PIECES OF PEACE:WOMEN AND GENDER IN PEACE AGREEMENTS

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Abstract

With armed conflicts and wars continuing to occur globally, the pursuit of peace is an enduring concern. In the efforts to resolve these conflicts, a vast number of peace agreements have been signed. In this project, we examine the extent to which women and gender are explicitly acknowledged or addressed in peace agreements. Using debossing, we physicalize the mentions of women and gender in these agreements as a means to increase awareness and recognition of these often-overlooked constituencies.

Keywords

Peace Process; Women in Peace Agreements; Gender Equality; Data Physicalization; Debossing Data.

Figure 1. A peace agreement (ID848) from the Afghanistan 2000s post-intervention process.

Introduction

Peace agreements are a common practice in the resolution and regulation of modern conflict, with over 2000 peace agreements reached in more than 150 peace processes worldwide since 1990 [1]. These peace agreements often become blueprints for conflict transformation, formalizing the agreed way of resolving violent compatibility between political elites and, as such, shaping the political settlement that emerges following the signing of a peace deal. Although there is no commonly agreed definition of what a peace agreement is, they can have both a legal status and a social status as to how actors understand the agreed rules and responsibilities of the transition [2]. Despite their important role, only 21% of peace agreements from 1990-2024 contain explicit references to girls, women, gender, or sexual violence [3]. Consequently, the arrangements and institutions created by a peace agreement can have implications for how girls, women, gender minorities, and sexual minorities experience the peace and transition which that agreement governs.

Whether a blueprint for a post-conflict settlement, or a peace process roadmap, peace agreements are not gender neutral by default. Peace agreements contain institutional configurations, security mechanisms, and human rights regimes that all shape different gendered outcomes, or impact women's lives. Language in peace agreements that is perceived as 'neutral' in reality is 'gender blind,' in that it overlooks or ignores the role that gender plays in everyday life. This blindness has consequences for the lives of women and gender minorities in those contexts: "issues that are not specifically mentioned in the agreement can be difficult to prioritize post-agreement, and importantly, international implementation mechanisms and donor funding flow from the agreement's priorities" [4]. The distinction between women and gender minorities is also important as they encompass different groups of people each with nuanced challenges and experiences. Women generally refer to individuals whose gender identity matches their female sex assigned at birth, and gender minorities include individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from their sex assigned at birth.

Peace agreements can also create 'sticky' institutional arrangements that can be hard to re-negotiate later on. Rather than peace agreements instigating an interim transition to more majoritarian, democratic settlements, peace agreements can inadvertently create "a formalized political unsettlement" [5]. In this scenario, "the peace processes institutionalize disagreement into a set of agreed political and legal structures that lead to perpetual 'transition'. This transition is characterized by no war-no peace experiences, and ongoing contestation about the nature of the state, played out through its formal institutions" [6]. This means that any gaps in the way that the peace agreement understands or responds to 'gender', may become stuck and difficult to resolve through institutions captured by elite interests.

Building gendered language into peace agreements to act as 'hooks' [7] can also serve as a practical strategy for improving the inclusiveness of a peace process. For example, gender equality advocates involved in peace mediation might refer back to vague commitments conflict parties made in a pre-negotiation agreement to "respect gender equality" and use this reference as a building block to advocate for gender quotas in legislative bodies at a comprehensive phase of negotiations.

Finally, there is an international normative commitment to include gender perspectives when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, which was made through the adoption of United States Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. The Resolution 'calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: (a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for

rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements; (c) Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police, and the judiciary' [8]. Almost 25 years since UNSCR 1325 was adopted, however, peace agreements often overlook or ignore the special needs of women, girls, and gender/sexual minorities in peace and conflict, and rarely take a comprehensive gender perspective throughout the agreement [9].

In this pictorial, we present our work that highlights the historically limited references to and involvement of girls, women, and gender minorities in peace agreements and the limited capacity in which gender-related issues are considered when these groups are mentioned. To achieve this, we deploy debossing as a method and paper as a medium to foreground the gender-related text found in the 22 peace agreements (See Fig. 2) that make up the Afghanistan 2000s post-intervention process. This installation is designed so that each piece of paper represents a peace agreement with gender-related text imprinted into the piece of paper according to where and how they are mentioned in the peace agreement.

The debossed text on paper is intentionally designed to be difficult to see unless actively engaged with. As such, the installation allows for interactions involving light and shading to enable people to better perceive the data presented on the paper. This intentional design choice symbolizes these often-overlooked issues, prompting viewers to engage more deeply to uncover these data insights.

We address the "Diversity Data" theme by implementing inclusive practices and contributing to building a more equitable world through peace initiatives.

The International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn
5 December 2011

Afghanistan and the International Community:
From Transition to the Transformation Decade

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

1. We, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the International Community, met today in Bonn to mark the 10th anniversary of the 2001 Bonn Conference, which laid the foundation of the ongoing partnership between Afghanistan and the International Community, and to renew our mutual commitment to a stable, democratic and prosperous future for the Afghan people. We honour all those, from Afghanistan and abroad, who have lost their lives for this noble cause. Afghanistan expressed its sincere gratitude for the steadfast commitment, solidarity and the immense sacrifices of its international partners.

2. Afghanistan and the International Community expressed deep appreciation to the Federal Republic of Germany for hosting this Conference. Germany is a longstanding friend of Afghanistan and, in particular over the past ten years, alongside other members of the International Community, has been a steadfast partner in Afghanistan's stabilization and development.

