roads to peace and security / Johan Galtung. Spokesman, 19–32.
[91] Human Rights Watch. Women and Armed Conflict. Accessed 28.3.2024. https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights/women-and-armed-conflict

those that lay out specific actions to include women's voices in future decisions. These actions could include things like quotas for women in politics or special roles on commissions that oversee peace agreements or making sure that issues related to gender are considered in the work of bodies like truth commissions.[92]

When women's voices are included and valued in peace processes, essential priorities that might otherwise be overlooked often find representation. Key issues, such as expanding women's roles within the civilian, military, and police sectors of peacekeeping operations, gain attention and implementation. In cases where this has occurred, the presence of women has strengthened community relations, a critical factor for the success of peace interventions. However, women are still frequently excluded from post-conflict rehabilitation programs aimed at reconciliation, which provide vital support in areas such as education, healthcare, land access, and credit.[93]

It's been criticised how programs created to advance women's inclusion in reality lack the key component that is the voices of local women who know how to navigate the country's male-controlled society. Women's rights should be at the centre of peace and security planning, but despite the recognition, the reality of war-fighting bureaucracy leaves women's rights as an afterthought.[94] In Afghanistan, women were excluded from eighty per cent of peace negotiations between 2005 and 2020. The negotiations for the Doha agreement in 2020 excluded Afghan women completely and did not contain a single reference to women or the safeguarding of women's rights.[95]

A clear understanding of women's realities during war and conflict is essential to fully grasp the arguments presented in this thesis. Equally important is recognising what is at stake when women are excluded from peace processes. Women face systemic disadvantages both during armed conflict and in the subsequent peace negotiations. Despite frameworks like UNSCR 1325, meaningful progress in women's rights – whether in war or peace – will only be achieved when the Resolution is comprehensively implemented, ensuring that it is women's inclusion in peace processes that becomes the rule rather than the exception.

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[92] Goetz, A. M., & Jenkins, R. (2016). Agency and Accountability: Promoting Women's Participation in Peacebuilding. Feminist Economics, 22(1), 218.
[93] Heyzer, N. (2005). Women, War and Peace: Mobilizing for security and Justine in the 21st Century (in Felix Dodds and Tim Pippard eds.). Human & Environmental Security: An Agenda for Change, 58.
[94] Scharff, X. (2023). America Is Again Failing Afghanistan's Women – and Itself. Foreign Policy, Argument, 8.2.2023. Accessed 2.4.2024. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/08/united-states-afghanistan-taliban-women/
[95] Bahous (2023).

2.2 Resolution 1325

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 together with its nine subsequent resolutions make up the cross-cutting Women, Peace and Security agenda, which is a significant international normative and policy framework that addresses the gender-specific impacts of conflict on women and girls.[96] The adoption of this landmark resolution was the result of the lobbying from dozens of women's organisations, a couple of NGO's and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)[97].[98]

Resolution 1325 emphasises the need to increase women's involvement in preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts, as well as in all matters concerning peace and security. Adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, it carries the force of international law, obligating all UN member states to implement it. The Resolution builds on foundational documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Beijing Platform for Action. [99] It is further supported by nine subsequent UNSC resolutions – UNSCR 1820 (2009), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2010), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019) – that together form the WPS Agenda.[100]

The principal aim of the resolution is to enhance women's role and decision-making power in conflict prevention, conflict Resolution and peacebuilding and to improve women's security.[101] The Resolutions was made to maintenance international peace and security by reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding. It stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making regarding conflict prevention and resolution.[102]

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[96] Davies, S. E., True, J., True, J., & Davies, S. E. (2019). The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security (1st ed.). Oxford University Press, 4.
[97] UNIFEM was active from 1976 until 2010, when it became UN Women.
[98] Gumru & Fritz (2010).
[99] MFA Afghanistan (2015).
[100] USIP. What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security. United States Institute of Peace. Accessed 1.3.2025.
https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325
[101] MFA Finland (2023). Women Peace and Security: Finland's National Action Plan 2023-2027. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Print. Published 15.9.2023.
[102] United Nations (2000).

The Resolution recognises women's right to participate as active participants and decision-makers at all levels in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace-building processes. Further, the Resolution calls for all participants in peace negotiations "to adopt a gender perspective" and "express its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations." In this context, incorporating gender perspectives involves addressing the specific needs of women and girls in areas such as disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction.[103]

UNSCR 1325 has been described as vital for the fight for women's human rights for three main reasons. Firstly, the Resolution brought gender issues into the mainstream and provided the international community with a viable framework than can be adapted and used. Secondly, it identifies women as active agents rather than passive recipients – women's participation is a right, not something that men give women out of goodwill. Lastly, even though the Resolution is not legally binding, it is a Security Council resolution that passed unanimously and holds states and organisations, to some extent, liable to its recommendations. Additionally, this constitutes the first time that the UNSC devoted a whole session to debate women's experiences in conflict and peace – even though there had been resistance to previously discuss gender-based issues.[104]

For the advocates of Resolution 1325, it has been apparent from the get-go that the implementation of the Resolution would be an even more difficult task than getting it passed. Ever since the adoption of the Resolution feminists both inside and outside the UN have tirelessly strived to make the Resolution an ongoing commitment for the Security Council, rather than a one-time rhetoric gesture.[105]

Even though Resolution 1325 was adapted in 2000, women remain significantly underrepresented in peace negotiations. Research shows that women's influence on peace negotiations positively correlates with a higher likelihood of reaching sustainable peace agreements.[106] Yet, research has shown how policy and academic debates tend to focus on women's presence in peace processes, rather than their actual impact on them.[107]

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[103] Cohn, et. al. (2008), 185.
[104] Reda, L. (2018). UN Resolution 1325: Significant but lacking. Egypt Today. Published 6.3.2018. Accessed 15.9.2024. https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/44587/UN-Resolution-1325-Significant-but-lacking
[105] Cohn, et. al. (2008), 188.
[106] O'Reilly, Súilleabháin & Paffenholz.
[107] Paffenholz, T. (2018). Women in Peace Negotiations. Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiations, pp. 169–191.

2.2.1 National Action Plan

In 2004 the United Nations Security Council encouraged national-level implementation of UNSCR 1325, since according to the multilateral system, the Member States hold primary responsibility for the achievement of gender equality and fulfilment of human rights. The goal of National Action Plans (NAP's) is to implement the four pillars of the Resolution and encourage Member States to collaborate with civil society – especially with local women's networks and organisations – on the implementation of the Resolution.[108]

The NAP documents outline objectives and activates that countries take, both on domestic and international levels. The NAPs should secure the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings, prevent armed conflict and violence, and ensure the meaningful participation of women in peace and security. The first NAP was developed in 2005 and since then over a hundred countries have developed their own NAP's.[109]

As a UN member, Afghanistan is bound to uphold the principles of the UN Charter, treaties it has signed, and UNSC resolutions on women's rights. Afghanistan published the country's first ever National Action Plan in June 2015. The NAP was developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which served as the head of the Steering Committee that collaborated with other government agencies, civil society, and international organisations for the NAP's implementation and monitoring.[110]

The NAP was developed to address the unique challenges women face in the aftermath of war and conflict. The NAP emphasised how in a post-conflict Afghanistan, sustainable development would depend on equal access to opportunities and resources for both men and women. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2004–2021) vowed through their NAP to adhere to its women's rights obligations, and contribute to the maintenance of peace and security, to implement the Resolution.[111]

The twelve goals of Afghanistan's NAP included (1.) promoting women's involvement in decision-making roles within the Civil Service, Security, and Peace and Reintegration sectors; (2.) encouraging women's active participation in national and provincial elections; (3.) ensuring

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[108] WILPF. 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs): WILPF Monitoring and Analysis of National Action plans on Women, Peace and Security. Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org
[109] WILPF.
[110] MFA Afghanistan (2015).
[111] MFA Afghanistan (2015).

women's access to a fair and effective justice system; (4.) providing health and psychosocial support for survivors of sexual and domestic violence; (5.) protecting women from violence and discrimination, (6.) allocating resources for women-focused emergency activities; (7.) implementing policies for internally displaced persons under UNSCR 1325; (8.) ending impunity for violence against women (VAW) and related crimes; (9.) engaging men and boys in the fight against VAW; (10.) supporting and empowering civil society, especially women's organisations, on UNSCR 1325; (11.) enhancing economic security for vulnerable women through job opportunities; and (12.) increasing educational access for girls and women, particularly among displaced persons and returnees. [112]

Through these initiatives, Afghanistan's NAP aimed to build a more inclusive, safe, and supportive environment for women in the peace and recovery process. The NAP was meant to be implemented in two phases: 2015–2018 and 2019–2022.[113] Since the Taliban coup d´état in August 2021, the regime has neither carried out the second phase of the country's NAP to its term nor have they created a new NAP for the coming years.

2.3 Women's Rights in Afghanistan

The development of women's rights in Afghanistan throughout the 1900s, is marked by phases of progress and regression, deeply influenced by the political and social dynamics of each era. Each phase highlights the tension between progressive policies, often introduced by central governments, and the resistance from rural, traditionalist forces, illustrating the deeply fragmented approach to women's rights in Afghanistan over the century.

During the monarchy, progressive reforms were made to advance women's rights and gender equality. Early reforms (1880–1919) introduced progressive measures such as raising the marriage age, granting women rights to divorce and inheritance, and promoting education for girls as well as establishing the country's first girls' school. All which faced opposition from traditional tribal leaders. The king that reigned from 1919–1929 ushered in a particularly progressive period, advocating for women's liberation from tribal norms and well as banned child marriage, discouraged polygamy, promoted women's education, and allowed women to appear unveiled in public.[114] A new constitution in 1924 granted women the right to vote,

[112] MFA Afghanistan (2015).
[113] MFA Afghanistan (2015).
[114] Ahmed-Ghosh, H. (2003). A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan. Journal of International Women's Studies, 4(3), 3–5.

choose their partners, and abolished practices like bride trading.[115] However, these reforms that largely benefited urban women, alienated rural traditionalists, leading to his abdication in 1929 and the rollback of many rights.[116]

Women's rights saw a resurgence between 1933–1973 under another king, whose modernisation efforts included women's participation in the economy and politics. The 1964 constitution restored women's voting rights and opened opportunities in education, employment, and public life. The 1970s brought further progress with the rise of educated women and increased representation in universities and government. Reforms by the socialist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1978 focused on gender equality and compulsory education but faced resistance from rural leaders and mullahs[117], who saw these changes as atheistic and against tradition.[118]

The decade long Soviet-Afghan war (1979–1989) and the subsequent Afghan civil war (1989–1992) marked a turning point. The Islamist resistance group, Mujahideen who had been opposing Soviet forces during the Soviet-Afghan war, seized control of Kabul in 1992. The Mujahideen sought to undo socialist reforms, including those advancing women's rights. By the 1990s, Afghanistan entered a dark phase for women. The Mujahideen's rule (1992–1996) saw the erasure of women's rights, widespread violence, and destruction – the rule described as apartheid against women.[119]

The Taliban, meaning "students of religious studies," was formed in 1994 in Kandahar, Afghanistan, near the Pakistan border. The group originated when thirty madrassas[120] students rescued two kidnapped girls by attacking and killing a local field commander. After fleeing to Pakistan, their numbers grew rapidly, fuelled by recruits from refugee camps established during the Soviet-Afghan War. [121] Their influence expanded significantly, enabling them to seize Kabul and establish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. The group's ideology and

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[115] Central Asia Institute (2017). The Fight for Women's Voting Rights. Published 7.11.2017. Accessed 18.11.2024. https://centralasiainstitute.org/womens-voting-rights/
[116] Ahmed-Ghosh (2003), 4–5.
[117] An educated Muslim trained in religious law and doctrine, who usually holds an official post.
[118] Ahmed-Ghosh (2003), 4–6.
[119] Ahmed-Ghosh (2003), 6–7.
[120] Madrassa is a Muslim school, college, or university that is often part of a mosque.
[121] Physicians for Human Rights (1998). The Talibanís War on Women: A Healthy and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan. Boston and Washington, D.C. Report, 23.

values were shaped by their anti-Soviet stance and the influence of Pakistani training and education systems.[122]

The Taliban's rise in 1996 was initially warmly welcomed for its promise of peace and a modern state. The relief was short-lived, as the Taliban quickly broke their promises of peace and introduced restrictions that mostly affected women, including the enforcement of strict dress codes and the elimination of educational and social opportunities.[123] During the civil war, women had faced physical and sexual violence by the Mujaheddin, while the Taliban reign was characterised by their goal to erase women from all social, political and economic life, as well as from the streetscape.[124]

The Taliban reign ended abruptly in 2001, due to the United States invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion was a result of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the U.S., conducted by the terrorist organisation Al Qaida. The organisation had been partly operating from Afghanistan and in the aftermath of the attack and the U.S. had made numerous attempts to persuade members of the Taliban to hand over terrorist suspects. When non-violent negotiations failed due to the lack of cooperation from the Taliban, the U.S. quickly resorted to military means. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001, with the support of NATO and over forty Western allies, in pursuit of the "War on Terror". [125]

In efforts to increase public support for the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. framed the defence and protection of women's rights as a key policy objective.[126] President George Bush's administration argued that overthrowing the Taliban regime would restore these rights. President Bush never failed to mention the liberation of women as one of his moral ends.[127] The twenty-year-long operation was divided into two. Between 2001–2014, the U.S legitimised its military operations as "Operation Enduring Freedom," and from 2015–2021 as "Operation Freedom's Sentinel."[128] In late August 2021, the United States concluded its twenty-year war in Afghanistan, marking the longest conflict in American history.

