

**Can Afghan Woman Speak?:
Resisting Western Stereotyping of Afghan Women and Repressive
Gender Policies in Two Afghan Ethnoautobiographies by Zoya
and Latifa**

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Abstract

Western media had stereotyped Afghan women as creatures who face discrimination and marginalization from men and fundamentalist societies. In Zoya's *Zoya's Story* (2002) and Latifa's *My Forbidden Face* (2001), the two female authors speak about the terrible conditions of women in so-called democratic Afghanistan during the rule of the Taliban. Ethnoautobiographies of Afghan women, in general, demonstrate a new understanding of life under oppression and how they strive to maintain their autonomy in the face of repression and subjugation. The texts under study show that Afghan women are neither submissive nor passive figures but had tried to retain their autonomy under the rule of the Taliban. This research is framed by administering an approach that combines Michel Foucault's theory of Power/ Knowledge and Stuart Hall's theory of Representation / Stereotyping and directing a critical analysis of two ethnoautobiographies of two Afghan women activists who challenge their passive stereotyped images set by Western societies to justify the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. This paper argues that Afghan women attempted to maintain their autonomy and fight for their rights before the rest of the world rushed to free them. Afghan women resisted suppression in several ways, but Zoya and Latifa participated in non-violent resistance against the Taliban regime.

Keywords: Ethnoautobiography- Power- Resistance- Burqa- Fundamentalist- Stereotyping

Introduction

This paper intends to deconstruct the stereotypical image of Afghan women as submissive figures and offer a different perspective from the points of view of Afghan women. The media's constant images of abused and oppressed Afghan women have created a wave of stereotypes and negativity in Western society. Therefore, this study aims to recall the history of Afghan women's struggle against the repressive gender policies of the Taliban by critically analyzing two ethnoautobiographies of two Afghan women activists, Zoya and Latifa.

The tragedy of our country has been reduced to the image of the Taliban and the burka and a narrow 5 year-period of our history[...]And the image of the Afghan women, silent under their burka, does not tell the truth of our lives nor our resistance.
(Brodsky ix)

Therefore, Zoya's *Zoya's Story* and Latifa's *My Forbidden Face* are valuable to different interests and concerns, and they both empower the dispossessed and consume them yet again in terms of familiar stereotypes. Moreover, they open spaces for Afghan women to contest these representations. The exchange between metropolitan (the West) and marginalized cultures is always rough because "the West consumes exotic products in an economic climate in which colonialisms of the past are perhaps less significant than imperialisms of the present" (Huggan 16). However, subalterns can draw down the power to resist oppression through writing ethnoautobiography, which claims and exercises autobiographical agency in different way. This is precisely the point that the Afghan women make when given the space to speak, and write their own ethnoautobiographies to deconstruct the stereotyping images of them presented by the West.

Ethnoautobiography is a form of writing that grounds itself in the ethnic, cultural, historical, ecological, and gender background of the author. Part of such writing is the investigation of hybridity, categorical borderlands and transgressions, and the multiplicity of histories carried outside and inside society. (see Kremer 9-11). Ethnoautobiography tells a decolonizing story that takes an indigenous sense of "ethno", including ancestry, history, and place (ecology). It is considered a new beginning of cultural self-reflection.

Therefore, as creative writing and storytelling, ethnoautobiography could explore consciousness as the network of depictions held by individuals from a subjective viewpoint and brings them into analytical dialogue with objective

factors related to identity assertion. Ethnoautobiography is a “mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, which incorporates the lives and actions of others and which is inclined to represent “I” or subjectivity that is externalized and dialogical” (Smith and Watson 198). Besides, ethnoautobiographic texts are those testimonies constructed “I” response to, or in dialogue with, “metropolitan representations, and in this way, indigenous or oppressed subjects may collaborate with and appropriate a dominant culture's discursive models” (Pratt 7). This suggests that, despite radically uneven power relations, the production and reception of ethnoautobiography draw attention to interactions between differently located subjects and subjectivities in a way that has the power to unsettle metropolitan or Western expectations.

However, the struggle of white women has become the only history of feminism to serve as a model for the rest of the world. Therefore, any woman who does not fit this image is seen as oppressed and in need of saving. By analyzing both ethnoautobiographies, *Zoya's Story* and *My Forbidden Face*, the paper deconstructs standard Western feminist notions of gender and focuses on indigenous understandings of gender from Afghanistan. In addition, the paper will show that Afghan women can resist the Taliban's oppression and assert their own agency. Zoya and Latifa had written their ethnoautobiographies to record their history and present. Besides, they had given a futuristic vision of new liberated Afghanistan.