3. Ten years ago today at the Petersberg, Afghanistan charted a new path towards a sovereign, peaceful, prosperous and democratic future, and the International Community accepted the responsibility to help Afghanistan along that path. Together we have achieved substantial progress over these ten years, more than in any other period in Afghanistan's history. Never before have the Afghan people, and especially Afghan women, enjoyed comparable access to services, including education and health, or seen greater development of infrastructure across the country. Al Qaida has been disrupted, and Afghanistan's national security institutions are increasingly able to assume responsibility for a secure and independent Afghanistan.

Figure 2. One of the 22 peace agreements from the Afghanistan 2000s post-intervention process

6. Afghanistan reaffirms that the future of its political system will continue to reflect its pluralistic society and remain firmly founded on the Afghan Constitution. The Afghan people will continue to build a stable, democratic society, based on the rule of law, where the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including the equality of men and women, are guaranteed under the Constitution. Afghanistan recommits to upholding all of its international human rights obligations. Acknowledging that on this path Afghanistan will have its own lessons to learn, the International Community fully endorses this vision and commits to supporting Afghanistan's progress in that direction.

7. We have taken note of statements by Afghan civil society organisations, including today's statements by two of their delegates at this meeting. We all reaffirm that the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Afghan Constitution, including the rights of women and children, as well as a thriving and free civil society are key for Afghanistan's future. Therefore, we underscore the further promotion of civil society participation, including both traditional civil society structures and modern manifestations of civic action, including the role of youth, in the country's democratic processes.

8. We recognise that building a democratic society above all entails enabling legitimate and effective civilian authority embodied in a democratically elected government and served by transparent and strong, functioning institutions. Despite significant achievements, Afghanistan needs to continue its work to strengthen state institutions and improve governance throughout the country, including through reforming the civil service and strengthening the linkage between justice reform and development of its security institutions, including an effective civilian police force. Strengthening and improving Afghanistan's electoral process will be a key step forward in the country's democratization. Afghan government institutions at all levels should increase their responsiveness to the civil and economic needs of the Afghan people and deliver key services to them. In this context, the protection of civilians, strengthening the rule of law and the fight against corruption in all its forms remain key priorities. We will move this agenda forward, in accordance with our commitments under the Kabul Process in line with the principle of mutual accountability.

9. Consistent with Transition, we reaffirm that the role of international actors will evolve further from direct service delivery to support and capacity-building for Afghan institutions, enabling the Government of Afghanistan to exercise its sovereign authority in all its functions. This process includes the phasing out of all Provincial Reconstruction Teams, as well as the dissolution of any structures duplicating the functions and authority of the Government of Afghanistan at the national and sub-national levels.

10. We support the crucial role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. We express our gratitude to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative Staffan de Mistura for his dedicated service, and welcome the Secretary General's decision to appoint Jan Kubis as his new Special Representative for Afghanistan. We note that the UNAMA mandate is currently under review in line with the increased capacity and ownership exercised by the Government of Afghanistan and consistent with the process of Transition that entails the assumption of leadership responsibility by the Afghan Government. We also take note with appreciation of the close collaboration of the International Contact Group with the Afghan Government and their work, and encourage them to continue their joint efforts.

2

SECURITY

11. We welcome the determination of the Afghan people to combat terrorism and extremism and take responsibility for their own security and for protecting their homeland. We share Afghanistan's vision for its national security forces to be built to modern standards and adequate capacity, so that they can effectively and independently defend Afghanistan.

12. We welcome the successful start of the Transition process. Afghan authorities are assuming full security responsibility for their country and will complete this process by the end of 2014. Correspondingly, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), authorized by the UN Security Council, has begun a gradual, responsible draw-down to be completed by that time. With the conclusion of the Transition process, our common responsibility for Afghanistan's future does not come to a close. The International Community, therefore, commits to remain strongly engaged in support of Afghanistan beyond 2014.

13. We underscore that the international support for sustainable Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) needs to continue after 2014. In assistance to the ANSF, the International Community strongly commits to support their training and equipping, financing and development of capabilities beyond the end of the Transition period. It declares its intent to continue to assist in their financing, with the understanding that over the coming years this share will gradually be reduced, in a manner commensurate with Afghanistan's needs and its increasing domestic revenue generation capacity. In this context, we look forward to define a clear vision and appropriately funded plan for the ANSF, which should be developed before the forthcoming NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012.

Peace Data

We began this project by collaborating with PeaceRep, a research consortium dedicated to rethinking peace and transition processes. PeaceRep's work focuses on peace processes, which are structured efforts to resolve profound disagreements between conflicting entities [10]. They maintain the Peace Agreement Dataset (PAX), a publicly accessible archive that documents formally signed peace agreements that are part of over 150 peace processes, spanning the period 1990-2023 [11].

Our project draws from the PAX Gender sub-dataset [1], where domain experts have categorized the agreements into 11 areas concerning provisions on women, girls, gender, and/or sexual violence. These categories encompass areas such as Participation, Equality, Particular groups of women, International law, New institutions, Violence Against Women, Transitional justice, Institutional reform, Development, Implementation, etc. It is noteworthy that of the 2055 agreements compiled in the PAX, only 436 (21%) contain provisions addressing women, gender, and/or sexual violence (Fig. 3).