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[122] Ibrahimi, S. Yaqub (2016). The Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001): 'War-Making and State-Making' as an Insurgency Strategy. Small Wars & Insurgencies. Ottawa, 953.
[123] Ahmed-Ghosh (2003), 6–7.
[124] Rostami-Povey, E. (2007). Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion. Zed Books, 26–28.
[125] Connah, L. (2021). US Intervention in Afghanistan: Justifying the Unjustifiable? University of Lancaster, 70, 72–73, 76.
[126] Connah (2021), 72–73.
[127] Wylie, G. (2003). Women's rights and 'righteous war': An argument for women's autonomy in Afghanistan. Sage Journals, Feminist Theory4(2), 217.
[128] Connah (2021), 70, 72–73, 76.

2.3.1 Efforts to Improve Women's Rights

The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan led to the creation of a diverse network of administrative expatriates, aid agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and ethical discourses into a nexus aiming to re-build the Afghan state and its institutions and economy. The collaborative governance in Afghanistan produced a new mode of governance operations within the liberal peace space.[129]

Since 2001, the status of women in Afghanistan did improve compared to the last decades of the 1900s, with greater access to education, healthcare, employment, justice, and basic rights. These advancements allowed Afghan women to engage more actively in public and political life. However, during this period, women did remain largely excluded from significant social and political spheres, including decisions concerning their security and well-being. Their participation in formal peacebuilding, the peace process, and security sector reform remained limited.[130]

The Afghan Government, through structures like the High Peace Council (HPC) and its Provincial Peace Committees, did emphasise the importance of women's involvement in peace efforts as a prerequisite for sustainable reconstruction. While only nine of the HPC's seventy members were women, seventy-one women served in Provincial Peace Committees across thirty-three provinces, signalling incremental progress. These structures made it evident that the government did recognise that durable peace and stability in Afghanistan hinged on women's active participation in political and social decision-making across all thirty-four provinces.[131]

UN agencies and the civil society in Afghanistan took upon themselves to create frameworks to help women better access decision-making and secure their rights to participate in all aspects of society. Already in 2002 UNIFEM began their work in Afghanistan to support the development, monitoring and implementation of policies that both protect and promote the rights of women. UNIFEM's missions in Afghanistan included supporting the development of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, the adoption of a quota in the national

[129] Sharan, T. (2023). Inside Afghanistan: Political Networks, Informal Order, and State Disruption (1st ed., Vol. 1). Routledge, 14–15.
[130] MFA Afghanistan (2015), 4–5.
[131] MFA Afghanistan (2015), 4–5.

constitution, laws and policies, to combat violence against women and girls at both national and local levels, and mainstream gender in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.[132]

With the support of UNIFEM, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and UN Development Programme women accessed the Constitutional loya jirga[133] – the Afghan grand council – and the registration process, which were vital for women's ability to exercise their rights. Post-Taliban, the loya jirga adopted the country's first constitution in 2004, which approved a presidential system for the Islamic republic and deemed women and men to have equal rights and duties before the law.[134]

Not only did UN agencies support the improvement of women's rights; the Afghan government demonstrated their commitment to addressing barriers such as cultural biases, insecurity, and harmful traditions while fostering gender-responsive reforms in governance, justice, and security sectors. The government's efforts aimed to establish legal and policy frameworks that would protect and empower women in conflict resolution and strengthen their presence in negotiations and the security sector.[135]

During 2001 to 2021, women's participation in the police, military, and civil service saw an increase. Yet, the number of women remained insufficient to meet the emerging needs. Encouragingly, the women who worked in these sectors did inspire others to join, which contributed to gradual cultural shifts.[136]

The international mission in Afghanistan was driven by military, economic, political and humanitarian goals. The international community was not one homogenic entity with one collective goal, rather the aims for the reconstruction efforts would vary depending on country-specific objectives. Some countries involved in the reconstruction and peacekeeping efforts would justify their involvement by the protection of the rights of women and girls. For example, the official aim of Finland was to build lasting peace in Afghanistan, and make sure that all human rights were respected and ensured by the government. Other countries, such as Norway,

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[132] UN Women. UN Women Engagement in Afghanistan. UN Women: Asia and the Pacific. Accessed 14.11.2024. https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/afghanistan/1/un-women-engagement-in-afghanistan
[133] Loya jirga means "grand council" in Pashto. It is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan.
[134] Heyzer (2005), 58.
[135] MFA Afghanistan (2015), 4–5.
[136] MFA Afghanistan (2015), 4–5.

would emphasise that their main objectives focused on counterterrorism, even though they were also part of efforts in advancing women's rights.[137]

In 2019, over three and a half million girls had enrolled school and women accounted for twenty-eight percent of the Afghan parliament.[138] There is place for credit to the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan that helped better women's rights. Women made enormous progress in Afghanistan after being re-integrated into society as equal citizens after the Taliban reign. Women had been included into society through participation in political, economic and social life, after the disenfranchisement of the 1990s. Yet, women's participation in security related institutions remained limited, as during the twenty-three rounds of peace talks between 2005 and 2014, women were included at the peace table only during two occasions.[139]

2.4 The Peace Process 2018–2021

For this thesis, the Afghan peace process is defined as the period from 2018 to 2021, as this timeframe marked the commencement of both the intra-Afghan negotiations and the U.S.-Taliban peace talks. However, it is important to note that during this period, there were also peace processes between the Afghan government and various Afghan political movements, which primarily focused on issues such as hostage exchanges. Despite these other efforts, this thesis centres on the two main peace processes: the intra-Afghan and U.S.-Taliban negotiations.

It is important to note that there were peace efforts prior to 2018 as well. When President Barack Obama came to office, there was a shift in the U.S. approach as they wished for direct talks with Taliban representatives in 2010. In late 2010, the first talks between the Taliban and U.S. began in Doha – focusing on hostage exchanges.[140] The talks went on until 2012, during which both Taliban and Afghan government representatives attended conferences. Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai (2004–2014) deplored the Taliban's involvement in such meetings, since it allowed them to opt out of bilateral negotiations. Karzai's successor, President Ashraf

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[137] Mustasilta, K., Karjalainen T., Stewart, T. R., & Salo, M. (2022). Suomi Afganistanissa 2001–2021. Finnish Institue of International Affairs, Report, issue 72, 100.
[138] GIWPS (2020). An Open Letter from World Leaders Calling for Afghan Women's Meaningful Participation in the Peace Process. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. Published 10.9.2020. Accessed 8.10.2024. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/an-open-letter-from-world-leaders-calling-for-afghan-womens-meaningful-participation-in-the-peace-process/
[139] A Programme of the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. Afghanistan. 1325 Naps. Accessed 11.5.2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/afghanistan/
[140] Brooking, S. (2022). Why Was a Negotiated Peace Always Out of Reach in Afghanistan? Opportunities and Obstacles, 2001–21. United States Institute of Peace, issue 184, 10–12, 14. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/pw-184-why-negotiated-peace-always-out-of-reach-afghanistan.pdf

Ghani (2014–2021), kept this approach. The difficult relations between the Afghan government, the U.S. and the Taliban led to the Taliban suspending peace talks in 2012.[141]

In 2013 the U.S. continued to engage and restart negotiations, which led to a prisoner exchange deal with the Taliban the following year. At this time, the attention of the international community and Afghanistan was on Afghanistan's presidential election – where President Ghani was elected. President Ghani strived to improve Afghan relations with Pakistan, to work toward a peace process. Other international actors were also interested in furthering peace efforts. For example, in 2015 there were efforts for intra-Afghan negotiations by the United Nations and China, as well as Pakistan and China. [142]

As allied troops had decreased their presence in Afghanistan in the early 2010s, the Taliban started to surge back and re-gain control of districts during 2015 and 2016. The resurge of the Taliban sparked discussion in Washington, that the war was unwinnable. By May 2018, the Taliban controlled half of the country's districts – while the number of international troops kept decreasing. From 2018, the new and last phase of peace negotiations commenced.[143]

In February 2018, President Ghani offered the Taliban an unprecedented chance for peace, proposing unconditional talks and recognising them as a political entity, with amnesty for fighters. The offer was soon after declined by the Taliban.[144] In July 2018, President Donald Trump appointed Zalmay Khalilzad[145] as a special envoy for Afghan peace talks and began direct talks with the Taliban, aiming to secure a withdrawal deal with or without the Afghan government involved in the process. President Trump's decision marked a significant shift from the U.S. policy of not engaging with the Taliban in peace talks without including Afghan government representation. Another significant shift was made, when the U.S. expressed their willingness to discuss a full withdrawal of its troops with the Taliban.[146]

In November 2018, Russia hosted an international peace conference, where Taliban representatives attended alongside Afghanistan's HPC, while the Afghan government was absent. This meeting symbolised progress in peace efforts, with key international players,

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[141] Brooking (2022), 14.
[142] Brooking (2022), 12–13.
[143] Brooking (2022), 12–13.
[144] Brooking (2022), 14.
[145] Zalmay Khalilzad had served as the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003–2005.
[146] International Crisis Group (2020). Afghanistan Peace Talks Since 2018: A Timeline. Interactive, Asia. Published 11.8.2020. Accessed 10.10.2024. https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/afghanistan-between-february-2018-and-august-2020-timeline

including Russia and the U.S., in attendance.[147] Later in 2018, Trump announced plans to withdraw half of the 14,000 U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan. The decision made without consultation, heavily weakened the U.S. bargaining position. This announcement further strained relations between the U.S. and its Afghan allies and underscored Trump's impatience to reduce the U.S. military footprint in the region.[148]

In early 2019, U.S.-Taliban peace talks began, aiming for an agreement on military withdrawal, counterterrorism, and a ceasefire. Pressure mounted on the Afghan government to form an inclusive negotiation team, ultimately including a small number of women.[149] A framework for the agreement emerged, leading to nine rounds of talks throughout the year.[150] However, disagreements and exclusions limited the Afghan government's involvement.[151]

In June 2019, the Intra-Afghan Dialogue saw eleven women participate, who engaged actively, even discussing women's rights with the Taliban. While Taliban negotiators appeared open in informal settings, they often dismissed or ignored women in formal sessions, revealing underlying resistance. Afghan women persisted nevertheless, determined to assert their presence.[152]

In February 2020, the U.S. signed the "Doha Agreement" with the Taliban, outlining a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops and a prisoner exchange between the Taliban and Afghan government.[153] This agreement included four parts: the Taliban's commitment to prevent terrorist groups from using Afghan territory, a U.S. troop withdrawal by May 2021, the initiation of intra-Afghan talks by March 10th, and a comprehensive ceasefire as a goal for the negotiations.[154]

The Afghan government resisted to comply to the prisoner exchange that had been promised by the U.S., causing immediate friction and delays to the intra-Afghan talks. The Taliban

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[147] BBC (2018). Afghanistan war: Taliban attend landmark peace talks in Russia. Published 9.11.2018. Accessed 11.10.2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46155189
[148] Brooking (2022), 15.
[149] Sarabi, H. (2024). Women and mediation in Afghanistan: Innovating for influence. Still time to talk: Adaptation on innovation in peace mediation. Conciliation Resources, Accord, Issue 30, 81–82.
[150] Brooking (2022), 15.
[151] International Crisis Group (2020).
[152] Sarabi (2024).
[153] Cordesman, A. H. (2020). *Afghanistan: The Peace Negotiations Have Become an Extension of War by Other Means*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. Published 28.10.2020. Accessed 7.10.2024. https://www.csis.org/analysis/afghanistan-peace-negotiations-have-become-extension-war-other-means
[154] Brooking (2022), 18–20.

responded by threatening to resume violence.[155] The participants of the intra-Afghan negotiations were set to discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms as well as completion and agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.[156] The deal caused frustration in Kabul, as it limited U.S. military support against Taliban attacks and excluded a ceasefire, which the Afghan government had pushed for.[157]

In September 2020, Afghan and Taliban representatives finally met to discuss a political settlement, though key differences persisted, including the Taliban's desire for the Hanafi school of law as the sole jurisprudence, excluding Shia considerations. As a result, negotiations stalled by the end of 2020. At this point the Taliban were in no rush with the impending U.S. withdrawal, and President Ghani anticipated a potential shift in U.S. policy with Joe Biden's inauguration – leading both sides to avoid substantive issues, awaiting changes in the U.S. administration, while violence continued across Afghanistan.[158]

In early 2021, the intra-Afghan peace negotiations continued amid escalating violence and political shifts. Both sides agreed on broad negotiation topics – security, political, human rights, refugees, humanitarian, and implementation – but clashed on priorities. The Afghan government sought a ceasefire, while the Taliban prioritised discussing an Islamic government. The Taliban stalled negotiations, by requesting to resolve all points of the Doha Agreement with the U.S. before resuming to their negotiations with the Republic, as a way of awaiting clarity on President Biden's stance on troop withdrawal.[159]

In March 2021, Russia hosted talks, attended by representatives from the Afghan government, Taliban, and international partners. The Afghan delegation included only one woman, Habiba Sarabi[160], highlighting the limited inclusion of women, which raised concerns among women's

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[155] Maley, W. & Jamal, A. S. (2021). Diplomacy of Disaster: The Afghanistan 'Peace Process' and the Taliban Occupation of Kabul. The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, Issue 17, 47–48.
[156] U.S. Department of State (2020). 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. United States Department of State. Published 29.2.2020. Accessed 9.10.2024. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf
[157] Brooking (2022), 19.
[158] Brooking (2022), 21.
[159] Brooking (2022), 23.
[160] Dr. Habiba Sarabi was appointed as the governor of Bamyan Province in 2005, which made her the first female governor in Afghanistan. Previously Sarabi had served as Minister of Women's Affairs as well as the Minister of Culture and Education. Later, Sarabi was one of the four women present at the intra-Afghan talks in Doha 2020. Sarabi was the only women present during the Moscow talks in March 2021.

rights activists.[161] Human Rights Watch criticised the lack of women's participation, warning it disregarded Afghan women's rights and contributions to peace.

