

Essay: The documentary “The Takeover”

– Showing how Afghan women are standing up to the Taliban

In the documentary “The Takeover”, we see the Taliban depriving Afghan women of their basic rights. The documentary reveals how the Taliban rules Afghanistan with threats and violence and creates a fundamentalistic state where women are treated as second-class citizens. Through close-up recordings, the documentary tells the story of women who are risking everything to stand up to Taliban and fight for their rights. In addition, we meet women supporting the Taliban and see how their freedom of speech and movement are also restricted.

Filmed over a whole year, the film chronicles how determined the Taliban is at reshaping the Afghan society in line with their ideology. Step by step they are removing women’s rights, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right of assembly and other human rights. The documentary manifests the strength and courage of the women who are keeping their hopes for a better future by protesting the Taliban.

The documentary also shows how the leaders of the Taliban are trying to improve their image abroad. Through lies and misinformation, they want to obtain diplomatic relations, trade agreements and humanitarian aid. The Taliban is defining all new laws and regulations as domestic affairs in Afghanistan and does not accept criticism from other countries.

In “The Takeover”, we are trying to engage the viewers by focusing on people in movement. We have been following processes as close as possible with the camera. The idea has been to make people feel like they are in the streets and on the ground at the countryside in Afghanistan, seeing what the camera sees as it floats around. By recreating the intense atmosphere, we are hoping people will care more about the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

The Taliban is forbidding journalists from filming protests against its rule. They want to stop any critical reporting and are punishing journalists who defy their orders. The system is toughest for Afghan journalists who are beaten, imprisoned, tortured, and facing threats against themselves and their family. As filmmakers we did not want to risk the lives of Afghan photographers by hiring them to do the camerawork for our documentary. We also did not want to put activists at greater risk by asking them to film themselves during the street protests. For the safety of the protesters and some of the other people in the film, we have blurred out their faces. The documentary is filmed by the director himself. Being foreign, he faced fewer threats than Afghans, but was still held at gunpoint and beaten by the Taliban several times. In custody he could see how Afghans were bleeding and in pain after being punished. This way he also became a witness to violence that the Taliban in public denies using.

“The Takeover” is a historic document that shows what happens in Afghanistan after a 20-year long war. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks in 2001. By removing the Taliban from power, the aim was to prevent the country from being a safe haven for terrorists and to build a stable and democratic state. The U.S. was supported by NATO and over 40 countries. At the height of the conflict, there were more than 130,000 NATO soldiers in Afghanistan. According to estimates, more than 170,000 people were killed during the war, with around 50,000 of them being Afghan civilians. America’s longest war ended when the Taliban came to power in August 2021; that is also when our documentary starts. It discloses the failure of the war by showing how Afghanistan is turning back to the society the military intervention was supposed to remove.

“The Takeover” was qualified to the Oscars after winning the Grand Jury Award for the International short film competition at Sheffield DocFest. Since then, it has been screened at a number of festivals and events, bringing attention to the grave human rights situation in Afghanistan. It has also been made free for everyone to see online. This documentary will stand as a testament of Afghan women’s bravery. It shows how there’s still hope in a country the rest of the world seems to almost have forgotten.