In exploring the influence of gender perspectives across different peace processes, we worked extensively with experts at PeaceRep and chose the Afghanistan 2000s post-intervention process as our case study. Remarkably, a majority (73%) of these agreements enshrine the principles of gender equality in human rights and advocate for women's participation as protected under their constitution. Yet, despite these assurances, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 has stripped women of their fundamental rights, dignity, and freedoms [12]. Many of these agreements fall short of their promises to transform patriarchal structures and elevate women's rights and security [13]. Delving into the provisions of Afghanistan's post-intervention agreements, we aimed to portray them in a manner that not only reflected the commitments in agreements but also highlighted the gaps in implementation, thereby igniting critical reflection and dialogue among our audience about these issues.

Page 1, 3
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Page 2, Governance, 6
Afghanistan reaffirms that the future of its political system will continue to reflect its pluralistic society and remain firmly founded on the Afghan Constitution. The Afghan people will continue to build a stable, democratic society, based on the rule of law, where the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including the equality of men and women, are guaranteed under the Constitution. Afghanistan recommits to upholding all of its international human rights obligations. Acknowledging that on this path Afghanistan will have its own lessons to learn, the International Community fully endorses this vision and commits to supporting Afghanistan's progress in that direction.

Page 2, Governance, 7
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Page 4, Peace Process, 18
Mindful of the relevant UN resolutions, the International Community concurs with Afghanistan that the peace and reconciliation process and its outcome must be based on the following principles:
(a) The process leading to reconciliation must be: truly Afghan-led and Afghan-owned; as well as inclusive, representing the legitimate interests of all the people of Afghanistan, regardless of gender or social status.
(b) Reconciliation must contain: the reaffirmation of a sovereign, stable and united Afghanistan; the renunciation of violence; the breaking of ties to international terrorism; respect for the Afghan Constitution, including its human rights provisions, notably the rights of women.
(c) The region must respect and support the peace process and its outcome.

Figure 3. Example provision with text addressing women, gender, or sexual violence (ID848).
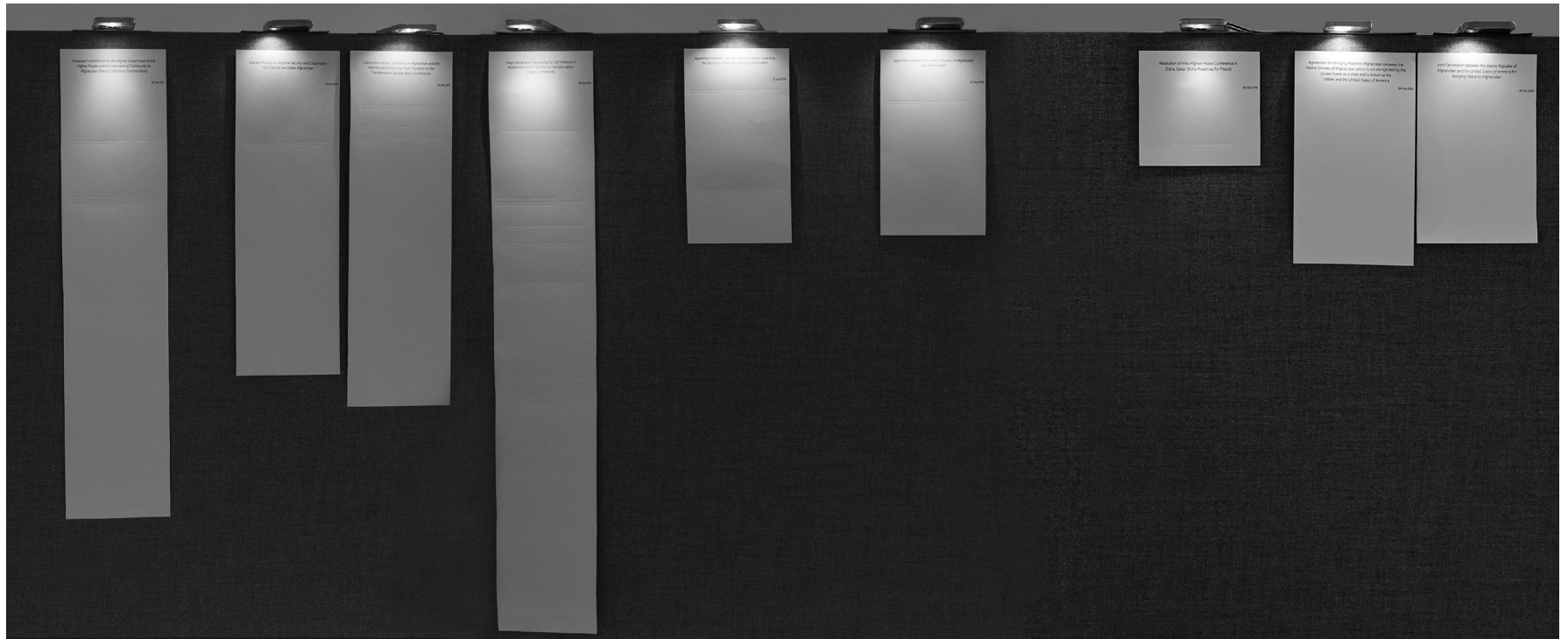
Pieces of Peace

Figure 4. An overview of the 9 peace agreements installed. The setup is part of the 22 agreements in the Afghanistan 2000s post-intervention process, which spans from July 22, 2010, to February 29, 2020.

