The US-Taliban Peace Deal: A Buberian Analysis of the Declaration's Language

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Abstract

In this paper, we use critical interpretive and rhetorical analysis, informed by three theoretical concepts from Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, i.e., *I-It-Thou*, *Reciprocity*, and *Interhuman*, to analyze the US-Taliban peace declaration document which was released after the actors signed a Peace Deal in February 2020. The analysis revealed that the document's text embodies a nondynamic, non-dialogic and non-reciprocal spirit; creates *It-It* and *I-It* relationships; and does not extend the democratic and creative deliberative spaces which, according to Buber, every dialogue must aim to accomplish. The analysis further revealed that the declaration's aim tends to be to obtain a consensus/closure, i.e., to end the physical confrontation between Taliban and American troops, and not to attend to the underlying historical, cultural, and political structural forces which had created, and will continue to create, the conditions for the protracted conflict. Implications of the Deal for the Afghan people and for regional and global peace have been discussed. Moreover, we hope to bring the philosophy of Martin Buber, an eminent dialogue thinker yet little-known in Pakistan, to the peace and conflict literature produced within the country, and open it up for a critically engaged criticism and commentary. Finally, since the declaration is only a four-page text and its analysis is understandably limited in methodological and epistemological scope, suggestions for future research have been offered.

Keywords: Protracted conflict, dialogue, democracy, peace, deliberation

Introduction

According to Coleman (2003), protracted, intractable conflicts characterize our contemporary moment and "may well determine our capacity to survive as a species" (p. 1). This realization has compelled scholars to develop theories and models that could help us study, understand, and find means to effectively negotiate these conflicts. Ellis (2020), for instance, has identified two such research models. His "rational model" assumes that conflicts emerge around scarce material resources, while the "intractable model" upholds that conflicts arise mainly from identity and involve emotions. Ellis further adds that intractable conflicts are recalcitrant, nonrational, and particularly resistant to resolution as they generate difficult conversations. Similarly, Coleman (2003) has noted that these intense, inescapable conflicts involving issues such as identity, meaning, justice, and power are complex, traumatic, and often resist even the most serious attempts at resolution.

However, "[e]ventually, all parties to a conflict must talk" (Coleman, 2003, p. 183). After fighting a two-decade long deadly war, the United States and Taliban ("Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," as they call themselves and as is written in the deal document) signed a peace deal on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar. The actual details of the proceedings of the talks leading to the Deal are unknown, however, a four-page long document detailing the peace agreement was issued to the public. One important epistemological and methodological

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clarification that we want to make at the outset is that a majority consensus exists among Buberian scholars who contend that Buber's theories are most suitable for explaining and applying to contexts that involve dialogue (Barge & Little, 2002; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Broome, 2019; Ganesh & Zoller, 2012; Holquist, 1990; Kramer, 2004; Patton, 2014; Wolfe, 2018). For the purpose of this study, we assume the *talks* to represent a *dialogue* because: first, "talks" inherently imply a two-way *free* interaction; and second, phrases like "negotiations" and "process" were widely used in media and political commentary to refer to the *talk*, which in our opinion, constitute the elements of dialogue. Besides this, we believe that the analysis of this document could, *ex post facto*, yield important insights about the nature of the *talks*, the actors involved and the intertwining power dynamics.

In this paper, we analyze the four-page Peace Deal document by employing three concepts from Martin Buber's (2003 [1947]; 1958 [1923]; 1988 [1965]) philosophy of dialogue: *I-It-Thou*; *Reciprocity*; and *Interhuman*. The purpose of the paper is to explore what can Buber's philosophy reveal about the present-day "hypermodern" (Lipovetsky, 2008) inter-nations dialogues. In addition, it also aims to show how a dialogue that is grounded in Buberian philosophy can transform those socio-cultural conditions and communicative structures that lead to the creation and sustaining of protracted conflicts. Finally, we also hope to introduce Martin Buber, an influential European philosopher of dialogue however little appreciated in Pakistani context, to the academics whose work concentrate on conflict resolution and peace building. For the last 40 years, the country has been facing its own internal conflicts as well as spillovers from imperialist wars in Afghanistan. Therefore, we hope to inspire some critical engagement with Buber's work.