> The minimal inclusion of women at the Moscow talks show an appalling disregard for Afghan women's struggle for over a decade to be full participants in peace processes as called for by the UN Security Council. […] Even the Afghan government's inadequate level of women's representation at the Doha meeting seems to have slipped away, as women have again been pushed aside and ignored.[162]

Biden's April 2021 announcement of a full U.S. troop withdrawal by September 11th emboldened the Taliban, while Afghan forces' morale declined. Despite efforts to hold peace talks, the Taliban were increasingly reluctant to negotiate, sensing a potential military victory. During the summer of 2021, the Taliban rapidly captured territories, and both sides were locked in a deteriorating peace process. The final intra-Afghan meeting was held on August 11th. The meeting focused on future talks, but days later, major Afghan cities fell to the Taliban, making further negotiations moot. President Ghani fled, the U.S. and allied forces scrambled to evacuate citizens and personnel, and Kabul fell to the Taliban without resistance on August 30th, marking the end of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the intra-Afghan peace process.[163]

Understanding the phases of the Afghan peace process is crucial to accurately assess the extent to which Resolution 1325 could have been implemented. As demonstrated, the intra-Afghan negotiations were significantly undermined by President Trump's policy of engaging in direct talks with the Taliban, which weakened the Republic's role. Agreeing to the Doha agreement forfeited the leverage that a sustained U.S.-backed intra-Afghan negotiation could have provided. The Doha Agreement ultimately sabotaged the potential for meaningful intra-Afghan talks. This chapter outlined the numerous negotiation forums and meetings that took place between 2018 and 2021 presented critical opportunities where women could have been meaningfully included in the peace process. It is essential to recognise the role of international actors in the peace process, as all participating Member States share equal responsibility for upholding and implementing Resolution 1325.

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[161] Salahuddin, S. (2021). Lone female negotiator 'surprised' at lack of women at Moscow Afghan talks. Arab News. Published 22.3.2021. Accessed 10.10.2024. https://www.arabnews.com/node/1829446/world

[162] Human Rights Watch (2021). Afghanistan: Women's Full Participation Needed in Talks. Published 22.3.2021. Accessed 10.10.2024. https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/22/afghanistan-womens-full-participation-needed-talks

[163] Brooking (2022), 25–27.

2.4.1 Afghan Women's Participation

When it came to the peace process, several women's organisations worked alongside the High Peace Council, especially after Afghanistan adopted its first National Action Plan in 2015. The organisations had funding from different countries and donor agencies and worked especially on peacebuilding and peace education in the rural areas and lobbied to bring more women into the peace process. However, the coordination was lacking between the organisations on how they could combine their efforts, and the government did not take the efforts of women or other civil society with required gravity. UNAMA as well as Finland, Canada and Sweden started to push the HPC on including women into the peace process.[164]

Women's rights activists in Afghanistan were worried about the Afghan government resisting including women in peace talks, while trading away women's rights to reach an accommodation with the Taliban. One goal of Afghanistan's NAP 2015 was to ensure women's effective participation in the peace process. However, the NAP lacked detail and was not meaningfully carried out. As a result, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission called for a minimum of thirty percent of negotiators to be women.[165]

Despite extensive advocacy work by Afghan women and the international community to include women in the peace process, they continued to be excluded during the spring 2021 negotiations. The exclusion of women indicated how neither the government nor the international community took the issue of women's inclusion seriously, which caused concern among women about the future of any peace with the Taliban.[166]

A notable case of neglecting women's participation in international peace negotiations was the Moscow Talks in 2021, where there was only one women part of the twelve-member delegation present at the meeting.[167] This woman was Habiba Sarabi, who included in her speech in a room full of men that:

> Women suffer the most from war, but why are we not considered in meetings such as this? It is unfortunately because we are still not part of a political party and… we are still not the leader of a military group that has power… which is why the

[164] Sarabi (2024).
[165] Human Rights Watch (2021).
[166] Rahmaty, M. (2021). The Exclusion of Women's Voices from Afghan Peace Talks Remains the Norm. The Global Observatory. Published 30.3.2021. Accessed 7.10.2024. https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/03/exclusion-womens-voices-afghan-peace-talks-remains-norm/
[167] Rahmaty (2021).

> host countries also don't consider women… [I am] thus requesting the hosts to take note of this in the future.[168]

Development aid donors to Afghanistan, as well as the international community who hosted peace talks, were often the ones who failed to promote including Afghan women. During the Moscow summit in March 2021, the donors didn't condemn the lack of women. However, an U.S. official stated that Washington had wished for more women present, and the EU tweeted about peace requiring inclusivity.[169]

The responsibility to promote women's inclusion was not solely the responsibility of the Republic or the Taliban, it was the responsibility of each, and every party involved. It was an issue that could and should have been actively encouraged and reinforced by the international community, particularly by the countries hosting and attending the meetings. However, mere rhetoric and symbolic commitments are insufficient to bring about a meaningful shift in how the international community includes women in peace and security. Simply committing to Resolution 1325 was not enough then and is not enough now.

[168] Rahmaty (2021).
[169] Human Rights Watch (2021).

3 The Analysis

The Security Council has expressed significant concern over the persistent barriers to women's participation and full involvement in peace processes. These concerns are highlighted in various resolutions, including Resolution 1820 (2008), which acknowledges the "persistent obstacles and challenges" women face. The Council has also noted that limited implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda negatively impacts "durable peace, security, and reconciliation" as stated in Resolution 1889 (2009). To address these issues, the Security Council has called for greater commitment from the UN and member states to implement the WPS agenda, emphasising the need for "more systematic and concrete reporting" and urging "women's full and meaningful participation and leadership" in efforts to maintain peace and security.[170]

Major policy forums and open debates on WPS have consistently called on states and international institutions to strengthen their commitments to the agenda. This repetition is essential because achieving the core goals of WPS – preventing conflict and promoting peace through women's participation – is complex and requires long-term efforts. The WPS agenda operates on multiple levels, from institutional frameworks to localised contexts, and intersects with other international priorities, creating a dynamic and evolving field.[171]

The challenge lies in measuring progress across diverse settings, from UN headquarters to on-the-ground peace operations, while addressing the implementation gaps identified by the Global Study (2015). Ensuring these gaps receive the same attention as areas that are more easily adopted remains critical to advancing the WPS agenda.[172] Although the Security Council has repeatedly expressed concern over the implementation of Resolution 1325, the same challenges identified in earlier critiques and the Global Study, persisted during the Afghan peace negotiations from 2018 to 2021. Despite acknowledging these obstacles, the UNSC reports from this period reveal the recurring shortcomings.

As earlier stated, there are multiple reasons why the implementation of UNSCR 1325 remains inadequate – including criticisms of the Resolution's viability as a framework. This study, however, focuses on two specific aspects. First, it examines how the language in the UNSC reports on Afghanistan (2018–2021) undermines the Resolution's pillar on participation by

[170] Davies & True (2019), 4.
[171] Davies & True (2019), 4.
[172] Davies & True (2019), 4.

consistently portraying women as victims of conflict. Second, it addresses the tokenism inherent in the Resolution by analysing how the pillar on participation is superficially implemented during the peace process based on the reports.

The analysis of this thesis was conducted using a deductive QCA, in which Resolution 1325 and the eight UNSC reports were examined to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. After collecting the data, I interpreted its significance using predefined categories: victimisation and tokenism. I systematically gathered all instances from both the Resolution and reports that either victimised women or demonstrated the tokenistic implementation of the Resolution. I began by identifying subcategories in the Resolution, which served as a foundational framework for the analysis – if the themes exist in the Resolution they could be found reflected in the reports.

I analysed the reports chronologically, labelling relevant points under either category – or both. I then examined how subcategories, such as the lack of concrete action by the international community and the Afghan government, were evident in the reports. The most relevant and strongly re-occurring points were selected for the final analysis. However, some predefined subcategories based on the Resolution were not reflected in the reports at all. For instance, the emphasise on "the special needs of women and girls" was initially considered a subcategory of victimisation but it was not echoed in the reports. Most subcategories emerged organically during the analysis, derived from recurring meaning units under victimisation and tokenism. For example, the subcategory of women's agency within informal systems was established when it became evident that the Resolution's tokenism was reinforced by the absence of concrete action to include women in formal peace processes, while women's participation was highlighted in informal efforts.

This approach has allowed for a comprehensive analysis of how the language of Resolution 1325 is reflected in the UNSC reports. It also provided a nuanced examination of how the Resolution's pillar on participation is undermined by the persistent portrayal of women as victims and its inherent tokenism – both evident in the victimisation of women and tokenistic implementation of the Resolutions during the Afghan peace process. Lastly, this methos allowed for a critical assessment Resolution 1325's viability as a framework in a contemporary peace effort involving both national and international actors.

3.1 Victimisation and Tokenism in the Resolution

The Resolution that is meant to empower women's participation, victimises women through its language, while the lack of accountability mechanisms and the Resolutions vague and ambiguous language allows member states to only symbolically adapt NAPs and the WPS agenda. To analyse how the victimisation of women and the tokenism of the Resolution defeat the implementation of UNSCR 1325 pillar on participation in the context of the 2018–2021 Afghan peace process, it is essential to first identify these shortcomings within Resolution 1325 itself.

The Resolution places strong emphasis on the need for conflicting parties to uphold humanitarian law as a means of safeguarding the rights of women and girls during and after conflict. However, its language reinforces the notion that women are primarily in need of protection, framing them as passive recipients rather than active agents. By portraying women as subjects of protection, the Resolution reduces their agency, making it contingent on the actions of others. This emphasis on protection further positions women as mere victims of violence, whose human rights are not inherent but rather granted or taken away by external forces. This framing of women in need of protection is very evident in the UNSC reports on Afghanistan as is shows later in Chapter 3.2.1.

> *Recognizing* that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security;[173]

It should however be mentioned that women are described as combatants once. The Resolution encourages those involved in peace efforts to take into consideration the different need of female and male ex-combatants. However, limiting women's roles to either victims or combatants continues to impose a narrow framework on their agency. Furthermore, the Resolution undermines women's agency by grouping women and girls into a single category. While it is true that women and children constitute the majority of civilian casualties in conflict,[174] adults and children have fundamentally different roles and capacities in war and should be addressed separately in such resolutions. The language in the Resolution does not implicate that children should bear the same responsibilities as adults in conflict, rather it

[173] United Nations (2000).
[174] Gardam & Jarvis, 21–25.

suggests that women are as vulnerable as children, which removes women of their agency and credibility as decision-makers.

Moreover, the Resolution describes the needs of women & girls as “special needs,” suggesting the needs of men to be the norm. After a conflict, the international community often reacts with a sense of urgency, which tends to overlook or push aside women's needs. Issues like physical security, resettlement, access to decision-making, land rights, health, and reproductive care are often categorised as "special needs." These are usually underfunded and given low priority. By sidelining these concerns, the international community contributes to harmful backlashes against the rights and progress women have made, as seen in various post-conflict countries.[175] Additionally, “special needs” is a very vague terminology, which content is left open for interpretation.

Even though the Resolution uses the term “special needs of women and girls” on a few points, the UNSC reports do not repeat it. Resolution 1325 has been re-evaluated by the Security Council through the nine-follow-up resolution that they have adopted since 2000 and the Global Study on the implementation of the Resolution in 2015. When examined, none of the nine subsequent resolutions mention the “special needs of women and girls.” Nevertheless, other terminologies concerning the implementation of Resolution 1325 has been maintained by the Security Council as can be seen in the SC reports from 2018–2021.