Debossing data

In this project, we deboss gender-related text in a peace agreement on paper. We choose paper as a medium due to its inherent fragility and susceptibility to tearing, which serves as a symbol of the vulnerabilities experienced by populations affected by conflict and war. By piecing together individual agreements, we can reveal a whole picture of one peace process, which allows us to critically examine the need to address and mend these vulnerabilities in peace processes.

Embossing and debossing are techniques used to create raised or recessed relief of text on a variety of materials, and for our project, we chose the latter (debossing). Unlike traditional 2D visualizations, which predominantly occur in digital formats and only target the user's sight, our approach leverages physicalization [14] to engage additional senses. Debossing allows the paper texture to be seen and felt, adding a physical dimension to the visual experience.

In the scope of this project, debossing is employed to accentuate gender-related content within peace agreements. This technique subtly conveys information about text that has traditionally been noted with pen and ink, making it less immediately noticeable unless deliberately sought. This intentional design choice symbolizes the often-overlooked groups of people, prompting viewers to engage more

deeply to uncover these critical insights.

We first introduce the main data encoding elements of this project: **'peace agreement display,' 'peace process layout,'** and **'viewers' interactions.'** The first two encoding elements focus on the appearance of the data, such as the text expression, text position, and agreement layouts (See Fig. 5). The last element focuses on ways in which the viewer can interact with the work.

Peace agreement display

Following the above idea, this section introduces our design on the chosen medium: Paper. Each piece of paper represents a peace agreement, and we deboss gender-related text information according to where and how it is mentioned in the agreement.

1. How do we select the text for debossing

The selected texts for debossing come from the PA-X GENDER database, which is structured into 11 categories. Domain researchers have coded the data in detail, focusing directly on women, girls, gender, or sexual violence. The selection process involved iterations and discussions about what to imprint, how and in what form (e.g., oval or square shapes or braille), and which words or sentences to use before deciding on selected texts (See Fig. 6).
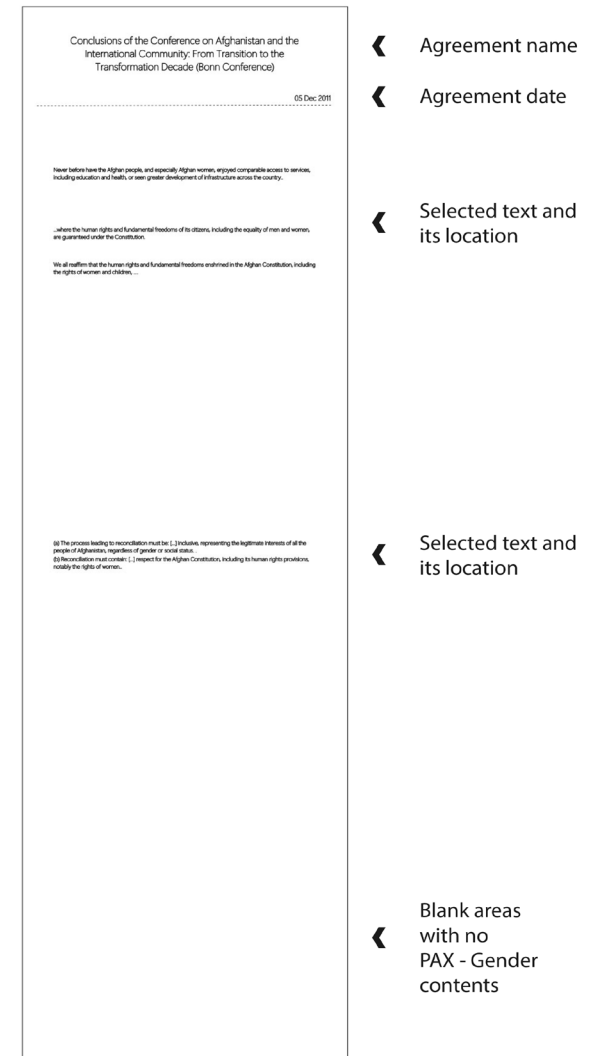

Figure 5. Data encoding elements of ID 848.

The primary aim is to ensure readability and print quality. After evaluating multiple fonts, sizes, widths, and tracking options, "Segoe UI Variable Display" was chosen. The software Sure Cuts A Lot 6 (SCAL) was used to create specific text settings for debossing. The chosen setup includes a line width of 1.0, a text width of 100%, text tracking at 100%, and a font size of 0.34 cm, ensuring clear visibility (See Fig. 7).