Bubering the dialogue: A Literature Review

Martin Buber's (1878-1965) philosophy of dialogue has been a major influence in the literature, theory, and practice of dialogue, whether interpersonal, organizational, or inter-nations (Black, 2005; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; DeIuliis, 2021). His central idea *I-Thou/I-It* forms the ontological basis of dialogue. In his book *The knowledge of Man* (1988 [1965]), Buber presented the twofold principal of human life, which, according to him, is humans' innate need to be confirmed and to confirm others. However, Buber stated that this *confirming* should not result in an instrumentalizing *It*, rather in a humanizing *Thou*. A *Thou* confirming, he observed, unfolds during a true dialogue which is a "dynamic, adaptable, pluralistic form of association" (p. 57). This is a revolutionarily humane conceptualization of dialogue, given that today, dialogue is most often used by powerful actors to "diplomatically coerce" (Beaulieu-Brossard, 2015) and instrumentalize the *other* (DeIuliis, 2021) or co-opt the dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012).

Connected to *I-Thou* is Buber's concept of *reciprocity*. Buber (1988 [1965]) argued that we can grasp our common humanity (*I-Thou*) only if we engage in genuine *reciprocity*. "Through reciprocal relationships between individuals, new values, new psychic facts are created that are not possible in isolated individuals" (p. 93). To this, we would add that, though in today's world, dialogues do happen, and new facts and values are also created, however, they may not be based on the *I-Thou* principle. This brings us to Buber's third point, *Interhuman*. Buber (1988 [1965]) posited that through an *interhuman* relationship, people confirm each other, becoming a *self* with the *other*. Drawing on Buber, DeIuliis (2021) asserted that the fuller growth of the self is not achieved by one's relation to oneself (in this paper: a nation), but by the confirmation in which one person knows herself to be made present in her uniqueness by the *other*. Thus, *Interhuman* is a powerful dialogic construct for exploring modern dialogues between humans that, in most cases, are shaped/mediated by nations and corporations. After this brief primer, we believe that a detailed elaboration of Buber's *I-It-Thou*, *Reciprocity*, and *Interhuman* is warranted.

I-It-Thou and Interhuman/The Between

Kramer (2004) argued that "I", "You", and "It" are the elemental variables of Buber's philosophy. According to him, Buber held that no isolated *I* exists apart from relationship to an other (*It* or *Thou*). Therefore, for Buber, Kramer claimed, *I* can only exist in a dialogue, or what Buber called "encounter." Similarly, Buber's biogrpaher Maurice Friedman (2002) noted that by *Thou*, Buber meant an experience not of an *object* but of a *relationship*. Friedman further maintained that this relationship is neither objective nor subjective but *interhuman*. According to Buber (1988 [1965]), this interhuman, a "dynamic solidarity," is contained neither in one or the other, nor in the sum of both, but in the realm of "the between." This realm, Buber asserted, *happens*, or is *present* between the encountering entities. He further maintained that only *I-Thou* can take place in the realm of *the between*. On the other hand, *I-It*, according to him, takes place within the mind of the *I* and not between the individual and the world, hence it is subjective and lacks mutuality.

In *The knowledge of Man* (1988 [1965]), Buber posited that humans have two "primal attitude" or ways of speaking. First, *I-It*, which is more objectifying and monological, while the second, *I-Thou* is immediate, mutual, and dialogical. However, he contended that these are not absolute opposites, rather two complementary stands of life and must continue to interchange with one another, though he cautioned that we become human only through *I-Thou* because it calls us into a unique wholeness. In *I-It*, Buber claimed, the object is reduced to the observer's experience while in *I-Thou* "he [sic] is invited to meet me where I stand in open reciprocity" (p. 16). Friedman (2002) also noted that for Buber, *I-It* can never be spoken with the whole being. Similarly, Patton (2014) argued that an I–It relationship regards other human beings from a distance, from a superior vantage point of authority, as objects or subjects, as things in the environment to be examined and placed in abstract cause–effect chains. An I–Thou perspective, in contrast, Patton asserted, acknowledges the humanity of both self and others and implies relationship, mutuality, and genuine dialogue.