Gender politics in Afghanistan are directly linked to the ruling regime. The Taliban regime led to religious and social transformation for women as the Taliban ruling led to war and conflict. The results of wars and conflicts are death, poverty, displacement, famine, and destruction of the economy and national infrastructure. These regimes have victimized Afghan people in general and Afghan women in particular. However, Afghan women never gave up hope for freedom and equality. Women's struggle and protest was an act against the authoritarian policies of the Taliban, which structurally sustained the perception of "masculinity/men as political, active, and rational, and femininity/women as personal, passive and irrational, respectively" (Peterson and Runyan 25). This ongoing conflict has generated many reactions from activists, theorists, novelists, and dramatists to advocate the cause of women, provoke their resistance and stir their liberation from the shackles of sexist ideas and stereotyping tendencies.

The Taliban's repressive gender policies triggered Afghan women's resistance. An essential part of feminist theory, empowerment, thus, is a process of

challenging unfavourable power relations, a process of change by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives (see Batlivala 127-138). Every part of Afghan women's lives, private or public, was distorted, which provoked many Afghan women to engage in different ways of resistance. The writings of most Afghan writers clearly describe the challenges and sufferings of Afghan women during the Taliban's regime, such as forced marriage, lack of freedom, loss of identity, and domestic violence.

Thus, recalling Foucault, it must be kept in mind that “where there is power, there is also resistance, which is never exterior in relation to power” (Foucault 95). Resistance can occur at various points and in many aspects of power relations. One of the most fundamental forms of resistance is writing down and recording memories.

To understand history, it is first necessary to appreciate the conditions that influence individuals' range of behavioural choices in their time and culture. Indeed, the creation of its own identity; compliance and compliance parameters in a company; assumptions about roles in times of crisis, such as being the perpetrator, victim, or spectator of injustice; and going against the norm ultimately makes a difference in their own life as well as in history. (Watson 1)

Ethnoautobiography or life stories of Afghan women show a new understanding of life under oppression and how they struggle to sustain their autonomy in the face of subjugation and repression. The texts under study show that Afghan women are neither submissive nor passive figures but have retained their autonomy under the rule of the Taliban. The research aims to answer the following questions while discussing the two memoirs: What are the predominant stereotypical misconceptions attached to Afghan women? What strategies do Afghan women use to resist? What are the consequences of their resistance? How do Afghan women empower themselves? What factors influenced their decisions and visions? For this purpose, the researcher has used an approach that combines Foucault's theory of Power/Knowledge with Hall's theory of Representation / Stereotyping to deconstruct the ideologies that inspire the memoirs of two remarkable Afghan women and highlight how these memoirs made violent and non-violent forms of resistance prominent. The researcher will deal with two

ethnoautobiographies of two women activists who lived in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule, Zoya and Latifa. However, they criticize the fundamental regime of the Taliban, which deprived them of their power of agency.

Manifestations of Oppression:

The Taliban regime persecuted women by banning education and work and imposing restrictive clothing and veils known as "Burqa". However, Afghan women did not succumb to oppression and joined movements and actions to fight for their rights. Zoya and Latifa let the readers enter an unknown world and experience feelings and thoughts that sometimes do not have a happy ending during the journey. During the Afghanistan war, women's situation became more and more miserable, and Afghan women rarely have freedom of thought and expression. The two ethnoautobiographies seek hope for the dream of women's empowerment through Zoya and Latifa's roles to counter the oppressive pain suffered by Afghan women. Empowerment thus refers to expanding one's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied.

Born in Afghanistan, a land ruled and dominated by the brutal Taliban regime, Zoya witnessed the repressive gender policy since her childhood. Her father and mother both carried out covert work against fundamentalists. When most of Afghanistan was burning under Russian rule, Zoya's mother worked with RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women). A secret society has been formed to make the world aware of what the people of Afghanistan face under the Russian regime and how their beautiful country is being destroyed little by little. Zoya grew up following in her mother's footsteps. She joined RAWA and began missions in Afghanistan and Pakistani refugee camps. The brutal crimes committed by the Taliban that left women begging and beaten in the streets, amputated children living on the streets waiting to die, houses demolished by bullets and bombs, and women abducted from their homes to be raped and tortured serve as examples of the Taliban's oppression against Afghan People.