While Resolution 1325 was unanimously adopted, it has been criticised for its ambiguous language, which allows for varied interpretations and makes effective implementation challenging. Its comprehensive scope includes numerous interventions, many of which are unrealistic. This lack of clarity also leaves donors uncertain about which objectives their funding supports. Although the Resolution has contributed to the emergence of norms over time, the absence of accountability mechanisms significantly weakens its impact. Critics argue that the Resolution may represent a symbolic gesture by the UN Security Council to include women in security politics, rather than a concrete commitment to actionable change.[176]

This tokenism is evident in the Resolution's vague language, lack of implementation tools, and failure to hold member states accountable for non-compliance. The Resolution states its goals through words such as: *recall*, *bear in mind*, *express concern*, *reaffirm*, *stress*, *emphasize*,

[175] Willett (2010), 156.
[176] Reda (2018).

recognize, *note*, *urge*, *encourage*, *request*, *call on*, *call upon*, and *invite*. Through the used language, the Resolution does not demand or require from the member states anything.

> *Urges* Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;[177]

Lastly, I want to highlight a positive outcome of the Resolution. It is important to acknowledge that Resolution 1325 encourages Security Council missions to engage with both local and international women's groups. As demonstrated in Chapter 3.3.3, the reports confirm that this principle was effectively applied during the Afghan peace process from 2018 to 2021. Women's rights organisations and groups successfully engaged with local women to understand their wishes and concerns regarding the peace process and an eventual peace agreement. This aspect of the Resolution's implementation can be regarded as a success in the context of the Afghan peace process.

3.1.1 The Global Study and Subsequent Resolutions

As this thesis focuses on the critique of UNSCR 1325, efforts by the United Nations to re-evaluate and more efficiently implement the Resolution must be highlighted. As mentioned in Chapter 3.1, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (2007–2016) commissioned a Global Study on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2015. The aim of the study was to assess the progress, challenges and impact of the Resolution. The study was meant to create a roadmap for more inclusive, effective, and transformative implementation of the Resolution. The Global Study showed how the Resolution has catalysed significant progress but also revealed substantial gaps that hinder its full implementation.[178]

The study highlights notable achievements, including increased global awareness of women's roles in peace and security. However, more notably, the study identifies significant challenges that undermine the Resolution's impact. Women's inclusion in peace processes remained largely symbolic, with little real influence on decision-making. Efforts to implement the Resolution were critically underfunded and a tendency to focus on security-related activities in

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[177] United Nations (2000).
[178] UN Women (2015). Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. United Nations. Accessed 5.12.2024. https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/globalstudywps_en_web.pdf

the implementation, neglecting the root causes of conflict and the structural inequalities that perpetuate instability.[179]

The study also criticised the one-size-fits-all approach often used in applying the Resolution, which is rooted in Western frameworks. This approach fails to account for the diverse identities, experiences, and priorities of women, particularly in the Global South. To address all these gaps, the study called for several key actions such as increased women's leadership, strengthened funding for gender equality programs, the creation of accountability and monitoring mechanisms, localised approached that considered country-specific needs and a shift away from militarised responses to conflict.[180]

As demonstrated in the Afghan peace process, the Resolution failed to serve as an effective framework for ensuring women's inclusion and rights. While the Global Study provides valuable insights into how the Resolution could and should be implemented, its application during the 2018–2021 Afghan peace process remained inadequate. This raises the question of whether the Resolution is only effective in theory but fails as a practical framework for peace.

In addition to the Global Study, the Security Council has strived to reinforce the implementation of the Resolution through subsequent resolutions. Between 2008 and 2019, the Council adopted nine additional resolutions to build upon and reinforce its principles. The follow-up resolutions have for example engaged in critically reviewing the vague language of the Resolution.

Interestingly, the language in the Resolutions adopted after UNSCR 1325 have been more assertive, using words such as *demand*.[181] Additionally, dismissive terms like "special needs of women and girls" have been left out of all subsequent resolutions. Therefore, it cannot be stated that the Security Council has not strived to more efficiently implement and re-evaluate the language in the Resolution, nevertheless, nine out of ten resolution that follow Resolution 1325 had been adopted before the Afghan peace negotiations began in 2018. Yet, the language in the reports from 2018–2021 mimic the majority of the language used in Resolution 1325 from 2000, rather than the language of the subsequent resolutions. Therefore, I have found that Resolution 1325 remains the most relevant and impactful resolution on women, peace and security, since its adoption.

[179] UN Women (2015).
[180] UN Women (2015).
[181] For example: Resolution 1820.

3.2 Victimisation in the Reports

The orthodoxy of the international women and conflict discourse perceives women as unquestionably peaceful actors, which must be and has been questioned.[182] Women's agency in the context of war has historically been framed through deeply gendered narratives. Efforts to advocate for greater involvement of women in peace and security work often rely on a gendered understanding of women's agency, portraying them as inherently peaceful. This perception is rooted in societal expectations tied to women's traditional roles or their biological capacity for maternity. Such interpretations have shaped transnational feminist pacifism for over a century.[183]

Women and girls are particularly at-risk during conflict, often targeted as "bearers of cultural identity." This leads to horrific abuses, including rape, forced displacement, trafficking, sexual slavery, forced abortion, and intentional transmission of STIs. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that women are not merely victims; they also participate actively in conflicts and play significant roles in the post-conflict phase, driving social change as well as promoting stability and inclusive governance.[184]

In Afghanistan's case, women have been symbolised in international media through two predominant narratives. On one hand, they are celebrated as active role models or heroes, exemplified by figures like Niloofar Rahmani, the first female pilot in the Afghan Air Force, and Malalai Joya, a parliamentarian who courageously defended women's rights against opposition from former warlords. On the other hand, Afghan women are often depicted as passive victims, such as Farkhunda Malikzada, a 27-year-old lynched by a mob in Kabul in 2015, or Aisha Mohammadzai, whose mutilated face appeared on the cover of Time magazine in 2010 as a symbol of Taliban brutality.[185]

This binary narrative, imposed by international media, offers an oversimplified view of Afghanistan's complex reality. Women in blue burqas are often used as symbols of repression and stagnation, while "strong" Afghan women are framed as harbingers of change and hope. This dichotomy not only obscures the diverse experiences of Afghan women but also provides a convenient framework for Western politicians to highlight progress in women's rights as a

[182] Kouvo & Levine (2008), 363–367.
[183] Goetz & Jenkins (2016), 214.
[184] Gumru & Fritz (2010).
[185] Kamminga (2019), 106–107.

success of international reconstruction efforts from 2001 to 2021. Such framing risks legitimising entire political or military interventions under the guise of advancing women's empowerment.[186]

This thesis identifies three key categories of how victimisation of women is echoed in the UNSC reports on Afghanistan based on Resolution 1325. The first subchapter examines how the reports frame women as passive agents, excluded from conflict as perpetrators but prominently featured as victims. The study has found that the reports emphasise the importance of protecting women during conflict as a means to secure their participation in the peace process and safeguard other rights. Even though the victimisation of women hinders their agency as active participants in both war and peace efforts.

The second subchapter has found how the reports group women with girls or children, reducing women to a civilian status characterised by vulnerability, comparable to that of children. This grouping further entrenches the perception of women as victims of war. Which then reinforces the challenge of achieving true gender equality in conflict and peacebuilding narratives.

The third subchapter examines how women's active agency through their occupations or agency are portrayed in the reports. Women's active roles in conflict and peace efforts are acknowledged only five times. This underscores the limited and selective recognition of women's agency in the reports, which largely depict women as a homogenic entity of passive victims in need of protection.

These narratives reflect the broader language and framing established by Resolution 1325, which ties women's agency in conflict to their status as victims requiring protection. Consequently, during the 2018–2021 peace negotiations, women were predominantly portrayed by the international community through a narrow lens, as either victims or heroes – most often as victims. This limited framing undermines meaningful inclusion in the peace process, contradicting the Resolution's goals of comprehensive participation.

3.2.1 Protection Equals Participation

UN peacekeeping documents often frame women as vulnerable individuals, frequently associating them with children. This portrayal undermines women's agency, positioning them as victims rather than active participants or agents of change in post-conflict settings. The

[186] Kamminga (2019), 107.

adoption of Resolution 1325 does little to disrupt the male-dominated power structures, presenting gender mainstreaming as a depoliticised, superficial activity rather than a transformative process.[187]

The reports interestingly link the protection of women to ensuring their meaningful participation in peace and security processes.[188] This need for protection is sometimes emphasised for female journalists, media workers, and government officials, highlighting the importance of safeguarding these groups from targeted attacks to foster broader female participation in the peace process.[189] However, more often the reports discuss all Afghan women as one entity, in need of protection in order to access the peace process.

> 60. Protecting women from violence and holding perpetrators to account are essential to ensuring women's meaningful participation in socioeconomic, political, peace and security processes. […] [190]

The reports are shown to consistently portray women as one homogenic entity, primarily as civilians in need of protection.[191] All reports from 2018 to 2020 reference women in the context of protection, mentioning it a total of twenty-one times. However, neither of the 2021 reports address women in this regard. Nevertheless, the reports largely fail to go beyond gender as the sole descriptive category, neglecting to address other intersecting factors such as class, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status that influence women's experiences and vulnerabilities in conflict. This narrow framing limits a comprehensive understanding of the diverse roles and needs of women in peace and security efforts.

While protecting women's rights is undeniably important, the repeated use of terms like "protect" positions women as passive recipients, often equating them with civilians in need of safeguarding.[192] This creates a narrative where women's rights appear conditional, bestowed by society or men, who thereby hold the power to revoke them. This raises a critical question: are women's rights not inherent and inalienable? If men's rights were at risk, would they similarly be framed as needing protection – and if so, who would be tasked with safeguarding them?

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[187] Puechguirbal, N. (2010). Discourse on Gender, Patriarchy and Resolution 1325: A Textual Analysis of UN Documents. International Peacekeeping (London, England), 17(2), pp. 172–187.
[188] For example: June 2019, Observations VIII(60)
[189] For example: June 2019, VIII(61)
[190] June 2018, Observations VIII(60).
[191] For example: December 2020, Observations VIII(76)
[192] For example: February 2019, Human rights III(35)

Why and how women access formal decision-making processes is important – whether if women gain access primarily due to the idea of their "natural instinct for peace-making" or in quest for equality with men – since the reason will affect the scope of political agency women are allowed.[193] When addressing women's inclusion in the peace processes, the reports often convey a tone that implies male dominance over whether women are "allowed" to participate, treating male attendance as the norm and female involvement as a concession.[194] Such language frequently frames women's rights and access to peace processes as something granted by others, rather than inherent.

This language reinforces a dependency dynamic, reinforcing unequal power structures rather than recognising women as active and autonomous participants in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. When women are described as active agents in the reports, it is framed through actions that must be taken to "make" them active, often through the practice of protection.[195] This framing implies that women's participation is not an inherent right but something that can only be granted through frameworks like the National Action Plan, laws such as the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, or resolutions like UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, that protect those women wishing to participate in formal decision-making.[196]

Despite Resolution 1325 acknowledging the gendered nature of conflict, peace processes often overlook the distinct experiences of men and women. Women are excluded as active participants and viewed primarily as victims, while their roles as combatants or leaders are ignored.[197] Assumptions that women are inherently more peaceful than men also obscure their roles as warriors or family heads during wartime and fail to recognise men and boys as victims of conflict. [198] This exclusion reflects systemic inequalities in access to political institutions and power structures. Even after peace agreements, issues like gender-based violence frequently escalate, challenging the stability and equality of post-conflict societies.[199]

The inclusion of women in decision-making alone cannot transform gendered power structures, therefore women's presence must be empowered, allowing them to challenge militarism and introduce alternative views previously dismissed as weak. To achieve this, representations of

[193] Otto (2006), 135.
[194] For example: March 2021, Observations VIII(69).
[195] For example: February 2019, Human rights III(34).
[196] For example: February 2018, Observations VIII(57).
[197] Akbari & True (2024), 3.
[198] Willett (2010), 155.
[199] Akbari & True (2024), 3.

women must move beyond narrow, biologically defined roles and rework identities tied to victimhood, maternity, or imperialist ideas. Women's solidarity for peace should draw on their agency and a nuanced understanding of gender as a social construct, challenging the dominance of male protectors.[200]

It is important to note that formal negotiations of the Afghan peace process did not involve just any citizens; the four women selected as negotiators on the Republic's team held significant roles in Afghan society. These women included a former governor, a minister, and a vice-presidential candidate; the president of the Afghan Red Crescent Society; a journalist and member of parliament; and a deputy speaker of parliament who was also recognised as a Nobel Peace Prize favourite. These were not ordinary women but highly active members of Afghanistan's social, economic, and political spheres.[201]

Despite this, the reports reinforce the idea that gender often remains the primary lens through which women are described in UN documentation.[202] The reports fail to elaborate on the societal roles or professional accomplishments of these women, instead grouping them into a single category defined by their gender.[203] This oversimplification obscures the complexity and diversity of women's contributions and needs within the peace and security process.

In conclusion, the reports and policies addressing women in peace and security processes reveal a consistent portrayal of women as vulnerable individuals needing protection. While frameworks like UNSCR 1325 and national action plans aim to promote women's inclusion, their language reinforces women's dependency and victimhood rather than recognising their inherent rights and agency.