In *Between Man and Man* (2003 [1947]), Buber elaborated his ontological conception of the *self*, the *other*, and *The Between*/*Interhuman*. He argued that human experience is divided between two poles: the individual and the collective. Buber coined the term "the sphere of the between," a third dimension, to describe this reality, i.e., the between in which the human being has its origin and root. Kramer (2004) pointed out that the interhuman comprises of inner impressions (feelings), and external conditions (interaction structures). According to Kramer, it is the true community, a realm shared here and now in an encounter, accessible only to the persons who participate in the meeting. The sphere of the between, Buber insisted, transcends the specific spheres of each one: "On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of between" (p. 243). Thus, both Kramer (2004) and Friedman (2002) held that the interhuman is not a social or psychological condition but an *event* that takes place on the edge between a person and their surroundings. True community, Buber (1988 [1965] asserted, is "the dynamic facing of the other, a flowing from I to Thou" (p. 37). The event, Kramer explained, is extraordinary, fragile, and floating. Similalrly, Levinas (1967) also observed that *the between* is not an independent space but an *opening* unique to both *I* and *Thou* in which they enter into a meeting.

Reciprocity

In a contentious and unequal but globalized world, human communication face different challenges. "Today, what is ethical communication? Can we expect dialogue? Should I demand reciprocity," DeIuliis (2021, p. 340) asked these questions as he examined the ethics of reciprocity in hypermodern dialogues, which increasingly involve asymmetrical power and communication contexts. Several dialogue scholars (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Black, 2005; Cissna & Anderson, 1998) have asserted that dialogue is constitutive of communication. Further, DeIuliis posited that communication is a particular mode or *quality* of relating with the *other* that is characterized by mutuality (or reciprocity) and difference (or strangeness). DeIuliis continued that the *relating*, a turning toward the other, is characterized by a recognition of both mutuality and difference as inherent within the communicative dialogic praxis. *Strangeness*, Friedman (2002) claimed, is the recognition, honoring, and celebration of the uniqueness of the other. Reciprocity, on the other hand, according to DeIuliis, is a communicative ethic of responsiveness, i.e., the attention paid to the simultaneous recognition of the difference and similarity in the *I* and the *other*.

For Buber (1988 [1965]) also, dialogue is a mode of human communication that privileges a phenomenological attention directed toward the *other*. He observed that this *attending* to the *other* in conversation is rare and intentional, not the norm. Buber reasoned that reciprocity enables the interlocutors to take advantage of the historical moment (encounter) if genuine ethical responsiveness is observed. He further observed that reciprocity is grounded in true dialogic encounters that protect and promote the *Other* rather than the *self*. Some scholars also use reciprocity interchangeably with *intersubjectivity*. Tauber (1995), for instance, noted that the fulcrum of Buber's entire argument rests on recognizing that intersubjectivity is a reciprocal responsibility. From the above discussion, it emerges that the *interhuman* can only be realized through *reciprocity* which in turn makes possible the *I-Thou* relationship.

Protracted Conflicts

As we mentioned above, Buber's philosophy of dialogue has extensively informed the literature, theory, and practice of dialogue (Black, 2005; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; DeIuliis, 2021). In this paper, our focus is on a major conflict of the twentieth century, i.e., the war in Afghanistan (2001-2021) as part of the United States' "Global War on Terrorism." Viewed through the definition of Ellis (2020), this conflict meets the criteria to be identified as *protracted*. In protracted conflicts, "sacred values (e.g., religion, group identity, ethnicity) fundamentally inform the values and beliefs of each side and provide a group with a comprehensive and bounded system of beliefs…[and] are often the most troubling and recalcitrant (2020, p. 184). He further noted that, though, protracted conflicts implicate religion and ethnicity, however, it is more a matter of political issues being filtered through religious and ethnic lenses. Ellis has listed the following five characteristics of protracted conflicts.