On the other hand, Zoya was looking for ways to destroy evil. She had claimed that she would free her nation from the hooks of this fundamental regime. Zoya and her RAWA colleagues took numerous risks to raise worldwide awareness of crimes in Afghanistan, including secret visits to recruit new members for RAWA and to help as many people and children as possible.

Moreover, *My Forbidden Face* is written by Latifa, a sixteen-year-old girl who faithfully documented events over five years as they happened to her and her

family in her home country of Afghanistan after the Taliban took over. Latifa and her parents fled Afghanistan with the help of an Afghan resistance group based in France, and she now lives in Paris. The reader does not know the author's real name; She used the false name 'Latifa' to write the book because she still has family and friends in Afghanistan, where she was born and raised in an educated middle-class family. Latifa portrayed the story of her struggle setting up an underground school with some of her friends. Latifa realizes that life without literacy is like ending Afghan women's lives. Latifa's anxiety, gloom, and fury made her a woman who had the desire to fight for women whose lives were never the same again.

As a result, Afghan women became the central focus when The United States of America justified the war in Afghanistan in 2001. How Afghan women were subjugated and oppressed by the Taliban made global headlines. The only saviours are the Western forces who will liberate Afghanistan by establishing a government that cares about women and a rule of law that protects them. So, there are only two choices - oppression by the Taliban or freedom by Western colonialism. The binary of 'saviour'(America) and 'beast'(The Taliban) could be traced back to colonial discourses dominated by the white saviour complex. This thought was evident in United States First Lady Laura Bush's radio speech to her country in November 2001.

Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women. (Flanders 2001)

By describing the US military strike as a heroic and necessary interference to protect Afghan women from the Taliban, the First Lady sustains the Western saviour's subjectivity by manipulating Afghans' subservient mentalities. Indeed, Afghan women and girls are exploited as subjects to authenticate white subjectivity through feelings of gratefulness for the "White Western Savior". The domination of women was a great sign to produce this binary system which reinforced "the image of Muslim women as helpless victims who must be freed from their oppression by Western feminists" (McLaughlin 202). In other words, stereotyping images began appearing in the press and on television of Afghan

women wearing mini-skirts with those now wearing full burqas, Western women enjoying a concert, and veiled girls gathered outside a closed school.

Identity and stereotyping are tightly knit together, as it can be understood from the notion of relational and excluding identities. There are two essential concepts in this context, namely security and simplification. One of the postcolonial perspectives on stereotyping analyses how insecurity and conflicting feelings shape the stereotyping process. According to Stuart Hall,

Stereotypes get hold of the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. (23)

Stereotyping is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order, and it helps set up a frontier between what is expected and unexpected. It furthers the binding of 'Us' into an (imagined) community, expelling 'Them' – the Others. According to Hall, stereotyping divides exaggerates, simplifies, and fixes differences while dividing people into "Us" and "Them," according to Hall. The third characteristic of stereotyping is that it frequently occurs in situations with glaring power disparities. This is thus because oppressed or marginalized communities are the prime targets of power. There is rarely any peaceful cohabitation when binary oppositions like "Us" and "Them" are one of the two rules or has the upper hand.

From 1997 to 2001, the Taliban assaulted the city of Kabul, unleashing inhuman acts and outrage against women, barred from working, school, and public life and leaving home without permission from male relatives. Under the Taliban, the media did not exist, but the Taliban used local radio stations to read the Quran and announce regulations. Their rules are no music, television, photos, weapons, Western books, education or schools for girls, and only religious classes for boys.

Thus, the Taliban led women to be voiceless, deaf, and dumb puppets; however, as Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak asked in her essay, "Can the subaltern speak?". Afghan women were subordinate and mute and could not speak for their rights. If they had spoken, their voices would not have been heard. Women in Third World countries are marginalized, first by colonists and second by patriarchal societies. Afghan women are exploited by a diverse power structure

representing religious warlords, the Taliban, the Soviet Union, and Americans. The 9/11 enabled Western feminists to reflect on gender equality and the liberation of Afghan women from the oppression of religious fundamentalists.

Colonialism, patriarchy, and minorities operate on the same oppressive model using power, hegemony, and ideology. The weaker sex is controlled and dominated by the powerful phallogocentric ideology, which "is the shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups" (Guha and Spivak 297). At this point, ideological hierarchy keeps the dominant and influential group in supremacy by controlling the infrastructure. In other words, "colonialism caused racial discrimination and created and reinforced any native gender oppression of colonized women in the non-western world (Loomba 183). Therefore, the Taliban regime wrinkled many matrilineal or woman-friendly cultures and practices and intensified women's subordination in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime, colonialism and racism are intricately linked because they intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men, increasingly excluded from the public sphere, became more domineering at home.