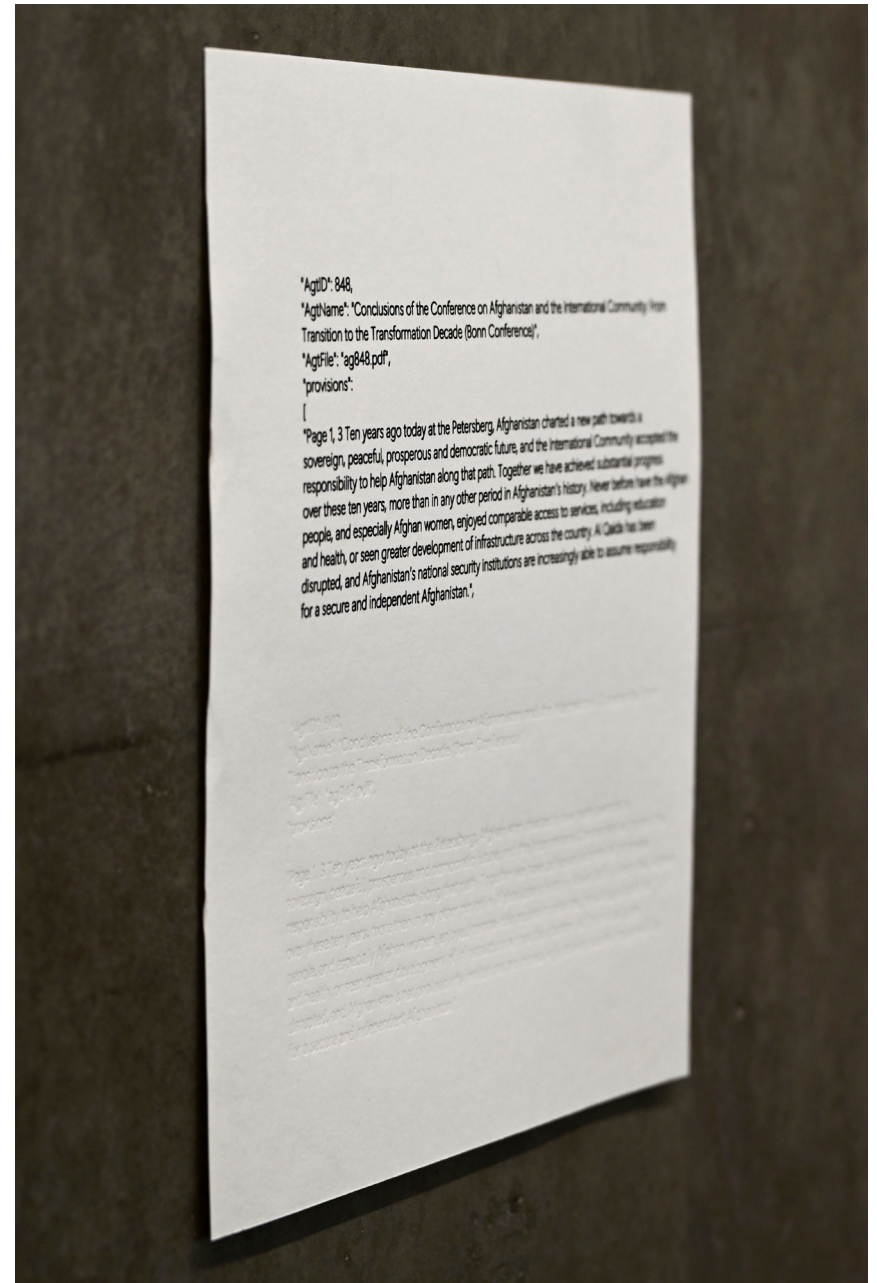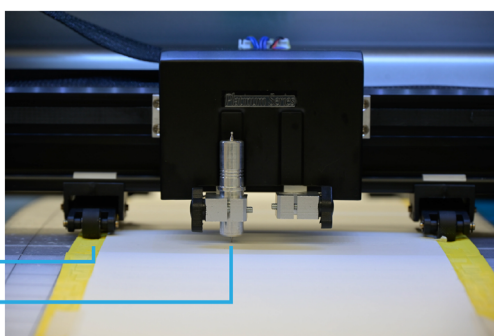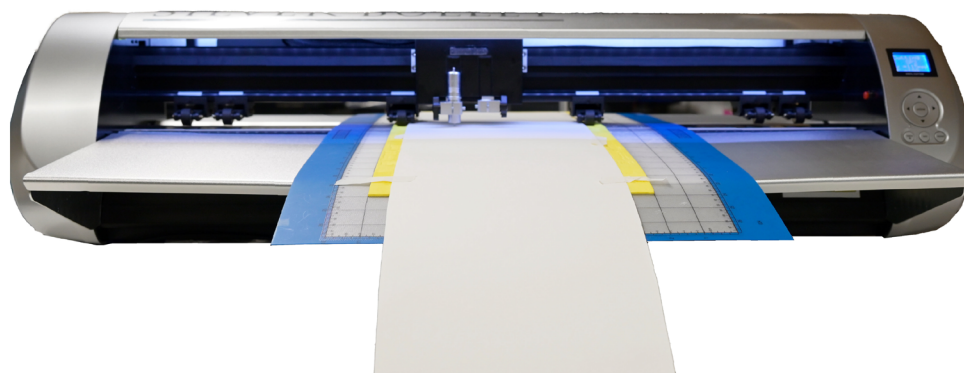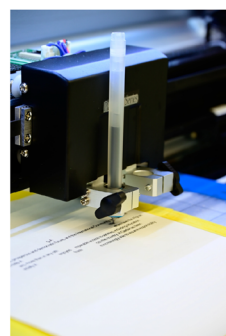Figure 6. Different iterations and ideas on text expression.

Figure 7. Final text and expression choice. With the same font size and settings, the embossed texts require more effort to read.

Debossing Tool

Pinch Wheels

Tool and Holder

Figure 8. Silver Bullet Machine Embossing machine in working conditions.

The debossing is done using the Silver Bullet Machine. It has 6 Pinch Wheels to allow the mat to move vertically. It also has two Tool Holders for inserting tools such as cutting, engraving, drawing, and embossing (See Fig. 8). The maximum length available between the pitch wheels has some mechanical constraints, which accommodates a paper width of up to 19 cm to prevent undesirable roller marks.