First, intractable conflicts involve power imbalances where language and ethnicity are used to define the other and maintain power differences. Second, these conflicts are concerned with existential threats. They are less about tangible resources and more about human needs and identity. Third, intractable conflicts typically involve social and political distance between groups that results in misinformation and stereotypes and other cognitive distortions. Fourth, intractable conflicts involve extreme emotions. Deep feelings of humiliation and anger are part of these conflicts. And fifth, intractable conflicts result in trauma. Such traumas can be intergenerational. (2004, p. 184)

Ellis (2004) offered that protracted conflicts around identity are best studied through the Intractable Model. This model, he explained, is based on the principles of democracy, inclusion, and dialogic communication. Protracted conflicts most often involve two asymmetrical power wielders. Scholars (Ellis, 2004; DeIuliis, 2021; Coleman, 2003; Mullen, 2001) have noted the problematics of asymmetrical relationships between conflicting parties. Ellis suggested that groups must function in an environment of equality; "that is, all participants or citizens must be able to participate and avail themselves of the opportunities for debate, discussion, and to shape group outcomes" (p. 194). This environment of equality, he claimed, can only be achieved through the democratic principles of dialogue and deliberation, which in turn, are enabled through the expansion of deliberative contexts and public conversational spaces.

Ellis (2004) also asserted that the definition of inclusion must be serious and deep. "Contemporary democracies such as the United States, as successful as they may be, still fall short of genuine deliberative experiences that include a wide array of groups and voices" (p. 192). Ellis claimed that absolutist cultural notions that usually result from power asymmetry restrict the dialogic transformation of participants and increase misunderstanding. He offered the example of The Israeli–Palestinian conflict and suggested that Islam and the West "must construct new frameworks because it is no longer the case that a single culture is the holder of a universally valid technique or set of assumptions" (p. 191). We submit that similar assumptions underlined the conflict in Afghanistan and, therefore, demands thinking along the lines demonstrated by Ellis.

Finally, Ellis (2004) emphasized that communicative activity – especially democratic communicative activity – must have a dialogic experience in order to articulate cultural stances and resistance. He asserted that managing, let alone solving, difficult cultural conflicts must involve the transformation of culturally embedded communication patterns. To this end, he noted that the vocabulary used in their communication by conflicting parties is important. Terms/phrases, Ellis maintained, are representative of conflicts and reflect group status as well as the intensity of the group differences. In protracted identity-based conflicts, Ellis (2004) and Mullen (2001) held, language is based more on obtaining self-interest rather than the understanding of self and other.

Mullen described how the structure of the terms can reveal the differences between high- and low-status groups, superior and subordinate groups, and the underlying complexity. He pointed out that communication should not be reduced to simple instrumental strategies but aimed at transforming the relationship between the conflicting parties.

The four-page peace agreement, we contend, offers a rich text that contains the positionalities, mutualities, differences, and expectations of both parties. In the light of the above literature, we thoroughly analyze the document's text, however, we specifically investigate the following two questions.

1. What ontological positions (*I-Thou-It*) does the Peace Deal's text take/create?
2. What epistemological claims (*reciprocity* and *interhuman*) are made (i.e., words and phrases used, and cultural/master narratives/stories implicated) in the Peace Deal's text?

Methods

Theoretical Framework

According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), "[i]t is by seeing the world through a particular theory that we can distance ourselves from some of our taken-for-granted understandings" (p. 22). To achieve this critical distance, and maintain an analytic consistency throughout the study, we employ three concepts from Martin Buber's philosophy

of dialogue, i.e., *I-It-Thou*, *Interhuman*, and *Reciprocity*. These constructs were discussed in detail in the literature review section.