Taliban is a fundamental regime that Afghanistan has administered from 1996 to 2011. The Taliban were one of the Mujahidin (Freedom Fighters). The first appearance of the Taliban was a battle fought with shipping sent from Pakistan to Turkmenistan. However, after defeating the army, the Taliban moved to Kandahar and fled the city without resistance. Mujahidin Group attacked Kandahar for almost two years. With the control of Kandahar, the Taliban released their first declaration, in which they wanted "men to wear turbans, beards, short hair and kameez and women to wear a burqa, a garment that covers the entire body" (Peter 46). Over time, more and more laws had been issued. Women are prohibited from working and going to school. Music, games, and television were banned.

In September 1996, the Taliban occupied Kabul. The last president of Afghanistan, Mohammad Najibullah (Mohammad Najibullah, 1947-1996) and his brother were arrested in the United Nations compound and hanged on the football field. Latifa in *My Forbidden Face* recalled these events in her ethnoautobiography. According to Latifa, "Taliban considered Najibullah a heretic and hanged him for teaching others" (23). Latifa recalled, "many neighbours' children stopped going to school because their parents did not want the Taliban to indoctrinate them. Compared to these children, after all, I am already fortunate. My education was not interrupted until the arrival of the

Taliban" (120). Most schools became *Madras* (schools that teach radical ideas). Girls can only participate in *Madras* before the age of eight, but boys have no restrictions; they can only learn the Qur'an and the radical ideology of the Taliban. Knowledge and education became the key to the resistance of Afghan women. Many girls acquire literacy skills that they cannot obtain in secret schools. With the help of her parents and friends, Latifa established one of these secret schools at her own home.

Taliban declared that Islam is the leading religion in Afghanistan, and religion plays a vital role in the lives of Afghans. Both the Mujahideen and the Taliban use religion as a driving force; for example, the death of millions of people and the devastation of countries were carried out in the name of Islam. Members of the Taliban implemented what their leaders taught them. In so doing, the Taliban regime introduced barbarian images of Islam to the rest of the world. According to Zoya in *Zoya's Story*:

The Mujahideen entered Kabul and burnt down the university, library, and schools. Women were forced to wear the burqa, and fewer women were visible on television and in professional jobs. The period from 1992-1996 saw unprecedented barbarism by the Mujahideen, where stories of killings, rapes, amputations, and other forms of violence were told daily. To avoid rape and forced marriages, young women were resorting to suicide. (54)

The holy Qur'an was used to command the public, and rebels were punished for spreading fear, inciting obedience, and cooperating with the Taliban. Hence "there was a violent form of power which tried to accomplish a continuous mode of operation through the virtue of examples" (Foucault 155). In other words, the Taliban misused Qur'an verses to oppress people and force them to obey them. As if the holy Qur'an was their power by which they frightened the Afghan people.

The Taliban prohibited women and girls from going to work or attending schools. Outside the family, women or girls are not allowed to speak with members of the opposite sex. When going out, women must wear a burqa and be accompanied by a male relative. The Taliban also asked the men to leave beards, pray five times a day in the mosque, and wear a headscarf and Salwar kameez (traditional pants and stockings). Life in the city was returning to ordinariness

because "women were no longer working in government and men in the city had started to grow beards" (Zaeef 17). All statues and images were demolished because they were considered offensive to extremist Taliban's extremist Islamic ideology.

The Taliban's repressive gender policy deploys a strategy of splitting – where those (Afghan women) who do not fit the Taliban's regime and norms are excluded, and their rejection is achieved by combining them with a set of stereotypes that are considered unacceptable: "others." This negates the possibility of meaningful discourse about or with them and ensures they continue to be excluded. This is most effective when gross power inequalities allow the Taliban regime (dominant group) to employ their oppressive strategy without challenge. Therefore, while implementing "their strict version of Sharia Laws, the Taliban unleashed an army of enforcers throughout territories under its domination" (Emadi 126). For example, the burqa, which did not have a good reputation among the city inhabitants, is considered offensive because The Taliban forced Afghan women to dress in a way that concealed their identity as unique individuals. Burqa is a form of the veil that predates the Taliban in the city and countryside. The Taliban impose a blue burqa, while women in rural areas wear burqas of different colors as part of their daily attire. The burqa "was the only passport [the Taliban] demanded of a woman" (Zoya 5).