The inclusion of women in peace negotiations, while symbolically significant, is often framed as a concession rather than a right, perpetuating male-dominated power structures. These narratives obscure the diversity and active roles of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, reducing them to a homogenous category defined by gender. Despite progress, such as the inclusion of accomplished Afghan women in negotiation teams, reports fail to

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[200] Otto (2006), 174.
[201] Qazi, S. (2020). Who are the Afghan women negotiating peace with the Taliban? Aljazeera, Features. Published 7.10.2020. Accessed 29.11.2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/7/who-are-the-afghan-women-negotiating-peace-with-taliban
[202] Pratt, N. & Richter-Devroe, S. (2011). Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 13(4), 494.
[203] June 2020, Observations VIII(73).

adequately highlight their societal roles or achievements, focusing instead on their gender and therefore need for protection.

Moreover, the reports lack intersectional analysis, neglecting how factors like class, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status shape women's experiences. By equating gender with victimhood, these documents perpetuate essentialist notions and fail to address systemic inequalities that exclude women as active participants in peace processes.

3.2.2 Women and Girls

Gender is often mistakenly equated with sex, which refers to the biological distinction between male and female. In reality, gender encompasses a socially constructed set of characteristics, including norms, roles, and behaviours associated with women and men.[204] Resolution 1325 perpetuates the conflation of gender with sex, categorising women based on their biological identity but labelling it as "gender." This is echoed in the reports, where "women" are treated as a distinct category defined by "gender."[205]

By grouping women into a singular, homogeneous entity based on gender, the reports strip women of their individual agency. They portray women as a group in need of protection from external perpetrators, with their rights safeguarded by those in positions of power – both categories existing outside the defined group of "women." This categorisation is problematic because it frames women's agency solely through their femininity and defined by their societal roles as women. This perception shapes expectations about their roles and capabilities, where traditionally male-dominated fields (e.g., political leadership) are valued more highly than traditionally female-associated areas (e.g., education or healthcare).[206] These fields, roles and institutions vary depending on the country or regional context.

Women in post-conflict reconstruction have often lacked the ability to define their own roles, with societal expectations such as being "preservers of the bloodline" increasing their vulnerability to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). CRSV, which encompasses violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, has been a focus of international policies since the late 2000s, recognising it as a potential tactic of war. However, these efforts have been criticised for stripping agency from women survivors by categorising them as victims alongside

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[204] Peterson, V. S., & Runyan, A. S. (1993). Global gender issues / V. Spike Peterson. Anne Sisson Runyan. Westview Press, 17–18.
[205] For example: June 2018, Observations VIII(60).
[206] Peterson & Runyan (1993), 17–19.

children and the severely disabled, implying their need for indirect representation rather than self-advocacy.[207]

The reports prove how UN documents associate women with "girls in need of protection,"[208] reinforcing a limited perception of women's agency in both conflict and peace. As discussed, women are often lumped together with another generalised category, "girls" or "children," further diminishing their distinct identities and roles.[209] Here again, the reports echo the language of Resolution 1325. This conflation appears repeatedly in the reports, even in situations where women and children could be more appropriately described as distinct categories.[210]

In the reports, women are often grouped with children in discussions of civilian casualties and human rights violations, or with girls in the context of violations against women's human rights. In both cases, this framing reinforces the perception of women as victims, equating their vulnerability in conflict to that of children.

> 75. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict, with women and children comprising more than 4 of every 10 civilian casualties recorded. […] [211]

The reports highlight efforts to protect women's rights through the implementation of laws in Afghanistan, such as the "Anti-Harassment of Women and Children Law" from 2017.[212] Such laws emphasise how violence against women persists, with limited access to justice and redress for victims. Laws have been framed as tools to reduce violence against women and improve their access to justice and support. However, many of these laws are broadly applied to both women and children or women and girls, further reinforcing the tendency to group women with more vulnerable populations.[213]

The reports' updates on human rights and violations against women's rights are always categorised as "violence against women and girls," usually establishing numbers on the amount of murder, harassment or annoyance, rape, injury and disability forcing into self-immolation or suicide, forced marriage and child marriage, and CRSV during the reporting period. Moreover, the reports note how crimes of violence against women and girls are still significantly

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[207] Goetz & Jenkins (2016), 215.
[208] Shepherd, L. J. (2008). Gender, Violence & Security: Discourse as Practice (1st ed.). NBN International, 87.
[209] For example: June 2019, Human rights III(35).
[210] For example: February 2019, Observations VIII(61).
[211] December 2020, Observations VIII(75).
[212] February 2018, Human rights III(27).
[213] Goetz & Jenkins (2016), 215.

underreported due to cultural barriers, security threats and widespread impunity, that continue to impede access to justice for victims of violent crimes.[214] Therefore, all reporting is important, even if the grouping of women and girls – or children – undermines each groups distinct experiences of war.

Even though the reports often categorise women and girls as one when presenting the number of violent crimes, women are often discussed as an own category in events aimed at protecting and promoting women's rights.[215] In other words, the reports by the Security Council categorise women and girls as one, while events in Afghanistan have shown to discuss women's rights as an own entity. The reports mimic the Resolution's way of categorising women and girls as one, while the activities provided by both local and international actors in Afghanistan have shown to discuss the rights of women separately and entirely as its own agenda.

In certain cases, it is logical to address issues affecting both women and girls together. For example, the June 2020 report highlights concern about their rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other things, the pandemic limited access to education for both women and girls and, as death tolls rose and the economy declined, their roles in traditional household work became increasingly significant. Furthermore, the pandemic and lockdown measures heightened the risk of domestic violence against women and girls as well as setbacks in other social, political and human rights.[216]

> 74. The spread of COVID-19 is having a devastating impact on women and could reverse the gains made with regard to their rights and freedoms. Lockdown measures to stem the pandemic are very likely to have increased levels of domestic violence, while access to justice and protection systems has decreased. Many women have lost their jobs as domestic labourers and handicraft workers and are at risk of losing their hard-won economic and social independence. […] I call on the Government to put women and girls at the centre of the response to COVID-19. That starts with women as leaders, with equal representation and decision-making power. […] To preserve and build on the gains made, I urge all stakeholders to ensure that COVID-19 does not divert funds and focus away from the implementation of the Afghanistan national action plan on women, peace and security, notably the meaningful participation of women in decision-making, peace and political processes.[217]

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[214] For example: December 2020, Human rights III(41).
[215] For example: December 2020, Political developments A(16).
[216] Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, UN Women (2020). *Issue XV: The impact of COVID19- on women and girls' education.* Gender Alert on Covid-19 Afghanistan. Published 1.10.2020. Accessed 7.12.2024. https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2020/10/af-Gender-Alert-Issue-15.pdf
[217] June 2020, Observations VIII(74).

The June 2020 report highlights an inconsistency in how women and girls are categorised. Women are treated as a distinct group when discussing the violations against their human rights as well as access to decision-making, and participation in peace forums. However, when Secretary-General Guterres calls on the Afghan government to prioritise women in the pandemic response, women and girls are grouped together. This example contrasts to some extent with the general pattern in other reports, since women and girls are more often categorised as one when discussing crimes against their rights, but women are treated as a separate entity when discussing the conflict's impact on their rights. However, the example accurately portrays the way the reports address women as an own group when measures to improve their rights are presented.

It must be noted that while the reports occasionally discuss women independently from girls, girls are not mentioned in any of the eight reports as an independent category. Even though women are sometimes presented as their own category, women are also actively grouped together with other entities than girls in the reports. The reports additionally affiliated women with "young people" or "ethnic-," "religious-," and "other minorities" or "vulnerable groups" such as "victims of war" or "persons with disabilities".[218]

> 69. All Afghan constituencies, including women, youth, minorities, victims of war and displaced persons, must have an opportunity to participate in the peace process. […] The United Nations will continue its work to ensure that the voices of all relevant constituencies, including marginalized groups, are heard.[219]

To conclude, the reports on Afghanistan reveal a recurring pattern of grouping women with children or girls, especially in contexts of civilian protection, human rights violations, and violence. This framing perpetuates a narrow perception of women's agency in conflict and peacebuilding, often equating their vulnerability to that of children. While there are instances where addressing women and girls together is logical – such as during the COVID-19 pandemic when both groups faced overlapping challenges – this approach frequently undermines women's independent roles and contributions.

Moreover, the reports reflect the influence of Resolution 1325's language, where women are often depicted as victims requiring protection, rather than as active participants in decision-making or peace processes. Although efforts to address women's rights are highlighted, including through laws aimed at combating violence and ensuring justice, these measures

[218] For example: December 2020, Observations VIII(76).
[219] March 2021, Observations VIII(69).

frequently conflate women's issues with those of other vulnerable groups, diminishing their distinct agency.

Ultimately, while the reports acknowledge the need for women's meaningful participation in peace and political processes, they largely frame this participation within the context of protecting their rights, rather than emphasising their inherent capacity as leaders and change-makers. This reinforces the broader challenge of achieving true gender equality in conflict and peacebuilding narratives.

3.2.3 Women as Active Agents

Previous research has called upon a better understanding of women's realities as not only victims, but also as actors in armed conflict. Many women have chosen to join political movements during conflicts, in roles such as activists, community workers, combatants, intelligence, nurses, porters, and cooks. Women can either join an existing group or form a new one. Becoming an active participant in war might be due to political conviction or affiliation or as a measure to seek protection from enemy forces.[220]

As outlined in Chapter 3.2.1, the reports predominantly portray women as passive agents – a homogenous group in vulnerable positions in need of protection. This framing suggests that women only gain access to decision-making institutions and -positions when their right to participate is safeguarded, implying that such rights are granted to them by the protectors.

Of the eight reports analysed in this study, women are predominantly discussed in relation to their conflict or peace related agency in only five instances. More often, they are portrayed as a unified group of victims. Although the reports vaguely acknowledge women through their civilian occupations as journalists, human rights advocates, and civil servants, they rarely highlight their agency – doing so in just five points. Interestingly, these mentions are situated in only three reports out of eight: February 2019, June 2020 and December 2020.

The first exception is found in the December 2020 report, which references female inmates with alleged ties to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan (ISIL-K). This exception acknowledges women's conflict-related agency and limits their portrayal to a specific category rather than recognising them as general combatants.[221] While this point mentions women in

[220] Heyzer (2005), 56.
[221] December 2020, Human rights III(44).

combatant roles, there is little detail about their agency – such as whether they were aligned with government or anti-government forces.

The second instance is found in the February 2019 report, where the Security Council acknowledges the work of Afghanistan's first-ever all-female demining team, who successfully cleared one of the last minefields in one of Afghanistan's provinces.

> 49. Also in November, the country's first all-female demining team successfully cleared one of the last minefields in Bamyan Province. The 13-member team released 51,520 m2 of contaminated land back to the community. […] [222]

Tokens can be described as individuals who differ from the majority and are defined by ascribed characteristics – such as gender, race, or religion – that come with cultural and behavioural assumptions. Their rarity forces them to symbolise their entire category, often labelling them as hyphenated members of society, like "woman-engineer" or "male-nurse". This symbolic status further isolates them, regardless of their personal choices or the organisational intentions.[223] This concept is evident in the reports through phrases like "all-female demining team" or "female journalist", which illustrate how women remain hyphenated members in both conflict and peace efforts, but also in their normal peace time roles.

The third instance is found in the February 2019 report that highlights a meeting that was held in Moscow between a ten member Taliban delegation and a number of Afghan political figures, with two women participating.[224] The fourth instance is from the same February 2019 report, where it states that the government issued a presidential decree establishing a thirty-three-member High Advisory Board for Peace, including two of women. Moreover, the composition of the board was predominantly government officials and political opposition figures, further highlighting the limited inclusion of women in key decision-making roles.[225]

The fifth instance is found in the June 2020 report that mentions the inclusion of four women in the twenty-one-member negotiation team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The inclusion of these four women was highlighted as a success in the progress of including women in the peace process.[226] Otherwise, the reports mention women and peace negotiation solely

[222] February 2019, Humanitarian assistance and refugees V(49).
[223] Kanter (1977), 968.
[224] February 2019, Political development A(7).
[225] February 2019, Political development A(8).
[226] June 2020, Political developments A(7).

through the statement that women should be included or through examples of how NGO's and UN agencies pursue to highlight the importance of including women.

> 15. […] In October, participants in a series of radio conversations supported by UNAMA in eight provinces discussed the importance of the inclusion and participation of women in areas of peace and security, stressing that women were skilled peace brokers, experienced negotiators and key to the success of any future political settlement. The Mission promoted support by international donors for these and other relevant programmes and activities.[227]

In the reports, women are frequently used as a distinct category, while men are primarily described through their roles as agents in conflict settings, either as perpetrators of violence or as contributors to peacebuilding efforts. Across all eight reports analysed, men are explicitly referenced as a group only twice: once when noting that the Taliban negotiation team consisted exclusively of men[228], and again when mentioning the appointment of new police officers, all of whom were male.[229]

Interestingly, the reports also include broader references to "all Afghan women and men" when addressing the protection and promotion of human rights. However, men as a category are mentioned far less frequently than women. Other categories, such as "young people" and "victims of war," appear more often than "men" in the reports, but still nowhere near as frequently as "women." This imbalance highlights the reports' focus on women as merely an homogenic entity within the broader conflict narrative, while men are discussed through their agency.