Data Source

As we mentioned earlier, we analyze the four-page document of the US-Taliban Peace Deal. Though, the analysis of the actual proceedings of the talks in which this document was agreed upon would have been ideal, however, the details of it have been kept in complete secrecy (George, 2021). The dialogue started in 2016 and, following an on-gain off-again trajectory, culminated in the Peace Deal in February 2020. The talks were held in Doha, Qatar's capital city, where the Taliban maintained their political office since 2010 (AlJazeera, 2013). According to the Deal document, it is a "comprehensive peace agreement" made of four parts. The first part details the guarantees that the US seeks from Taliban; the second explains the timeline of the US' complete withdrawal from Afghanistan; and the third and fourth parts elaborate on a post-withdrawal permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, and intra-Afghan negotiations, respectively. We believe that this document offers a rich data source for a rhetorical-interpretative analysis that can yield a wider and critical set of meaning and themes related to dialogue, communication, conflicts, culture, democracy and community.

Analytical Tools

To analyze the text of this document, we use a combination of two interpretive approaches (tools), namely: interpretative textual analysis (Chandler, 2002; Allen, 2017); and critical discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Interpretative textual analysis, Chandler (2002) states, looks at texts as semiotic objects, "that position text users as holders of different subjectivities, playing various roles in semiotic interaction, and which speak to other texts through relations of intertextuality" (p. 202). Similarly, Allen (2017) posits that interpretation involves understanding the text within the multiple facets of the historical, cultural, and social understandings of the world at the time when the text was created. However, interpretative analysis tends to overlook the question of power and agency. Therefore, Jørgensen and Phillips' (2002) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was also used to account for power, agency, and the prospects of social change. Jørgensen and Phillips argue that using CDA, the analyst works with what has actually been said, explores patterns in and across the statements, and identifies the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality. Using these two frameworks, we critically scrutinize the document for sub-texts, unstated assumptions, discursive concealments, hegemonic normalizations, and dialogic disruptions.

Analysis Procedure

Following Merskin (2004), our first step of the analysis involved "a long preliminary soak" (Hall, 1975), i.e., we individually gave a thorough reading to the text. Next, we jointly had close and deeper readings of the text interspersed with rigorous analytic and interpretive discussions. Thus, we mutually identified and agreed upon the rhetorical, dialogical, and communicative themes and patterns in accordance with Chandler (2002), Allen (2017), and Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), and corresponding to, or contrasting with, the central questions of our research, i.e., *I-Thou-It*, *Reciprocity*, and *Interhuman*. Although, this is a qualitative analysis, however, we also noted important quantitative nuances, i.e., the number of times a specific word/theme or combination of themes was used/repeated.

Data Analysis and Findings

I-Thou-It

Although, Buber has nowhere hinted at any possibility of *It-It* relationship, however, based on our analysis, we want to make a naïve claim (innovation) to state that, overall, the Deal reflects a relationship that can best be described as *It-It*. The document is written by a "third" person in the third person's voice, and in a passive grammar with rarely (clearly) mentioning the author(s) and the addressee(s). According to Derrida (1998), passivity of speech is a relation to an absolute past that can never be fully mastered, i.e., brought to presence, and to a future that is not anticipated. To Derrida, in this type of relation of signification, a "dead time is at work" (p. 68). In our interpretation, this document embodies and symbolizes a dead time which tends to diminish any possibility for the *I*, a temporal entity, to exist either as *I-Thou* or *I-It*. Therefore, the document not only objectifies (*It*) Taliban but also the USA, which we will show in the succeeding sections.

Moreover, the document does not contain any form of regret/remorse from both conflicting parties on the loss of lives and property which also represents an *It-It* relationship. Thus, both parties neither transcend themselves nor is this experience (Peace Deal) transcending for the humanity as a whole (see The Buber-Rogers dialogue 1957 in Cissna & Anderson, 1994). According to Buber (1988 [1965]), affirmation, validation, and confirmation are at the heart of an *I-Thou* encounter in which both parties acknowledge the uniqueness of each other and their common humanity. Martin and Cowan (2019) have refered to affirmation/confirmation as the "growth choice" while non-affirmation as the "fear choice." The analysis of the document reveals that both the US and Taliban still hold to the *fear choice* and are not willing to discuss the prospects of how they both can grow from the situation they find themselves in.