Latifa and her family saw changes in their lives in the blink of an eye. For them, the Taliban decree deprived them of personal freedom and was based on sexual racism. Latifa recalled how she and her sister packed her clothes and hid them from the Taliban.

I put my prettiest clothes in a suitcase, leaving only pants and black running shoes. Soraya does the same. Her beautiful Aryana airline uniforms, colourful skirts, spring shirts, high heels, and rainbow sweaters are now indecent. (Latifa 39)

The imposing of the burqa in Kabul and Mazare Sharif was devastating. In the years before the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, these two cities made the fastest progress in improving the professional status of women. Even uneducated women who have lived in rural areas consider the burqa to be humiliating. For Zoya and Latifa, the strict dress code of the Taliban deprived them of their autonomy and the ability to express themselves as they pleased. According to Lila Abu-Lughod,

in her *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, "women were not oppressed by religion, but rather by men who were barbaric and quenched for power" (80).

Afghanistan is a traditional and religious country. Therefore, the role of gender is marked in Afghan society. Afghan women have had difficulty obtaining freedom in a society where men were considered superior to women. The Taliban asked them to "hide their identities as women, to make them feel so ashamed of their sex that they were afraid to show one inch of their bodies. The Taliban did not know the meaning of love: women for them were only a sexual instrument" (Zoya 8). Under the Taliban rules, women resisted suppression in several ways. While giving his speech "Three Ways of Meeting Oppression", Martin Luther King clarified that oppression is dealt with in three ways by the subjugated. The first way is submission, which means people adjust to oppression and become submissive. The second way to resist subjugation is through violence, and the third is non-violent resistance (28). In the case of Afghan women, both resistance patterns were evident, but most women participated in non-violent resistance against the Taliban regime.

Voices of Resistance:

Afghan women, "according to their own culture, religion and ethnicity, have been resisting the social domination that the family and society try to impose on them" (Rostami-Povey 3). Despite the difficult living conditions under the Soviet Union and the Taliban regime, Afghan women have found a space to exercise their autonomy and self-determination. After the takeover of Afghanistan by the United States in 2001, many Afghan women came to tell their stories during the resistance. The history of Afghanistan echoes its patriarchal nature. Most men and their actions have been recorded in history, leaving no room for women. Therefore, women are victims of both the Taliban's fundamentalism and the patriarchal society in which they live. According to Michel Foucault, there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more accurate and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated into global strategies. (142)

No power can continue to rule over people who refuse to be intimidated by death. This does not mean that the willingness to die is always the basis for a

winning strategy against domination, but to some extent, all political power is conditional upon the cooperation and obedience of its subjects, who always have the potential to withdraw their consent and thus defeat tyrannies (see Sharp 151). Foucault argues that such revolt stands in the way of utterly absolute power and anchors all forms of liberty.

Before the Soviet invasion, the most prominent women's movement was the Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women (RAWA) of Meena Keshwar Kamal co-founded the organization with a group of Afghan women, formally established in 1977. Alongside the organized political campaign, RAWA also built schools, hospitals, and craft centres for displaced women in Pakistan. RAWA's mission is to fight for women's human rights. The basic principles behind RAWA's vision are democratic and secular principles, of which women are considered equal to men. Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women (RAWA) exposed violent crimes without hesitation in contemporary Afghanistan. Once again, during the Taliban rule, members of RAWA risked their lives to film Taliban violence against women secretly and then spread this information to the outside world. RAWA provides shelter, vocational training, and education to homeless women and prostitutes in Heart, Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Jalalabad (Sherazi 100).

The organization's main base moved from Kabul to Pakistan in the early 1980s. However, most of the field investigations and evidence gathering by RAWA members were carried out in Afghanistan during the Soviet and Taliban rule. *Zoya's Story*, which was written by Zoya, a member of RAWA details the work of RAWA and its risks. The courage, determination and resourcefulness of Afghan women are transformative elements of the situation of women in a patriarchal society, which considers women inferior to men and treats them as property that can be bought and sold. Afghan women won the right to vote, but the Afghan government failed to deliver on the rights promised to women, while the United States made progress toward Afghan women's rights. Therefore, the women's actions showed resistance to submissive and passive states; their small resistance behaviors can be analyzed from the history and memories written by Afghan women. Not all Afghan women can choose to join a women's organization like RAWA, looking for alternatives. For example, women wore makeup under their burqas to resist the Taliban.

