# Feminist Resistance Imaginaries (FRI)

## Heroism, Imagination and Female Self-Empowerment in Contemporary Afghanistan

**Selai Balkhi, MSc | University of Fribourg**

### WHY THIS RESEARCH?

Afghan women face intensifying restrictions on education, work and public life. Yet resistance persists in quiet, imaginative forms. This study explores how women sustain agency through heroism, imagination and everyday acts of self-empowerment.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do Afghan women construct and narrate heroines?
2. What role does imagination play in sustaining resistance?
3. How do visual methods reveal dimensions of agency not captured by language alone?

### THEORETICAL LENSES:

- Feminist postcolonial theory
- Narrative identity & imagination
- Visual epistemology
- Everyday resistance (Scott, Abu-Lughod)

### METHODOLOGY:

- Qualitative, feminist, postcolonial approach;
- •8 women participants in Afghanistan; Narrative semi-structured interviews;
- •5 participant-generated drawings; Thematic + visual analysis.

### KEY FINDINGS:

**Everyday Heroism —** Women redefine heroism through care, teaching and moral integrity rather than public confrontation.

**Imagination as Agency—** Envisioning alternative futures sustains hope and selfhood under repression.

**Education as Resistance —** Pursuing and providing education becomes an act of defiance and future-making.

**Quiet Resistance —** Resistance operates through everyday practices invisible to dominant power structures.

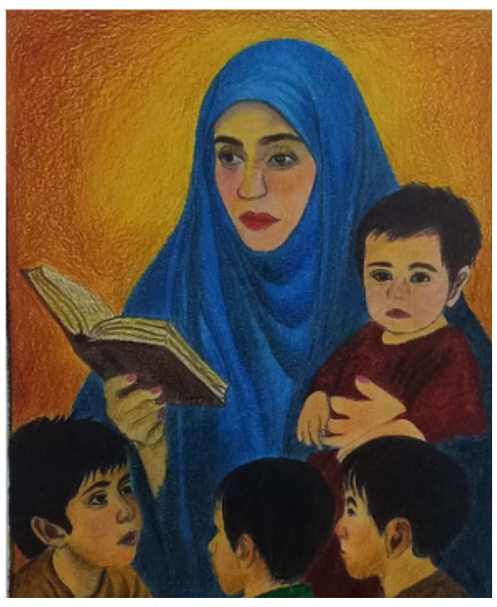
**Feminist Resistance Imaginaries (FRI)**

| 1. Structural Conditions of Oppression | 2. Imaginative Counter-Worlding | 3. Embodied Memory Practices |
|---|---|---|
| • Political restrictions<br>• Ethnicity / religion<br>• Economic conditions<br>• Digital isolation | • Alternative futures<br>• Education / protection / hope<br>• Moral integrity<br>• Motifs of resistance | • Drawings & symbols<br>• Bodily postures<br>• Autobiographical traces<br>• Herstory, counter-archives |

**Heroines as imaginative spaces of resistance**

Selai Balkhi

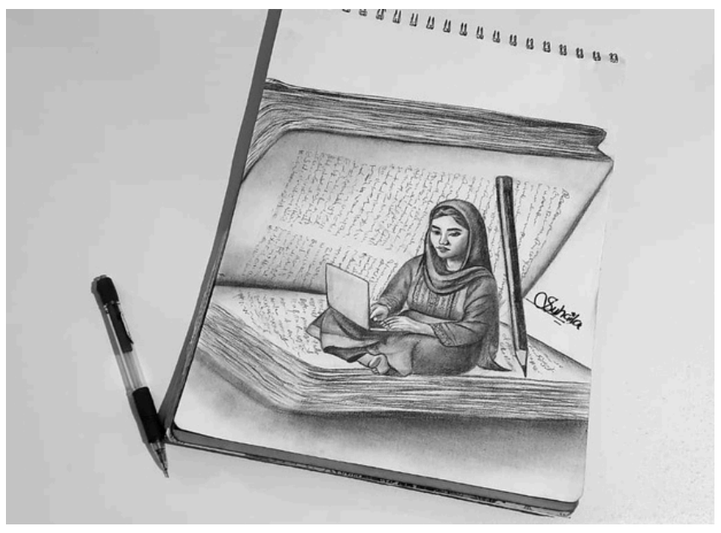
### VISUAL EVIDENCE: PARTICIPANT-GENERATED DRAWINGS AS KNOWLEDGE



**Education & Voice - Books,** writing and teaching become symbols of knowledge, continuity and future-making.



**Between Constraint & Possibility —** Contrasting landscapes visualize restriction and imagined alternatives.



**Self-Representation —** Visual selfhood and female subjectivity emerge within constrained social worlds. Books, writing and teaching become symbols of knowledge, continuity and future-making.

### FROM FINDINGS TO CONTRIBUTION

**Rethinking Agency**

Agency under repression can be quiet, relational and future-oriented -- not only visible, individual or confrontational.

**Why Visual Methods Matter**

Participant-generated drawings reveal meanings, memories and imagined futures that may not be fully accessible through interview language alone.

**Global Health Relevance**

Hope, selfhood, education and imagined futures are social resources; understanding them matters when studying well-being and resilience under structural restriction.

### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

***To understand empowerment under repression, we must examine not only what women are prevented from doing, but also what they continue to imagine, teach, care for and make possible.***

**Selected References:**
Abu-Lughod (2013); Scott (1990); Spivak (1988); hooks (1994); Butler (2004); Mahmood (2005)

**SCAN THE FULL REFERENCES. →**