2. How do we locate text on paper
The exact positions of the gender-related texts within the document are calculated to ensure optimal placement relative to the overall document dimensions. The calculations were based on the position where the gender-related texts are located within the original document.

We take the agreement ID 848 'Conclusions of the Conference on Afghanistan and the International Community: From Transition to the Transformation Decade (Bonn Conference)' as an example. It contains 3379 words, and the required paper height is approximately 58 cm, based on font size and visibility requirements. The debossed text covers approximately the area proportional to how much women, gender, and/or sexual violence content is mentioned relative to the whole document. To provide the viewer with more context, headers with the agreement title and date are printed in black. The unified header height is set to 6 cm, and the title has a font size of 0.60 cm. This is to provide enough space and visibility, allowing viewers to recognize and relate the documents to specific historical contexts quickly.

3. Paper selection

Five types of paper were tested in varying grams per square meter (gsm) (Fig. 9): Southbank Smooth (310gsm); Bread & Butter (270gsm); Somerset Velvet Buff (250gsm); Seawhite Cartridge Paper (220gsm); and Seawhite Cartridge Paper (140gsm). The decision was made to use higher gsm paper for debossing. The higher gsm paper provides better quality debossing, ensuring the texts are clearly visible and well-defined.

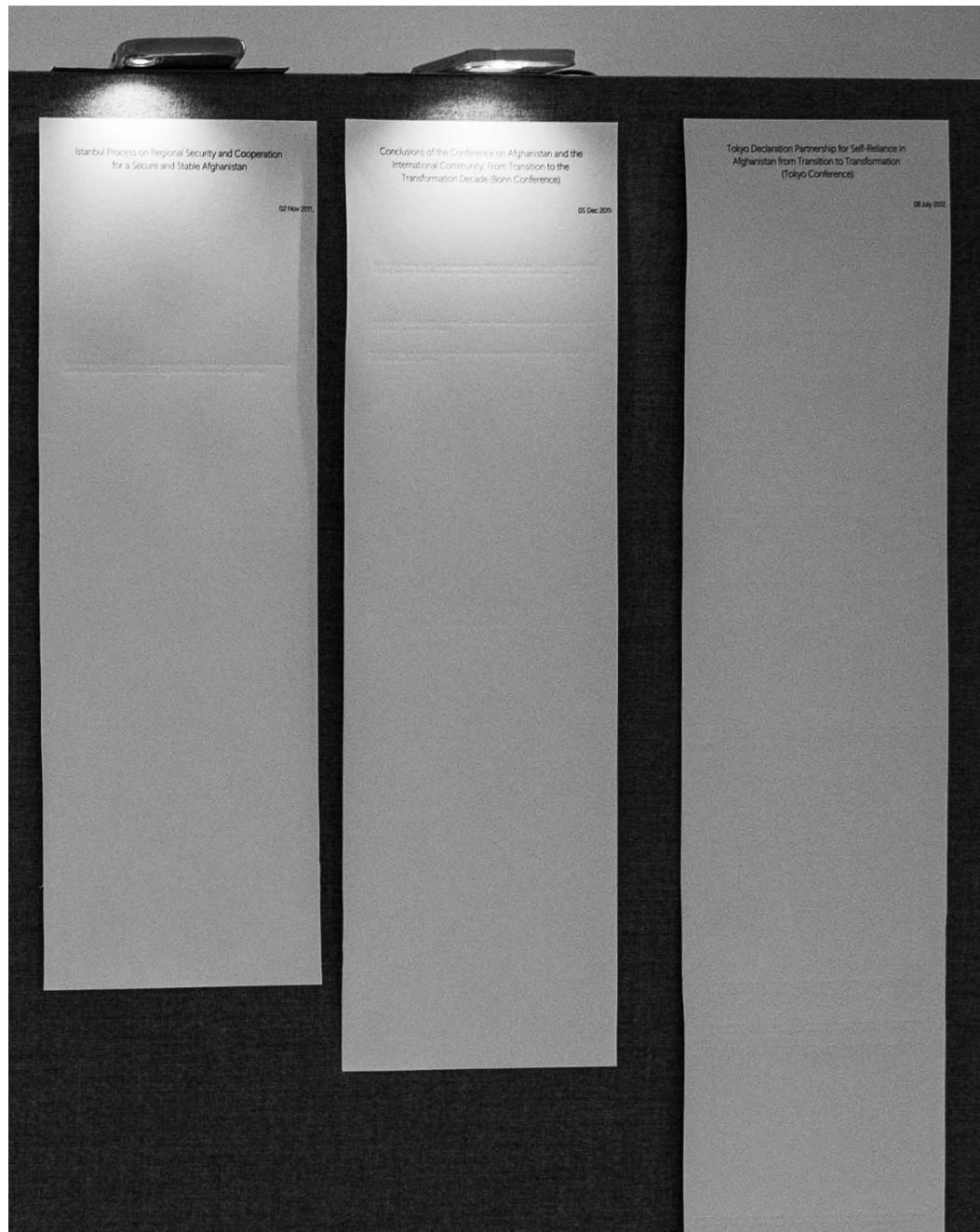Figure 9. Showcase of various papers used for debossing.

Figure 10. Peace agreements with and without light comparison.