Zoya states: "In the streets of Kabul, I often see women hiding under these burqas. They look strange next to the beautiful young women of the city, who

walk happily arm in arm, wearing makeup and wearing mini-skirts" (Zoya 132). Zoya's mother was a member of RAWA. Zoya learned that her mother wore the burqa, even though her mother had told her that illiterate women, beggars, and prostitutes wore the burqa. Zoya knew her mother was "wearing it to save her life" (Zoya 133). Zoya's mother wore a burqa to hide her identity from the Taliban's officers and hundreds of other women secretly participating in an underground organization like RAWA.

RAWA and other groups use the burqa to hide materials, such as books, that are necessary items for the clandestine schools in which they operate. Moreover, they have used it as a vehicle for smuggling still and video cameras to survey conditions in Afghanistan and Pakistani refugee camps while avoiding intense scrutiny of their activities. (McLaughlin 203)

Therefore, the veil or burqa could also be the site of resistance, a convenient shield for women supporting national liberation struggles. Simply continuing to wear the burqa was an act of resistance because it could hide weapons or secret communications. The burqa was also seen as a symbol of national tradition and resistance to colonial domination in the colonial context. For these reasons, the burqa is a multifaceted icon, a reminder of a repressive regime and an icon of heroic resistance.

Zoya and Latifa's Non-Violent Resistance Strategies:

Although they were always in danger, Zoya and Latifa never gave up. Education is critical in preventing poverty, empowering women, and promoting human rights. Afghan people recognize the power of education, and the education reform in Afghanistan started earlier than in some other underdeveloped countries. Latifa's fight to continue getting rights and literacy symbolizes resistance against fundamental regimes. Getting literacy is a basic right for every human being. Latifa never withdraws from providing education to children, young men, and women around her dwelling. She felt compelled to become an underground school teacher so that young children could still get reading and math lessons until 7-14 years old.

I take eight children, and Farida does the same.
Maryam will have five, on average, depending on

what day it is. Our pupils will be between five and fourteen years old, both girls and boys. We're taking risks as well, of course, but we're careful to limit them. (Latifa 76)

The quotation reflects the resistance carried out by Latifa and her friends in fighting for literacy for Afghan children. Uncertain life in uncertainty makes Latifa think about struggling and fighting by continuing to provide reading and writing knowledge. Thus, Afghan children can continue to study. Her eagerness to continue sharing education and knowledge through underground secret school made her one of the representatives of Afghan women who speak against oppression, injustice, violence, and repression of Afghan women in international forums in France. Throughout her ethnoautobiography, Latifa hoped the story of herself and Afghan women would be a tool to have support from women and the global community.

The Taliban rule, local traditions and geopolitical forces were the main factors in the oppression of Afghan women. Therefore, education and social progress in Afghan society remain a constant struggle for them. Education became the foundation for women to question and confront authority. Women from all fields of life were dynamically involved in the deliverance and empowerment of women, even risking their lives. *Zoya's Story* and *My Forbidden Face* showed how Afghan women fought for freedom before coming to save them from other parts of the world. Although many Afghan people accepted the oppression of the Soviet Union and the Taliban, others collectively participated in the resistance and changed the situation.

There were numerous reports on oppressed women in Afghanistan in international media, development reports, and literature that evoked images of oppressed women, such as hungry widows, young girls being forced into marriage, a high rate of maternal mortality, rape, murder, kidnapping, wife-beating, suicide, denying girls' education, destroying girls' schools, restricted mobility, and—most importantly—the use of clothing. The burqa has been recorded in words and images so often that Afghan women have become victims of the stereotype of male domination, ignorance, and suppression of religious beliefs worldwide. To dispel this feeling, it was true that many Afghan women suffer violence, deprivation, and restrictions on their freedom of choice and movement. The Afghan authorities often ignored their situation or regarded it as the norm. When Afghan women avoided being victimized, they were often

victimized again. Women who fled could be imprisoned, and raped victims could be convicted of adultery or killed for damaging family honour. At best, they could find refuge in a shelter, but this was not much better than prison because it put them on the verge of being unable to get out quickly. Afghan women used the opportunities to speak on their terms, which was how they negotiated with and against Western expectations of the agency. For example, Latifa became an Afghan woman representative who spoke internationally in Paris. She took all the risks to fight for women's rights in accessing education which the Taliban banned. Through all the efforts done by Latifa, she proved that by being the 'Speaker', she had voiced all the oppressions to fight for Afghan women's freedom.