> 76. If the peace negotiations are to offer hope, they must bring a commitment by the parties to protect the human rights of all Afghans and uphold the international treaties to which the country is a party. […] Women, young people, civil society actors and victims of war must have opportunities to contribute meaningfully to every step of the process. […] I reiterate my support for the work of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in protecting and promoting the human rights of all Afghan women and men, including victims and vulnerable groups.[230]

In essence, while previous research emphasises the diverse roles women assume during war – ranging from combatants to activists and community workers – this diversity is largely ignored in the reports. Out of the eight reports analysed, only five instances acknowledge women as

[227] December 2020, Political developments A(15).
[228] December 2020, Political developments A(8).
[229] December 2020, Security B(23).
[230] December 2020, Observations VIII(76).

active agents – besides civilian occupations such as journalists or civil servants. In contrast, men are predominantly described through their agency in conflict, either as perpetrators of violence, as peacebuilders or the decision-makers of nations. Men as a distinct category are rarely mentioned, further reinforcing the reports' gendered imbalance.

This narrow focus on women as victims neglects the complexity of their roles and contributions, while simultaneously underrepresenting men and other intersecting identities within the broader conflict narrative. To advance inclusivity and equality, there is a need for a more nuanced portrayal of both women and men, recognising their diverse experiences and capacities in conflict and peacebuilding processes.

3.3 Tokenism in the Reports

Resolution 1325 acknowledges that women are disproportionately affected by wars and calls on all parties in armed conflicts to take special measures to uphold women's rights, protect them from gender-based violence, and ensure accountability for crimes committed against women and girls. Although the UN has officially pursued "gender mainstreaming" since 1997, Resolution 1325 marks the first significant effort to integrate gender considerations specifically into the areas of armed conflict and security.[231] However, feminist scholars have found that gender mainstreaming has largely fallen short of achieving genuine gender equality. Scholars attribute this not only to institutional and political resistance to altering entrenched gender dynamics but also to a lack of conceptual clarity regarding gender mainstreaming itself .[232]

Historically seen, women have been absent from formal negotiations and peace processes. However, their participation in informal processes has been more significant. Increasing women's representation in formal peace negotiations is essential to fulfilling the Resolution's call for women's full participation at all levels of peace-making and promoting sustainable peace. Achieving this requires concerted efforts to bridge the gap between formal and informal efforts. The UN Secretary-General has emphasised the critical role of mediators in peace negotiations, urging the United Nations to appoint more female mediators and establish a UNSCR 1325 directive that would strengthen connections between mediators, civil society, and

[231] Cohn, et. al. (2008), 185.
[232] Caglar, G. (2013). Gender mainstreaming. Politics & Gender, 9(3), 336–337.

women's organisations, fostering women's meaningful involvement at all levels of peace processes and ensure better integration of informal and formal efforts.[233]

The chapter begins by analysing how the implementation of Resolution 1325 pillar on participation has been realised in the reports. Chapter 3.3.1 finds how despite calls for an inclusive peace process, the actual representation of women in peace negotiations was minimal, underscoring the lack of concrete action to translate these commitments into reality. Efforts to involve women often resulted in token participation rather than genuine inclusion, as seen in the limited representation of women on advisory boards and negotiation teams.

Peace negotiations are officially called Track I and Track II peace efforts; however, this thesis uses the common terms used in other studies; formal and informal peace efforts. Chapter 3.3.2 delves into women's participation in the formal system, meaning peace negotiations involving the international community and Afghan government. While the reports highlight various efforts by the international community and Afghan stakeholders to include women in the peace process, the efforts often fell short of achieving genuine and meaningful participation. Women's involvement was largely facilitated through side events and informal forums, which, remained disconnected from the formal peace negotiations.

The last subchapter finds how the reports have highlighted women's agency outside the formal system, through informal peace efforts. While formal efforts by the Afghan government and the international community were often tokenistic and limited, Afghan civil society and women's organisations played a pivotal role in advancing women's participation in the peace process through informal efforts. Nevertheless, it remains essential to ensure women's access to formal peace processes in order to successfully implement Resolution 1325 and establish inclusive and sustainable peace.

3.3.1 A Wish Without a Will

The reports convey a strong desire to include women in the Afghan peace process, with the international community voicing support for negotiations where women and other marginalised groups could participate meaningfully. However, this support did not translate into sufficient

[233] Dayal, A. (2018). Connecting Informal and Formal Peace Talks: From Movements to Mediators. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. Published: October 2018. Accessed 12.12.2024. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Connecting-Informal-and-Formal-Peace-Talks.pdf

action. While the reports frequently highlighted the importance of involving women, there was a notable lack of concrete action to achieve this.

> 60. To be lasting, peace must be based on a broad consensus. Women must have full participation in the peace process, and the human rights of all must be guaranteed. The social gains of the past years must be preserved and built upon. […] [234]

Both international and national actors share responsibility for implementing the Resolution and ensuring women's participation. Post-war destruction of women's organisations necessitates targeted international support to enable their active involvement. This includes resources and opportunities for collective agency and access to decision-making forums. The lack of agreed methods and weak accountability mechanisms often results in token efforts rather than genuine inclusion.[235]

Resources and opportunities for women's collective agency remain insufficient or inconsistently allocated. In practice, mediation and reconstruction processes rarely offer women's organisations the structured, meaningful access needed to influence decision-making. While bureaucratic compliance with mandates might give the appearance of inclusion, it fails to translate into genuine representation or influence, reducing women's participation to symbolic gestures rather than substantive engagement.[236]

The UN Security Council expressed their support for the Afghan Government's peace offer to the Taliban in February 2018, in a Security Council press statement from March 2018. The statement by SC President Karel Jan Gustaaf van Oosterom called upon the Taliban to accept the offer without any preconditions and without threat of violence. Van Oosterom states that the member states underline the importance of an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process for the establishment of long-lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. The statement stresses that the Kabul process must respect equal rights of all Afghans, including women, under the Afghan Constitution. Van Oosterom concludes the statement by expressing the responsibility of UNAMA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to

[234] June 2019, Observations VIII(60).
[235] Goetz & Jenkins (2016), 231–232.
[236] Goetz & Jenkins (2016), 231–232.

provide their support for the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, if this is requested by the Afghan Government or someone in close consultation.[237]

The reports frequently emphasise the same desire for an inclusive, Afghan-led, and Afghan-owned peace process, as was expressed by van Oosterom. This same aspiration was expressed by both international and regional actors, including nations and institutions such as the EU and the UN, across various settings – ranging from bilateral and trilateral dialogues to conferences, peace talks, and statements from Secretary-General Guterres.[238] These repeated declarations reinforce the notion that the international community genuinely supported a peace process where women and other marginalised groups would be represented and heard.

> 24. This consensus on peace in Afghanistan was further strengthened at a conference held in Tashkent on 27 March, which was attended by high-level representatives of 23 countries, as well as the European Union and the United Nations. The participants reiterated their support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, leading to an inclusive peace agreement between the Government and the Taliban. […] [239]

However, the reports reveal a significant gap between rhetoric and action. While the international sphere consistently advocated for inclusivity, concrete efforts to ensure the participation of women and other groups in the peace process were largely absent. Russia serves as a notable example, publicly emphasising the importance of an Afghan-led and inclusive peace process yet failing to uphold this commitment. This contradiction was evident in the Moscow summit of March 2021, where women negotiators were excluded,[240] undermining the inclusivity of the intra-Afghan negotiations they purported to support.

The Resolution is weakened by its vague and ambiguous language, which complicates implementation efforts.[241] The reports have not escaped this shortcoming. For example, the reports' frequent reference to an "inclusive Afghan peace process" is left open to interpretation. This can be understood to mean the inclusion of women, youth, victims of war, and other marginalised groups that the reports highlight as at risk of exclusion from decision-making forums.

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[237] United Nations (2018). Security Council Press Statement of Kabul Process. Meeting Coverage and Press Releases. Published 15.3.2018. Accessed 25.11.2024. https://press.un.org/en/2018/sc13251.doc.htm
[238] For example: June 2020, Regional cooperation C(34).
[239] June 2018, Regional cooperation C(24).
[240] Human Rights Watch (2021).
[241] Reda (2018).

Moreover, the Resolution does not explicitly define what constitutes an “inclusive peace process.” While the concept of inclusion is somewhat understandable within the context, it lacks the precision that the terms "Afghan-owned" and "Afghan-led" have, which clearly refer to a peace process controlled by Afghans rather than international actors. This lack of clarity in peace processes weakens the Resolution's practical applicability and creates challenges for effective implementation.

Although the reports express a strong commitment to including women in the peace process, the lack of concrete implementation is evident in the actual representation of women in peace dialogue initiatives. The negotiating team that was announced after the November 2018 conference in Geneva included three women, but no civil society representatives. Additionally, women were excluded from the US-Taliban talks throughout 2019, as were issues of women’s rights, which lead to widespread concern among Afghan women that their human rights would be compromised for the sake of an agreement. [242]

The twenty-one-member negotiation team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, formed in March 2020, included representatives from various political and social constituencies, with only four women among them.[243] While the team was intended to be inclusive and aimed to represent the entire Afghan population, the participation of just four women – representing only nineteen percent of the team – underscored the inadequate inclusion of women. Considering that women make up half of the country’s population, this limited representation highlights the gap between the stated intention to include women in the peace process and the lack of genuine commitment to achieving meaningful gender inclusion.[244]

To summarise; the reports consistently highlight a strong desire to include women in the Afghan peace process, reflecting international and national actors' commitments to an inclusive approach. However, this commitment often remained rhetorical rather than practical. Despite calls for an Afghan-led and inclusive peace process, the actual representation of women in key decision-making roles and peace negotiations was minimal, underscoring the lack of concrete action to translate these commitments into reality.

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[242] A Programme of the Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom. Afghanistan. 1325 Naps. Accessed 11.5.2024. http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/afghanistan/
[243] A Programme of the Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom.
[244] June 2020, Political developments A(7).

The vague language of Resolution 1325 further compounded the challenge, as terms like "inclusive peace" lacked clear definitions, weakening their practical application. Efforts to involve women often resulted in token participation rather than genuine inclusion, as seen in the limited representation of women on advisory boards and negotiation teams. These shortcomings reveal a persistent gap between the aspiration for inclusivity and the structural and practical barriers that prevent its full realisation. There is a need for a more comprehensive and transformative approach to women's inclusion in peace-making processes. Women's voices need to be heard in both international formal peace negations as well as in local discussions concerning women's rights.

3.3.2 The Formal Peace Process

Earlier literature has argued that the gender mainstreaming within the UN assigns women a specific, constrained form of agency – one that situates them as objects in need of protection by men, rather than empowered actors. As a result, gender mainstreaming does little to disrupt the masculine and militaristic foundations of the UN's dominant discourse. Instead, it creates tokenistic spaces for alternative voices, presenting an illusion of inclusivity while silencing dissent and undermining women's agency. In this way, gender discourse has been subsumed into a hegemonic framework of masculinity, militarism, and war, limiting its transformative potential.[245]

Even though this was the case for the Afghan peace process as well, it is important to recognise that efforts were made to include women in the formal framework of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. More important, however, is examining the nature of these efforts and assessing whether they genuinely aimed to facilitate women's meaningful access to the formal peace process. The reports highlight instances where both the international community and the Afghan government took steps to promote women's inclusion in these negotiations.

Both the international community and Afghan stakeholders expressed aspirations for the outcomes of the intra-Afghan dialogue. Various forums allowed Afghans to articulate their hopes, which included a rapid reduction in violence; the preservation of civil, political, and socioeconomic gains – particularly for women, minorities, and vulnerable groups; guarantees of fundamental freedoms and equal legal protection; and participation in national and local

[245] Willett (2010), 144.

governance.[246] The Afghan government, for example, successfully established a leadership council for peace and reconciliation consisting of thirty-seven members, tasked with creating a politically inclusive advisory team for negotiations with the Taliban. This advisory team included twenty-two members, and while the report mentions that female representatives were part of the team, it does not specify their number.[247]

Additionally, the June 2019 report highlights the government's convening of a consultative loya jirga on peace in Kabul, which brought together more than three thousand delegates from across the country. This assembly aimed to include ex officio representatives, such as parliamentarians and members of provincial councils, with the objective of defining the parameters for negotiations with the Taliban. The jirga released a communiqué calling for many things, including the formation of an inclusive negotiating team, continued support from the international community and the preservation of human rights, particularly women's rights.[248]

Another instance of the government convening a consultative peace loya jirga is mentioned in the December 2018 report. On both occasions the Jirga emphasised the importance of women's rights and their participation in the peace process as key points of discussion.