Though, the document, we argue, displays an overall *It-It* scenario, however, specific sections of the document do establish a relationship which is *I-It*, to which we turn now. One important aspect of the text is that it reflects a big power asymmetry (Ellis, 2020) between both parties. Throughout the document, Taliban are referred to as "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban" which shows an *I-It* relationship. Used 16 times in the document (17 % of the text), this label designates the Taliban as an illegitimate group. Seen through Buber's philosophy of dialogue, with this invalidating and delegitimizing tag dotting the document, we can infer that genuine dialogue and reciprocity could not be established. Buber, in his book *I and Thou* (1958 [1923]), has compelling called the subject position that the deal's text articulates for the US as the "lord of the hour." He writes:

> In our age the l-it relation, gigantically swollen, has usurped, practically uncontested, the mastery and the rule. The I of this relation, an I that possesses all, succeeds with all, this I that is unable to say Thou, unable to meet a being essentially, is the lord of the hour." (p. 56)

Reciprocity

The text shows no signs of reciprocity: it is one-dimensional in its tone and texture. This is evident from the following almost identical sentence-structure used throughout the document.

> The US is committed to….
> The Taliban will be responsible for…

From the first statement, we can infer that the US considers itself as the only entity to which it owes a *commitment*. Taliban, on the other hand, are obligated to an *other* force: apparently, the US. In addition, as Fromm (1941) has demonstrated, the phrase "committed to" symbolizes a relationship of freedom while "responsible for" shows a diminution of choices. Moreover, the US is situated as the absolute center (Holquist, 1990), or a self-sufficient *I* to an *It* (Buber, 2003 [1947]), while the Taliban is constructed as an absolute periphery. Similarly, Broome et al. (2019) assert that reciprocity values *We* more than *I,* and celebrates relational harmony, not the erosion of relational diversity. Seen in this context, the peace deal document places *I* higher than the *We*.

Finally, the document is aimed at achieving *consensus*. Barge and Little (2002) cautions that attempts to secure *consensus* (collective thinking) tend to diminish the prospects of dynamism. They point out several ironies in consensus-based approach, arguing that consensus (an end, not a process) could become static which can erase some voices. Instead of consensus, they favor a *dialogical wisdom* i.e., cultivating a productive dynamic between the centrifugal and centripetal forces and not obsessing with dissolving them into a *solution*. Moreover, by establishing an *I-It* instrumental and fixed relationship, the Deal effects, what Deetz et al. (2007) terms "the discursive closure." For instance, Afghanistan comprises of multiple ethnic and national groups and not all of them align with what Taliban stand for, plus the fact that dissenting groups exist within the Taliban (Barfield, 2011; Behuria et al., 2019). Thus, the document preemptively closes any discursive and dialogic room for all other Afghan groups to leverage their voices within the Taliban rule once the US has left. Moreover, it shows that even the *It* (Taliban) itself has been 'conceived' in an extremely reductionist, homogenizing epistemological form, exclusive of all other possible *It*s or *Thou*s.

Interhuman/The Between

The document's grammar is intriguingly mechanical and tends not to produce the dialogic effects. Following Bakhtin (1984), we infer that the document's syntax represents a "structured episode" which, according to him, offers no possibility for the *fleeting moments* to occur. Cissna and Anderson (1998), drawing on the Buber-Rogers debate (1957), have stated that "mutuality and, by extension, dialogue, are matters of moments of meeting [i.e., *fleeting moments*]" (p. 93). In line with this argument, we add that until there exists inequality – in any of its forms – among human beings, the between, or interhuman, can only be realized in the ephemeral moments, which in turn can be made possible by a spontaneous and organic encounter. It is through such organic moments, Freire (1970) held, that encountering members can realize their common humanity, which otherwise remains hidden from them in the bureaucratically composed and heavily routinized and ritualized structures. Building on Barge and Little (2002), we also want to add that the document fixes the centrifugal/centripetal forces rather than, as Barge and Little proffer, honor them, the latter fosters possibilities for learning to coexist with each other's complexities. This shows that it sets aside "the between" and hence, also the possibility of the moments of meeting (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Lastly, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) observe that a true dialogue requires a surplus/excess seeing of the *other*, i.e., that difference should not be defined as a conflict rather a quality which makes possible the *coming to being* of both the *self* and *other*. The document, however, does not reflect that either of the parties sees an excess of the *other*, thus positions both of them as stuck in an eternal conflict.