Also, Zoya was invited to New York by Oprah Winfrey to speak to many women and gather donations for RAWA. She is an activist who has dedicated her life to her country's freedom.

I have never had a private life, and I have no regrets about this. I do not see anything beautiful in me that a man could look at in a special way. I have never dreamed of a man looking at me, nor have I fallen in love [...] Only if one day there is peace in my country and a democracy in which men respect women can I think of marriage. (Zoya 131)

Feminizing Afghanistan:

Characteristically the covers of Afghan women's ethnoautobiographies play on similarity and difference and on the threshold of what can be recognized as human, with the burqa securely placed as a sign of the absolute Other, obscuring the promise of a familiar woman's body beneath. For example, the cover photos of Latifa's *My Forbidden Face* and Zoya's *Zoya's Story* emphasize the image of alienated and isolated Afghan women who symbolized Afghanistan. Zoya and Latifa used a photo of an Afghan woman wearing a blue burqa, a boundary where the cross-cultural translation was difficult. In New York, the scene when Oprah Winfrey liberated Zoya into speech by stripping the burqa away was an unforgettable one as it could remind the readers of the cover photos of Latifa's *My Forbidden Face* and Zoya's *Zoya's Story*

When the time came for me to go on stage, after Oprah Winfrey had read [Eve Ensler's poem] "Under the Burqa," all the lights went off save for one that was aimed directly at me. I had been asked to wear my burqa, and the light streamed in through the mesh in front of my face and brought tears to my eyes [...] I was to walk as slowly as possible [...] I had to climb some steps, but because of the burqa and the tears in my eyes, which wet the fabric and made it cling to my skin, I had to be helped up the stairs. Slowly, very slowly, Oprah lifted the burqa off me and let it fall to the stage. (211)

Audiences who attended these events in the West understood this unveiling scene as an act of liberation and benevolence. These presentations of unveiling symbolized the burqa as the fundamentalism of the Taliban and its brutal containment of Afghanistan and Afghan women under a system of gender apartheid. When Allied troops entered Kabul in 2001, journalists gathered with the specific intent of broadcasting images of women abandoning their burqas. For the worldwide media, this was an apocalyptic symbol of the turn from old fundamentalism to modernity and a mark of freedom that justified and validated the American military interference in 2001. However, Afghan women were unwilling to participate in these scenes. Zoya States, "on the liberation of Kabul in November 2001, no one was sorry to see the Taliban defeated, but neither did they rejoice when the Northern Alliance took over. They too had blood on their hands" (223). However, the unveiling was not an indicator of their abandoning their religion; instead, the unveiling for women meant resistance against obstructive societal roles and discrimination. For Zoya, "a woman in a burqa is more like a live body locked in a coffin" (209). Zoya analysed her and Latifa's cover photos by this sentence. A burqa was like a coffin that locked Afghanistan as if she was a dead body. The Taliban regime murdered Afghanistan and put her in a cheap blue coffin. According to the Taliban, Afghanistan had to be covered, alienated, and isolated. So, Afghan women symbolized Afghanistan as both being humiliated and oppressed by fundamentalists.

Zoya said, "Girls could not go to school. The Taliban's schools were an entryway to Hell, the first step on the way to prostitution" (128). The Taliban's view of girls and women is based on their physiology rather than their human

condition. Even the face of a woman was considered a cause of corruption. According to the Taliban regime, the hiddenness of women, especially in the public sphere, was a way for the Taliban to save Afghan society from moral corruption. Therefore, the burqa was a way to forbid the face of women who symbolized Afghanistan. They wanted to see Afghanistan as a prostitute who accepted domination and oppression. Besides, educated, strong-willed women were obstacles to the Taliban's transformation of Afghanistan into an Islamic Caliphate. Women had no role in that Caliphate. Therefore, their seclusion was necessary for the prosperity of the Caliph. Although women and girls had to endure various conditions under the Taliban, they bravely tried to find other ways to survive and set goals in a limited environment and resources. Although "the Taliban caught women involved in education, they continued "the bitter struggle despite being persecuted, jailed, and tortured" (Rostami-Povey 84). Women's resistance strategies varied, but they had to seek knowledge to survive and victory in common. Sometimes the fear of prosecution prevents them from violating the Taliban's rules.

Conclusion:

In short, even under the extremist Taliban regime, Afghan women have never lost the autonomy to seek knowledge. The Taliban imposed severe punishments, usually physical, to teach the public a lesson. The Taliban believed that by intimidating women, they would become submissive to men, but due to the cruelty of the Taliban, women participated in the resistance strategy.