> 7. In Kabul, from 7 to 9 August, 3,000 community representatives from across Afghanistan, including 700 women, gathered for the consultative peace loya jirga […]. On 9 August, the representatives adopted a resolution in which they […] called for the immediate start of negotiations, a ceasefire and the preservation of democracy, the constitutional republic and the basic rights of all Afghans, including women and minorities. […] [249]

While the loya jirga marked a step forward in incorporating women into the peace process, concerns remained among Afghans about how women would ultimately be represented. Many expressed doubts about the international community's commitment to upholding women's rights and ensuring their meaningful participation in the peace process. Despite participating in various platforms for peace, such as the National Jirga for Peace, women continued to face significant barriers. They lacked meaningful participation, decision-making power, and equal rights comparable to those enjoyed by men.[250]

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[246] June 2019, Observations VIII(60).
[247] June 2019, Political developments A(11).
[248] June 2019, Political developments A(11).
[249] December 2020, Political developments A(7).
[250] Azadmanesh & Ghafoori (2020).

Although the inclusion of women in formal peacebuilding efforts was limited, the reports highlight some noteworthy initiatives to involve them. These efforts were often led by the UN or a small number of countries engaged in Afghanistan's reconciliation process. For example, Finland, Afghanistan, and the United Nations jointly convened the 2020 Afghanistan Conference, which aimed to promote an inclusive peace where violence would cease, and women would play a meaningful role in the peace process. [251]

> 17. Coordination discussions by UNAMA with donors and partner organizations mobilized support and technical assistance for the peace process and negotiating teams, as well as the State Ministry of Peace. […] Donors and peace practitioners also coordinated support for women's participation in the peace process. On 10 March, the Permanent Missions of Afghanistan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, as co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, co-hosted, together with the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, a discussion at Headquarters entitled "A critical moment for Afghan women: the intra-Afghan peace process".[252]

As the example from the June 2020 report illustrates, most international cooperation in formal contexts focused on conferences, meetings and coordinating support for addressing Afghanistan's situation as well as strategies for achieving a peace process that is inclusive for women. When individual nations were involved, the reports indicate that their efforts were typically carried out in collaboration with the UN, the Afghan government, international institutes, local UN agencies such as UNAMA, or other local actors. This collaboration was essential to ensure that the peace initiatives adhered to the principle of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. However, it is important to note that this approach applied primarily to the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 2.2.2, the U.S.-Taliban negotiations were guided by the priorities of the two negotiating parties, rather than the broader objectives of inclusivity and Afghan ownership.

Resolution 1325 emphasises the importance of supporting local women-led peace initiatives.[253] The reports highlight instances where the international community made efforts to do so. These instances demonstrate that, at least in part, this aspect of the Resolution was implemented by fostering support for grassroots women-led peacebuilding efforts.[254]

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[251] December 2020, Coordination of development assistance IV(48).
[252] June 2020, Political developments A(17).
[253] Cohn, et. al. (2008), 185.
[254] For example: March 2021, Political developments A(14).

While providing these spaces for Afghans to share their visions for the peace agreement was significant, a major shortcoming was the inability to integrate these aspirations into the formal peace negotiations. Bridging the gap between informal discussions and the formal intra-Afghan and U.S.-Taliban negotiations would have been essential to ensure that these voices were meaningfully represented and acted upon in shaping the peace process. Without this integration these discussions were reduced to a tokenistic gesture of goodwill, rather than genuine efforts to shape the peace process.

However, there was one instance found in the June 2019 report that highlighted a case were Afghan women made genuine progress in their efforts to achieve meaningful participation in the formal peace process. Following a six-month consultation with fifteen thousand Afghan women across thirty-four provinces, the Office of the First Lady, with support from the High Peace Council, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Afghan Women's Network and other civil society organisations, convened a national conference of Afghan women for peace. At the conference, Afghan women submitted a fifteen-point declaration to President Ghani, who undertook to have its provisions considered at the consultative loya jirga and peace talks. Women comprised around thirty per cent of participants at the consultative Jirga, chaired thirteen of its fifty committees and were elected as two of the five deputy heads of the assembly.[255]

Even though this was an important step toward bridging the gap between informal and formal peace efforts, according to the reports it remained as an occurrence. The reports indicate that while there was discussion and expressed aspirations for women's participation in the peace process, their involvement was primarily supported through so-called "side events" organised alongside the intra-Afghan negotiations. Although these events were intended to facilitate women's access to the peace process, their very designation as "side events" underscores their marginal status, as they were not part of the formal peace negotiations.

> 49. At three side events on 23 November, key challenges and accomplishments for Afghanistan in the areas of sustainable peacebuilding were discussed, with a focus on human rights, the participation of women, reintegrating refugees and returnees, anti-corruption, economic priorities and aid effectiveness. […] On 19 November, the United Nations and Nordic countries organized a side meeting on the theme "From peacemakers to negotiators: Afghan women envision peace".

[255] June 2019, Political developments A(12).

> Speakers stressed the importance of sustaining and strengthening the participation of women and addressing security and protection concerns.[256]

In conclusion, while the reports highlight various efforts by the international community and Afghan stakeholders to include women in the peace process, these efforts often fell short of achieving genuine and meaningful participation. Women's involvement was largely facilitated through side events and informal forums, which, although valuable, remained disconnected from the formal intra-Afghan negotiations. This marginalisation undermined the aspirations of inclusivity and Afghan ownership that were central to the peace process rhetoric.

Resolution 1325's emphasis on supporting local women-led peace initiatives was partially realised through international and local collaborations. However, the inability to bridge the gap between informal discussions and formal negotiations reduced these efforts to tokenistic gestures rather than transformative actions and underscores the systematic marginalisation of women in the peace process. The failure to integrate women's voices into decision-making forums reflects a broader systemic issue, highlighting the need for a deeper commitment to dismantling barriers to women's equal representation in peacebuilding. To achieve truly inclusive peacebuilding, greater integration of women's voices into formal decision-making processes is essential, alongside sustained efforts to uphold their rights and representation in line with international frameworks like Resolution 1325.

3.3.3 Informal Peace Efforts

Although Chapter 3.3.2 highlights efforts by the Afghan government and the international community to include women in the formal peace process, most of these initiatives fell short. Women's participation was largely confined to side events and informal forums, with their access to the formal peace negotiations remaining highly limited. Beyond these side events and informal discussions organised by international actors and the Afghan government, significant efforts to include women in the peace process were primarily driven by civil society actors, particularly local women's rights organisations, peace initiatives and NGOs, as seen in the December 2020 report citation below.

> 13. Women's organizations continued public advocacy, with the Afghan Women's Network and the women's coalition for peace "Our Voice, Our Future" publishing an open letter to the Taliban on 13 August, expressing concern at the ambiguity of the movement's position on women's rights. […] On 8 September,

[256] December 2020, Coordination of development assistance IV(49).

> several Afghan women's organizations sent letters to Germany, Indonesia, Norway, Qatar, the United States and Uzbekistan, asking for their support in drawing attention to human rights, women's rights, political participation and demilitarization in the context of the peace talks. On 13 October, several Afghan women's networks sent an open letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressing concern regarding the intra-Afghan peace process and seeking support for a just, durable and inclusive peace process.[257]

A key thought in this discussion stems from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's (1997–2006) observation that women's peace efforts have historically occurred outside formal systems of military decision-making and international conflict resolution. This raises the issue of whether it is possible to challenge militarism from within institutions that are deeply invested in its perpetuation. On one hand, women's exclusion from the mainstream reflects the dominance of "male" thinking within military institutions. From this perspective, integrating women's peace activism into these institutions appears essential to dismantling the entrenched belief that international security ultimately relies on military power.[258]

In Afghanistan, women's networks and civil society actors played a key role in advocating for women's representation and inclusion in the peace process. The tokenistic approach of both the international community and the Afghan government often limited women's meaningful participation. In response, women found creative ways to maximise their impact on the peace process. These efforts included raising awareness about peace, engaging in direct talks with anti-government elements, and establishing non-governmental local councils for peace. [259] This resourcefulness is reflected in a key observation from the March 2021 report.

> 15. Women's networks continued to amplify calls for a ceasefire. On 6 February, in a virtual round table on the role of Afghan women in the peace process, a Taliban spokesperson justified the absence of women from the Taliban negotiation team by arguing that women did not fight in the war. Following that debate, on 7 February, 15 civil society organizations and the Afghan media formed a national consortium, the Women Initiative for Peace and Security, aimed at ensuring women's meaningful participation in the peace process.[260]

It should be noted that Resolution 1325 was never designed to be an organising tool for women's movements, rather it was shaped as an intervention in the functioning of a global governance institution, with paragraphs aimed at actors within the UN system and member states. Nevertheless, women's NGOs in conflict zones have used the Resolution in many

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[257] December 2020, Political developments A(13).
[258] Otto (2006), 115.
[259] Azadmanesh & Ghafoori (2020).
[260] March 2021, Political developments A(15).

strategic ways.[261] As shown below, Afghan women's organisations and civil society actors would participate in public advocacy to raise awareness to the issue of low female representation in the peace process, with reference to the Resolution.

> 8. In preparation for the conference, the High Council for National Reconciliation announced the receipt of more than 25 peace proposals from political leaders and civil society for consolidation into a draft peace plan. Many were reportedly in response to draft proposals circulated by the United States concerning guiding principles for the future of Afghanistan, a transitional peace government and political road map, and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. On 14 March, Afghan women activists published a position paper on the draft United States proposal, demanding inclusiveness, the upholding of the Constitution and women's rights, and alignment with international obligations under Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and United States obligations under the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017. […] [262]

Among those calling for a more inclusive peace process and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms were women's and youth groups, religious leaders, and the media. The reports highlight measures taken by civil society and various organisations to participate informally in the peace negotiations. For example, the June 2021 report establish that the Afghan Women's Network organised separate gatherings in Kabul to demand inclusivity in the peace process and the Women in the Peace Process Coalition conducted events on women's concerns about the peace process, demanding a ceasefire and women's meaningful participation, while the United Nations supported a consortium of women's networks that gathered in Kabul to discuss issues related to ceasefires, transitional justice, governance structures and constitutional review processes.[263] These efforts arose due to the fact that women's meaningful participation had not been adequately established earlier in the process.

The reports have highlighted UNAMA's active support for civil society actors and promoted women's inclusion in the Afghan peace process through initiatives at local, national and international levels. For example, in 2018, by facilitating dialogues and workshops across fifteen provinces, UNAMA helped develop thirty-four provincial roadmaps for peace in collaboration with civil society, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and the Afghan High Peace Council. These efforts emphasised consensus-building around political solutions and advocacy for peace, justice, and development.[264]

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[261] Cohn, et. al. (2008), 190.
[262] June 2021, Political developments A(8).
[263] June 2021, Political developments A(13).
[264] June 2018, Human rights III(34.)

At the local level, UNAMA implemented numerous peace initiatives, engaging women, youth, tribal leaders, and religious scholars in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts across the country. Notable achievements included the active participation of women in a peace Jirga in Nangarhar Province for the first time. The Mission also supported grassroots efforts, such as marking the International Women's Day in over thirty provinces and developing a peace curriculum in universities.[265]

UNAMA prioritised women's roles in the peace process, establishing women's shura councils[266] and organising high-level dialogues to highlight women's contributions to peace and security. It amplified Afghan women's voices in global forums, including a United Nations Security Council briefing, and celebrated their achievements through collaborative events with international partners.[267] Additionally, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Resolution, the UN organisations organised together with UNAMA a high-level dialogue on twenty years of hard-fought progress on women's rights in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's First Lady, Rula Ghani, delivered keynote remarks, emphasising the role of women in areas of peace and security at the provincial and central levels. Afghan women members of civil society organisations reiterated that sustainable peace could not be achieved without the active participation of women.[268]

These efforts underscored UNAMA's commitment to fostering an inclusive peace process by empowering civil society, ensuring women's meaningful participation, and building partnerships across local and international levels. It should be noted that the Missions efforts are highlighted in the UNSC reports and showcases the positive impact of local United Nations missions. Nevertheless, it remains important to underscore the efforts made by UNAMA in cooperation with the local civil society, outside the formal peace process.

It is important to emphasise that efforts to address the lack of women's inclusion in the Afghan peace process were not limited to local and national levels but also extended internationally. For instance, the December 2020 report highlights that the UN Security Council heard representatives from Afghan NGOs who called for political accountability from both the international community and the United Nations. These representatives urged global actors to ensure that the progress made in women's rights and participation was not compromised in the

[265] June 2021, Political developments A(16).
[266] Meaning an advisory or consultative council.
[267] For example: June 2020, Political developments A(16).
[268] December 2020, Political developments A(16).

peace talks. This demonstrates how local NGO efforts successfully gained international attention.[269]

Even though women were wishing for room in the formal system, operating from outside these systems can be seen as a position of strength. Otto (2006) echoed Virginia Woolf's argument that working within formal systems of power leads to co-option and pointed out Audre Lorde's famous remark that, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house".[270] This perspective holds that the intertwined problems of male domination and armed conflict are so mutually reinforcing that women's participation in mainstream institutions of war and peace might legitimise rather than disrupt militarism. This tension underscores the complexity of women's roles in challenging deeply embedded systems of power.[271] Through their advocacy, Afghan civil society and women's organisations were able to make a substantial difference in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, while formal efforts by the Afghan government and international actors to include women in the peace process were often tokenistic and limited, Afghan civil society and women's organisations played a pivotal role in advocating for inclusivity and meaningful participation. The informal initiatives supported these efforts by fostering dialogue, organising workshops, and amplifying women's voices at local, national, and international levels.