Unconclusion

One important quality or goal of the dialogue is that it does not attempt to achieve a *perfect* and *final* resolution (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Buber's dialogic philosophy not only stresses the need to accommodate complexity and difference, but also emphasizes that dialogue is a continuous and unending process. To assert and appreciate this understanding conceptually, scholars have created phrases like "To be continued" (LeGreco & Douglas, 2017) and "Unconclusion" (Black, 2020). Using the unconclusion as a useful dialogic lens (or insight), we argue that although, the peace deal document hints at unconclusion, however, it declares that dialogue will only continue between the US and the post intra-Afghan dialogue government (post-settlement government). Thus, it preemptively erases Taliban as any possible entity to continue engaging with. Therefore, *unconclsuion* is achieved at the cost of the conclusion/eraser of the *other* (Taliban).

Discussion

Drawing mostly on the critical discourse tradition (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), in this section, we endeavor to locate the discursive themes that we found in the analysis into the global and local material, socio-cultural and political structures, and examine their possible real-life consequences for the Afghan populations in particular, and for the people of all nations in general. The overarching premises of this *locating* is democracy, human rights, intercultural and inter-civilizational conflicts, intercultural communication and dialogue, global civic solidarity, emancipation, and local community building.

First, as Ellis (2004) states, the most common successful way of managing the conflicts that involve religion, ethnicity, and politics is liberal accommodation. However, the Deal document does not mention democracy a single time. Democracy, besides civil rights, and women's liberation, were the master constructs which the US and the allied forces heavily used to legitimize the "war on terror." It is curious to note how the document and its authors turn a blind eye on these "master signifiers" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and the highest ideals of contemporary civilization. Moreover, according to Ellis, democratic principles oblige all contending parties to create truly and deeply inclusive experience for authentic dialogue to happen. Ellis also mentions that inclusion rests on equality which can be realized only if all participants are able to shape group outcomes. Given the power asymmetry between the US and Taliban which is reflected in the document being a single authorship (unidirectional tone), it seems harder that an "environment of equality" (Ellis, 2004) was created during the proceedings leading up to the peace deal. In addition, the *agent* of the text flows unidimensionally from the US to Taliban, therefore, the *I* does not flow towards the *Thou* (Buber, 1988 [1965]), rather it is brought into being by instrumentalizing the *other*, i.e., by *Iting*.[1]

Second, following Heath (2007), the document does not seem to be "generative" as it fails to aim at any creative and democratic outcomes. Heath (2007) proffered that creativity and diversity make dialogue and collaboration generative, i.e., productive, dynamic, and open-ended. She proposed that collaboration stakeholders would be better able to negotiate creative and democratic outcomes if they embrace and engage diversity, because, diversity, she adds, facilitates creativity; and dialogue is the manifestation of diversity. The document, as we mentioned earlier, is addressed solely to Taliban, which is situated as a monolithic, *listening-only* entity, and diversity and dynamism are progressively removed. In the same vein, it also depicts the US as a monolithic voice and does not engage the plurality of opinions among Americans about this Deal. Many in Afghanistan and America think differently from those who have authored this Deal, and demand that the Deal should prevent