Zoya and Latifa have started a revolution of change and courage, and thousands of Afghan women have fanned the flames of resilience in the great flames of tirelessness. Many Afghan women were willing to risk their lives to protect the honour and dignity of other women. They were not passive and could protect their interests. Neither Latifa nor Zoya regarded the West in the way we might anticipate. While they need the support of Western women, they have no desire to be like them, and what Judith Butler refers to as their "idioms of agency" (78) are very different. *Zoya's Story* and *My Forbidden Face* have offered few signs that Afghan women desired to become Westernized (although the access to education and health and welfare resources available in the West. Instead, they spoke as patriots and members of an organized resistance dedicated to a dream of an independent and democratic sovereign nation.

Zoya visited the metropolis as an activist, and consumer culture in the cities of Italy or the United States holds no allure. Also, for Latifa, freedom was not understood in terms of life in the West when it became available to her. She left Afghanistan as an ambassador and gave testimony in France on behalf of other Afghan women, but her story ended in silence when she was unable to return to Kabul: "Azadi means freedom in our language. But who speaks Afghani? I no longer know" (175). These activists defended Afghan traditions and Islamic beliefs; what they had to say drew on a language of cultural identification in terms of nation, religion, and gender that was very different to the faiths of their liberal and feminist champions in Europe and the United States. Latifa and Zoya did not forget that when most Afghan men and women left home, they lost their country and all forms of belonging to enter the limbo of the refugee camps. The threat of the refugee haunted Zoya and Latifa, who passed into the West as champions of freedom. They carried the burden of representing others who could not speak or express themselves.

Finally, Zoya and Latifa believe that this situation would change. By writing their own ethoautobiographies, they have known they might be killed, but they had chosen to follow the glorious past of hundreds of heroes and heroines of their history who had stood by their people to the end and preferred to be killed rather than be silenced. They were the epitome of resilience. They also succeeded in deconstructing the humiliating images of Afghan women stereotyped by the West to justify the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, Zoya and Latifa have presented their own strategies for resisting the repressive gender policies of the Taliban regime, and they have become representatives and ambassadors of their own country to which they hope to "go back and walk the destroyed streets of Kabul, the sun shining not on a burqa but on [their] face[s]" (Zoya 152).

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هل تستطيع المرأة الأفغانية التعبير؟
مقاومة الصور النمطية الغربية عن النساء الأفغانيات والسياسات القمعية المتعلقة بالنوع
الاجتماعي في السير الذاتية العرقية لكل من زويا ولطيفة

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المستخلص

تم تصوير النساء الأفغانيات من قبل وسائل الإعلام الغربية على أنهن مخلوقات تواجه التمييز والتهميش من الرجال والمجتمعات الأصولية. في قصة "زويا" و"وجهي المحرم" ، تتحدث المؤلفتان عن الحالة الرهيبة للنساء في ما يسمى بأفغانستان الديمقراطية أثناء حكم طالبان. تُظهر السير الذاتية للمرأة الأفغانية ، بشكل عام ، فهمًا جديدًا للحياة في ظل الاضطهاد وكيف تسعى جاهدة للحفاظ على استقلاليتها في مواجهة القمع والقهر. تظهر النصوص قيد الدراسة أن النساء الأفغانيات لسن خاضعات ولا شخصيات سلبية ، لكنهن احتفظن باستقلاليتهم في ظل حكم الاتحاد السوفيتي وطالبان. تم وضع اطار هذا البحث من خلال إدارة نهج يجمع بين نظرية ميشيل فوكو للسلطة / المعرفة ونظرية التمثيل / القوالب النمطية لستيوارت هول وتوجيه مناقشة لسيرتين عرقيتين لناشطات أفغانيات و اللاتي يتحدين الصور النمطية السلبية التي وضعتها المجتمعات الغربية لتبرير الغزو الأمريكي لأفغانستان في عام 2001. أنا أزعم أن النساء الأفغانيات حافظن على استقلاليتهم وناضلن من أجل حقوقهن قبل أن يندفع بقية العالم لتحريرهن. قاومت النساء الأفغانيات القمع بعدة طرق ، لكن زويا ولطيفة شاركتا في مقاومة غير عنيفة ضد نظام طالبان.

الكلمات الدالة: السيرة الذاتية العرقية- القوة - المقاومة - البرقع - الأصولية - التنميط