Peace process layout

The arrangement of the 22 peace agreements from Afghanistan's post-intervention era spans the period 1990 - 2024. These agreements are displayed on a wall with the x-axis serving as the temporal indicator. This chronological display allows viewers to visually trace the progression and timing of these agreements over the years.

Given the varying time gaps between some agreements, the placement on the wall is adjusted accordingly. Agreements that are separated by larger time intervals are spaced further apart. This method visually emphasizes the periods of heightened or reduced activity in the peace process, offering an intuitive grasp of the pacing and frequency of agreement formation.

Of the 9 agreements displayed (See Fig. 4), 2 documents do not mention PAX-Gender categorized contexts. Both of these documents have a timeline that begins in February 2020. The absence of text in these documents could potentially draw attention to the presence or absence of gender considerations in the agreements, while also subtly highlighting the evolution of women's issues and gender-related gaps.
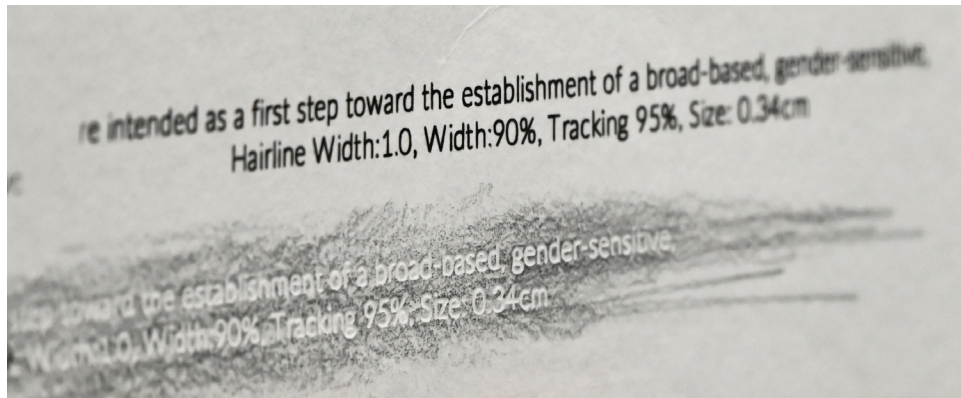
Figure 11. Text expressions with the application of a pencil.

Viewer's interactions
Missing gender perspectives
To consider how to show historically 'missing' mentions of women, our installation employs debossed texts on paper. These texts are subtly crafted into the flat sections of the paper, typically difficult to see until revealed under specific lighting conditions.

The installation is positioned on the wall to be viewed at an optimal upright angle. By altering the angle of light that strikes the paper, we can enhance the visibility of the text. When viewers use a phone torch, as shown in Fig. 10, the otherwise hidden texts become more visible, inviting proactive engagement and discovery.

The installation also features sound recordings of the 'Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-

establishment of Permanent Government Institutions' (commonly known as the 'Bonn Agreement'). Recorded by two native speakers of Dari (one of Afghanistan's official languages), the audio will include all sections of the agreement, with a female voice narrating the sentences that contain provisions addressing women, gender, and/or sexual violence, and a male voice narrating the remaining sections.

Other enhancing interactions include physically tracing the debossed text with a pencil, as depicted in Fig. 11. This interaction not only helps to make the text more legible but also serves as a metaphor for the necessary collective effort to uncover the 'missing' considerations of women.

The interactions aim to address the fact that by inputting our collective efforts, we can illuminate important narratives.
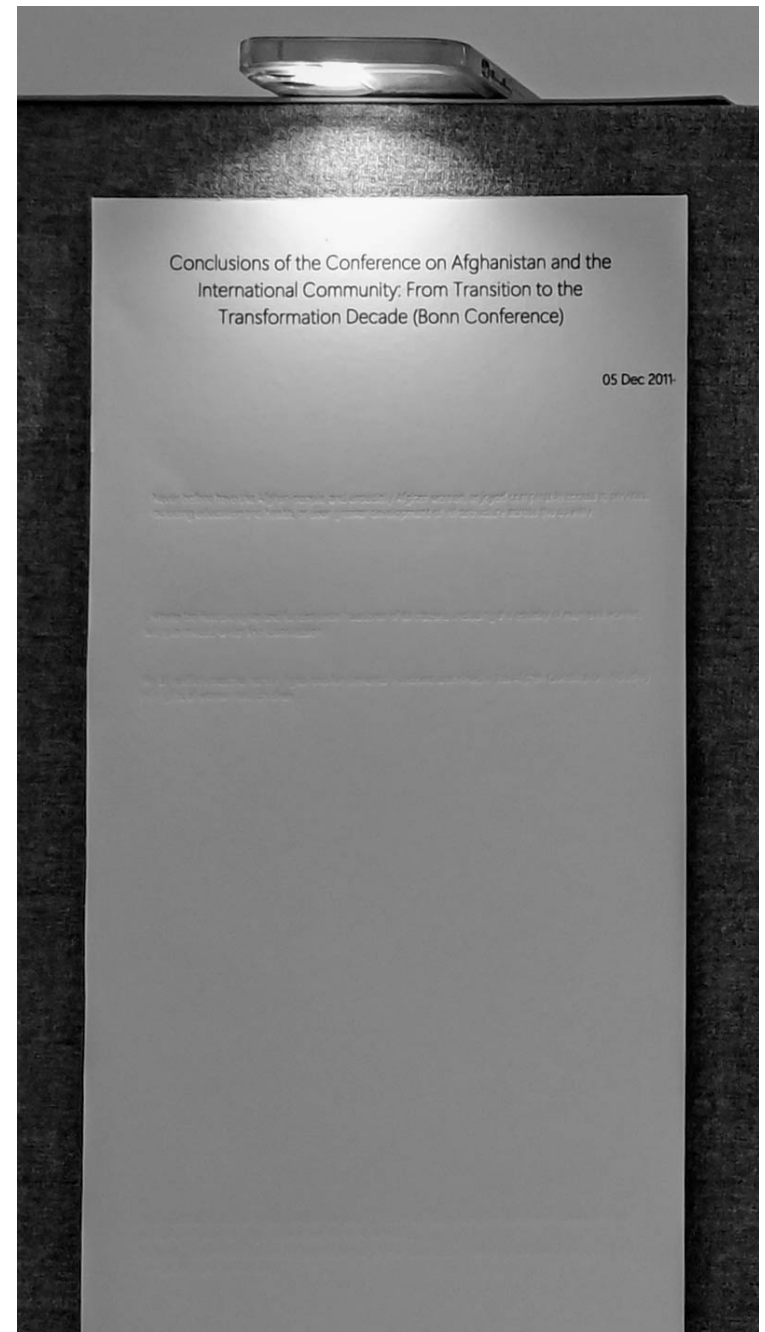