The broader structural challenges of militarism and male-dominated systems persist, which raises the critical questions about the effectiveness of working within formal institutions to challenge deeply entrenched power dynamics. Despite these barriers, the Afghan civil society demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity, using advocacy and grassroots mobilisation to influence the peace process from outside the formal structures. These efforts underscore the importance of empowering civil society as a critical force for sustainable and inclusive peace. Although this chapter has demonstrated that informal systems have offered greater opportunities for women's agency compared to formal ones, it remains essential to ensure women's access to formal peace processes, to successfully implement Resolution 1325, and establish inclusive and sustainable peace.

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[269] December 2020, Political developments A(16).
[270] Lorde, A. (1993). The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Ch. Lemert (Ed.), Social Theory. The Multicultural and Classic Readings, Boulder etc. (Westview Press), 485–488.
[271] Otto (2006), 115–116.

Conclusion

This study reveals how the United Nations Security Council General Assembly reports on Afghanistan echo the identified shortcomings of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. By examining the concepts of "victimisation" and "tokenism," the study identifies their presence in the eight reports published between 2018 and 2021. These reports consistently depict women as victims through their language and demonstrate the tokenistic nature of the Resolution through its largely symbolic implementation.

Resolution 1325 has undeniably played a key role in bringing women's concerns to the forefront of the UN's security agenda, as reflected in the UNSC reports. All eight reports emphasise the importance of including women in the peace process, presenting it as both a desirable and intended goal. However, despite this visibility, genuine implementation remained lacking during the Afghan peace process. Analysis of the reports reveals that women's inclusion was largely superficial, with limited meaningful participation or influence. This thesis confirms earlier critiques of Resolution 1325, which argue that it reinforces gendered narratives of women, which victimises them – as well as serves more as a symbolic gesture than a truly transformative framework, making its implementation tokenistic.

To answer the first research question; this study has found that the reports consistently portray women as vulnerable individuals needing protection, often grouped together with children or marginalised communities – comparing the vulnerability of women to these groups, further diminishing women's rights to equal participation with men. While frameworks like UNSCR 1325 and NAPs aim to promote women's inclusion, their language reinforces women's dependency and victimhood rather than recognising their inherent rights and agency.

I also found that while women were predominantly portrayed as victims, they are occasionally depicted as heroes when their agency in conflict or peace efforts is acknowledged. This dichotomous framing creates a limited and rigid understanding of women's agency, forcing Afghan women to navigate between these two extremes. The reports highlight the imbalance of how women's agency is described as a homogenic group within the broader conflict narrative, while men are discussed as individuals perceived through their agency. The reports prove that efforts to foster inclusion rely on the same gender identities that have legitimised women's exclusion.

By equating gender with victimhood, these documents perpetuated reductive stereotypes and failed to tackle the systemic inequalities that prevented women from being recognised as active and equal participants in the peace process. This also failed to acknowledge the complexity of women's roles and contributions in both conflict and peace. As earlier critique also highlighted.

A meaningful shift requires reframing women not as passive recipients of rights but as autonomous agents whose contributions are integral to sustainable peace and security. This transformation demands a departure from the current victim-focused narrative and the adoption of language and policies that recognise the full complexity of women's roles and identities in post-conflict settings.

However, the Security Council should be acknowledged for re-evaluating the language of Resolution 1325 in at least one notable instance. I found that the phrase "the special needs of women and girls," which is frequently used in Resolution 1325, was omitted from the reports. Referring to women's and girls' needs as "special" implies that they are an exception to the norm, which implicitly centres the needs of men and boys as the standard – thus further marginalising women. While many shortcomings of the Resolution were echoed in the reports, this phrase had been reconsidered by the Security Council to the extent that "the special needs of women and girls" were no longer mentioned in neither any of the nine subsequent resolutions adopted between 2008 and 2019 or the Security Council reports from 2018–2021.

To answer the second research question shortly; this study has found how the implementation of the Resolution's pillar on participation was not realised. The reports consistently highlighted a strong desire to include women in the Afghan peace process, reflecting the Afghan governments and the international community's commitments to the Resolution. However, this commitment often remained rhetorical rather than practical.

Despite calls for an "Afghan-led," "Afghan-owned" and "inclusive" peace process, the actual representation of women in key decision-making roles and peace negotiations was minimal, underscoring the lack of concrete action to translate these wishes into reality. As showed, women's involvement was largely facilitated through side events and informal forums – which the reports highlighted almost as a victory. Although these events were also valuable, they remained largely disconnected from the formal intra-Afghan negotiations, undermining the aspirations of an "inclusive" peace process. This pattern reflects a broader challenge highlighted in this thesis, that the superficial application of an inclusivity rhetoric in the reports based on Resolution 1325, fails to address the systemic barriers to women's meaningful participation.

While formal efforts by the Afghan government and international actors to include women in the peace process were often tokenistic and limited, this thesis has found that Afghan civil society and women's organisations played a pivotal role in advocating for inclusivity and meaningful participation. The informal initiatives supported these efforts by fostering dialogue and amplifying women's voices at local, national, and international levels.

As discussed in this thesis, Resolution 1325 was also implemented in positive ways during the Afghan peace process. The Resolution encourages Security Council missions to engage with both local and international women's groups, and the reports echo this sentiment and confirm that this was achieved. Afghan civil society demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity, using advocacy and grassroots mobilisation to influence the peace process from outside formal structures. These efforts highlight the crucial role of civil society in fostering sustainable and inclusive peace. Moreover, I found that as long as broader structural challenges – such as militarism and male-dominated power systems – persist, the effectiveness of working within formal institutions must be critically examined to challenge deeply entrenched power dynamics.

While the reports acknowledged the need for women's meaningful participation in peace and political processes, they largely framed this participation within the context of protecting their rights, rather than considering that it is their inherent right to participate as equally qualified decision-makers. This reinforces the broader challenge of achieving true gender equality in conflict and peacebuilding narratives. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and providing targeted support to women's organisations are critical steps toward achieving meaningful gender inclusion in peace processes.

Going forward, it is essential to re-evaluate how the Resolution and broader peace and conflict discourse portray women. To genuinely integrate women into peace efforts, their agency must be recognised and valued equally with that of men. Women should not be reduced to victims or grouped with children. To meaningfully realise Resolution 1325's pillar on participation – national government and the international community must ensure women's participation in peace efforts. Token gestures, such as side events or advocacy confined to informal systems, are insufficient for meaningful change on a national and especially international level.

Although women have made progress in advocating for their rights within informal systems, this does not guarantee that their rights and perspectives are considered in formal peace negotiations or reflected in eventual agreements. Research has consistently shown that

women's involvement significantly increases the likelihood of achieving sustainable and lasting peace. This evidence must not be overlooked.

This brings me to the topic of future research. I propose conducting a case study to explore what women's agency has achieved through informal peace efforts. Two notable examples come to mind: first, the 2022 case in Yemen, where women utilised tribal norms to negotiate civilian access to water[272]; and second, Sudan, where over forty-nine women-led organisations formed the Peace for Sudan Platform to advocate for an inclusive peace process[273]. Studying the informal efforts of women's organisations would provide valuable insights on women's possibilities within the field of peace and security, as this study has shown that women's contributions to peacebuilding are far more diverse in informal contexts compared to formal frameworks.

Nevertheless, ensuring women's access to formal peace processes remains crucial for the successful implementation of Resolution 1325. Equally important is the need to re-evaluate the language of the Resolution and how women are perceived and described within the United Nations peace agenda. While the Resolution offers a framework for women's inclusion in peace efforts, this study has demonstrated that it lacks effective implementation measures to meaningfully and comprehensively realise its goals. Looking at the Afghan peace process and the country's history, this thesis has ultimately proven that women are indeed the early casualties of war and peace.

[272] UN Women (2022). How women made use of tribal norms to mediate conflict in Yemen. Arab States. Published 24.10.2022. Accessed 20.12.2024. https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2022/10/how-women-made-use-of-tribal-norms-to-mediate-conflict-in-yemen

[273] United Nations (2023). Sudanese women advocate for peace at conference in Uganda. Sudan. Published 25.10.2023. Accessed 20.12.2024. https://sudan.un.org/en/255336-sudanese-women-advocate-peace-conference-uganda

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United Nations (2018). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 27 February 2018. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_27_february.pdf

> The Government has made commendable efforts in implementing the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women as well as upholding Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.[274]

United Nations (2018). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 6 June 2018. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_6_june.pdf

> The resounding international support for the offer expressed at the conferences held in Kabul and Tashkent provides further impetus to the peace negotiations.[275]

United Nations (2019). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 28 February 2019. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_28_february_2019.pdf

[274] Summary of the report published 27th of February 2018.
[275] Summary of the report published 6th of June 2018.

> The current moment represents perhaps the most significant chance to date for a negotiated settlement to the long and devastating conflict between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban.[276]

United Nations (2019). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 14 June 2019. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_-_english_-_14_june_2019.pdf

> At the 2018 Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, there was a strong message that peace, State-building and reform-driven development are mutually reinforcing and indispensable[277]

United Nations (2020). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 17 June 2020. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_june_2020.pdf

> The best chance of a durable peace settlement rests on broad consensus, with the political and social diversity of Afghanistan represented in the peace process, so as to lay the groundwork for wide acceptance of an eventual settlement.[278]

United Nations (2020). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 9 December 2020. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_december_2020.pdf

> If the peace negotiations are to offer hope, they must bring a commitment by the parties to protect the human rights of all Afghans and uphold the international treaties to which the country is a party.[279]

United Nations (2021). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 12 March 2021. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_march_2021.pdf

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[276] Summary of the report published 28th of February 2019.
[277] Summary of the report published 14th of June 2019.
[278] Summary of the report published 17th of June 2020.
[279] Summary of the report published 9th of December 2020.

Taliban to continue discussions towards establishing a substantive agenda for the Afghanistan peace negotiations.[280]

United Nations (2021). *The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General.* General Assembly Security Council. Published 15 June 2021. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_june_2021.pdf

Afghanistan is entering a new and uncertain phase of its decades-long conflict. Progress in the peace talks that began in September 2020 in Doha has slowed, and fighting continues around the country.[281]

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[280] Summary of the report published 12th of March 2021.
[281] Summary of the report published 15th of June 2021.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Abbreviations and Acronyms

CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
HPC	High Peace Council
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SC	Security Council
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women *(UN Women since 2010)*
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence against women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
QCA	Qualitative content analysis

Appendix 2: Definition of Terms

Gender	the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men

Gendered essentialism	the belief that males and females are born with distinctively different natures, determined biologically rather than culturally
Gender mainstreaming	an approach to policy-making that considers both women's and men's interests and concerns
Intra-Afghan negotiations	the peace negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban during 2018-2021
Kabul	the capital of Afghanistan – in this study used to refer to Afghanistan's government during the peace negotiations 2018-2021
Loya jirga	is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan
National Action Plan	national-level strategy documents that outline a government's approach and course of action for implementing resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda
Sex	the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones.
The Council	meaning the United Nations Security Council
The Government	in this study used to refer to Afghanistan's government during the peace negotiations 2018-2021
The Kabul Process	a forum and vehicle under the leadership of the Afghan Government to lead peace efforts to end violence in Afghanistan
The Republic	meaning the decision-makers of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Tokenism	the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort – especially concerning including a small number of people from under-represented groups to create an appearance of equality

UNSCR 1325	the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, that aims to ensure the increase in women's and girls' systematic and sustainable integration into peace and security
U.S.-Taliban negotiations	the peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban during 2018-2021
Victimisation	the state or process of deliberately being made into a victim

Tools

The primary tool I relied on for this thesis was the MOT Dictionary. As a non-native English speaker, my vocabulary is primarily in Swedish and Finnish. To accurately express my findings, thoughts, and opinions in English, I frequently used the dictionary to translate individual words and expressions from Finnish or Swedish to English.

In addition, I used two AI-powered tools during my work on this thesis: ChatGPT and DeepL. To ensure full transparency, I believe it is important to explain how these tools were used.

Alongside the MOT Dictionary, I utilised DeepL for translation purposes. Most often, I used it to translate my own thoughts from Swedish or Finnish into English. Occasionally, DeepL was also employed to translate passages from English sources into Swedish or Finnish to help me better understand the content of the source.

While both MOT Dictionary and DeepL were used for translation, ChatGPT was used for language refinement. My most common prompt for ChatGPT was: “Please make this clearer and more coherent”. This helped improve the structure and readability of long sentences and paragraphs that did not sound like proper English.

I want to emphasise that all the thoughts and opinions presented in this thesis are entirely my own. ChatGPT was not used to produce original writing, but solely for guidance on language and grammatical clarity.