the gains made in democracy and civil liberties including women's rights from being lost to Taliban (Afzal, 2020; Dozier, 2020). Moreover, the document's analysis also shows that both parties do not make any attempt to disrupt the conditions that fostered the conflict in the first place (Wolfe, 2018). Wolfe (2018) presented an "agonistic resistance-pluralism theory" of public dialogue, according to which differences are integral to being human and should not be presented in an innocent/victim *Us* vs a threatening *Other* binary. She argued that "agonistic pluralism" should attempt to de-reify rigid boundaries (us/them) and cultivate respect for difference because the latter has productive potentials for collective progress. She also states that deliberative moment should not solely aim at creating consensus, rather the aim must be to visibilize invisible positions (identities) and unequal power-relations, and direct us towards the issue, not just the positions. Since the document does not engage the socio-economic, cultural, and religious conditions that had created Taliban authoritarianism, and the anti-West – particularly, the anti-US mindset – therefore, following Wolfe (2018), the same conditions are bound to return. The Deal, at best, seems to cure (read: dump) the symptoms rather than heal the root causes of this protracted conflict.

Buber (1958 [1923]) argues that the fundamental aim of dialogue is to bring the *other* in the *presence*, and thus also become *present* themselves. The *other*, he observes, is ineffable, and to make sure the *other* remains so, dialogue should aim to speak *to* rather than speak *of* the *other*. The document, however, consistently speaks *to* the Taliban and thus dictates the *other* rather than bring it to *presence*. This is in contradiction with Buberian principle which holds that only through *I-Thou*, i.e., speaking *to* (to effect *presence*), can we become fully human. In *I-Thou*, Martin and Cowan (2019) observe, the uniqueness and separateness of the *other* is acknowledged without obscuring the relatedness or common humanness that is shared. In *I-It* relationship, they claim, *other* is experienced as an *object* to be influenced or used as a means to an end. From the document, the only *end* that we can see is to make sure a convenient withdrawal of the American troops is accomplished, leaving all the cultural and communicative context intact which would continue breeding the conditions of the protractedness. Thus, the document/Deal, we conclude, is not inherently dialogical but instrumental in nature and is not aimed at *transforming* the relationship between the conflicting parties (Ellis, 2020).

Finally, according to Martin and Cowan (2019), Buber understood that an authentic encounter between people or groups contains wonderful potential which becomes apparent when the two actively and authentically engage each other in the here and now and truly "show up" to one another. In such an encounter, Martin and Cowan maintain, a new relational dimension that Buber termed "the between" becomes manifest which then serves as the basis for the *I-Thou* relationship. The document reflects neither the *here* and *now* nor engage the past/history. Jovanovic et al. (2007) argue that a dialogic reckoning of the history is essential for achieving a sustainable conflict resolution. They further add that a constructive discussion of the past is a positive move for the future. The document, however, shows no hints at present/future reconciliation efforts.

Conclusion

Martin and Cowan (2019) have used the phrase "missed meetings" to refer to those counselling sessions between the therapist and the 'client' that could not actualize an *I-Thou* relationship. For them, such meetings are the ultimate failure of human relationships and result in *us* losing a part of ourselves. We argue that Martin and Cowan's argument also holds true for the US and Taliban Peace Deal. The Deal seems to be a *missed* meeting, and a broken dream. A Buberian dialogic analysis of the Peace Deal's declaration showed that both parties were only concerned to end a physical war without engaging to transform those social, cultural, geopolitical, and historical forces and structures that had brought them to the war in

the first place. The document poignantly indicates that both US' and Taliban's *I*s (self) have withered away, and each has lost their *part* in the *other*.

Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

The study is limited in several ways, however, we wish to highlight two of them. First, the emotional complexity resulting from our own identities as ethnic Pashtun/Afghan, who came of age amidst unending imperialist wars, might have affected our ability to achieve the critical detachment necessary for carrying out an objective analysis. Second, we analyzed only a textual document. Additional research is required to look longitudinally into the entire negotiation process, and the actual proceedings (meetings, media talks, minutes etc.), and also conduct interviews/group discussions with those who attended these talks in order to capture every aspect of the actual dialogic experience, and produce a methodologically comprehensive study.

Endnotes

[1]We add "ing" to the pronoun "it" to make it a verb that performs the action/work of *othering*.

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Appendix

The pdf of the Peace Deal was downloaded from the United States Department of State's website at https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf on February 17, 2023.