Figure 10. Peace agreements with light torch.

Discussion

Throughout this pictorial, we have described the process of developing an installation designed to encourage critical reflection on the historically limited references to and involvement of girls, women, and gender minorities in the 22 peace agreements that make up Afghanistan 2000s post-intervention peace process. Our installation aims to highlight that while the United States Security Council Resolution 1325 exists as an international normative commitment to include gender perspectives when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, the peace agreements continue to overlook or ignore the special needs of girls, women, and gender minorities in peace and conflict, and rarely take a comprehensive gender perspective throughout the agreement [9].
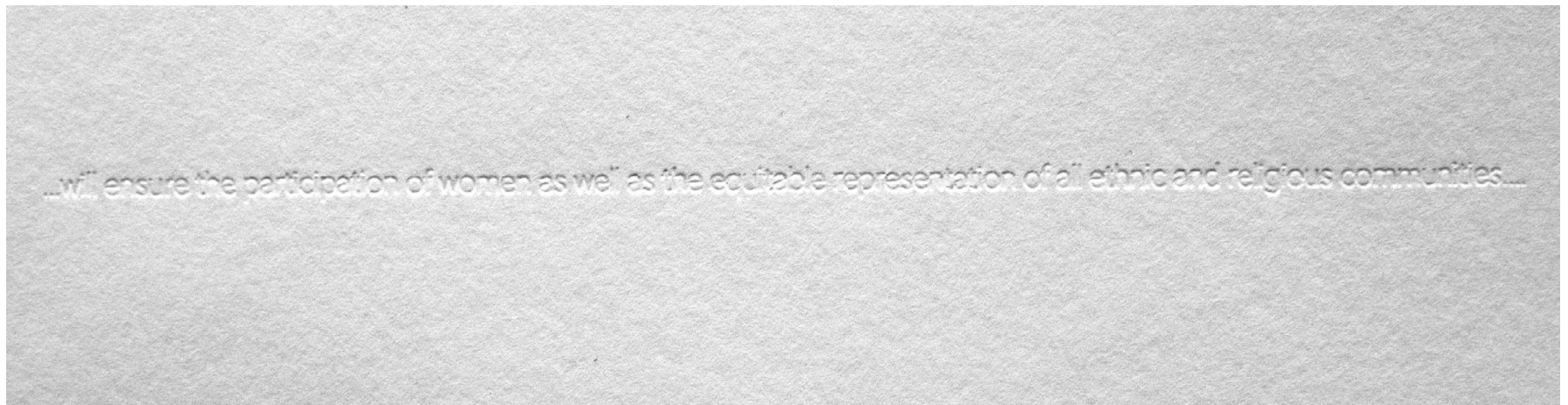
In the context of Afghanistan, while gender perspectives are mentioned in the peace agreements, they are not connected to local voices and are not context-specific in a way that considers patriarchal power dynamics [13]. This limited and surface-level understanding causes continuous harm to girls, women, and gender minorities, failing to "transform patriarchal gendered structures and prevent the regression of women's rights and security in Afghanistan" [13]. To reflect upon this issue, we considered using different paper types and encoding various debossing depths to represent data. We hoped this approach would emphasize the limited and, at times, repetitive nature of the discourse. However, after testing various debossing forces on the paper, no significant text visibility differences were found. Consequently, this encoding method was discarded. Nevertheless, we found the pale, colorless text on white paper symbolic of the missing, disregarded, and unimplemented human rights principles relating to gender in peace and conflict. The text, drawn twice to signify repetition, mirrors the redundant nature of the human rights discourse as it relates to the rights of girls, women, and gender minorities in the context of Afghanistan.

The use of physical pieces of paper, each designed to represent a single peace agreement and with only the gender-related text within them debossed, when placed together, highlights to viewers the insignificant amount of gender-related text. The debossed text is also intentionally designed to be difficult to see unless actively interacted with through light or shading. This installation asks viewers to critically engage and reflect on the implications that this limited representation has for girls, women, and gender minorities in processes involving peace and conflict.

Acknowledgments

...will ensure the participation of women as well as the equitable representation of all ethnic and religious communities...

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