



Gender freedom through picture news. A visual - socio graphic analysis

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Abstract

For two years now, the Taliban have regained control of the “new” Afghanistan. The images broadcast by Al-Jazeera of Islamic fighters inside the government building, of women fleeing, of violence at Kabul airport made this even clearer. The apparent openness to the press soon proved to be a fleeting veneer of democracy, and a sunset period for human rights began.

With the advent of the new Taliban government, the figure of the woman was relegated to the stereotype of wife and mother, while freedom of the press began to clash with radical Islamic thought. The panorama for Afghan women remains uncertain, and it remains to be understood to what extent their capacities, on the one hand, and the external actions of the international community, on the other, can influence the protection of rights and the improvement of conditions for women.

The work presented here traces the main critical aspects of the relationship between the media, women journalists, and gender equality in Afghanistan from two perspectives: the socio-historical and the socio-visual. Historical facts and international journalistic images accompany the analysis...

Keywords: media, journalism, women and religion, human rights

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, “freedom of expression has been one of the most important and valuable gains for women in Afghanistan.” (Buoncompagni, 2023) The “Muslim public sphere” (Eickelman, Salvatore, 2002) has levelled the public arena of discussion, delocalised and de-structured the centres of power (Pepicelli, 2018).

The possible return of the Taliban - after the withdrawal of Western military forces in August 2021 - is already beginning to hinder 20 years of important gains in the empowerment of Afghan women journalists. Television programmes and entertainment shows, for example, are being redesigned according to radical Islamic ideas, and women are once again being portrayed as stereotypical wives and mothers. Faced with this scenario, some journalists have tried to flee abroad, while others are using media spaces in their own country (newsrooms, online networks, acronyms) to defend the impartiality and freedoms of journalism (CPJ, 2021; Garcia, 2021).

Ensuring equality and plurality of information is a concrete duty, not a speculative goal. Comprehensively discussing the facts means having a gender dialogue

(Ceulemans, Fauconer, 1979; Silverstone, 2009; CPJ, 2021; Ronzheimer, Moutafis, 2021).

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this paper combines different approaches.

Firstly, it uses social theory and the available literature on the subject under consideration, especially online.

However, the main aim of the analysis is to rediscover and highlight sociographic methodology supported by visual sources (journalistic, national, and international). For the sake of completeness, it is recalled here that sociography is the detailed description of the various aspects of social life (political, financial, economic, family) of a given local community or region in a given period, or of a given sector of it (e.g. a neighbourhood), or of a stratum of the population, or even of a situation that appears problematic in that period or place (unemployment, crime, racial segregation, etc.), carried out using the parameters and research categories of sociology.

Bear in mind that the subject described and analysed is still evolving. It is difficult to find sources, overcome cultural and informational prejudices, and maintain a "pure" sociological vision at the macro level.

In this sense, sociography and visual sociology are excellent avenues to follow in order to address the theme developed below (Steinmetz, 1913).

As stated by Jane Kilby Graeme Gilloch (2022) *“Sociology is just as much an art form as it is a science. And while sociologists and those in cognate disciplines have long experimented with their writing, the search for new academic forms and practices has acquired new urgency and potentiality. How we write up our research is of paramount importance: our language can be used in experimental and innovative ways to offer nuanced, critical commentary without foreclosing alternative viewpoints, and without excluding others from dialogue. Sociography offers spaces for new sensibilities and sensitivities; unresolved or incomplete argument; multiple, multi-dimensional and multiplying possibilities: for writing differently. As an intervention in writing the social, our collection works to resist the ideological promotion of dry, dispassionate, and seemingly ‘objective’ discourse, one which has traditionally upheld a set of dominant, privileged voices.”*

The analysis explores the potential of new ways of writing about the social, drawing from history and visual news for a wider readership on a complex and still open issue in a specific part of the world, Afghanistan, and *“seeks forms of writing that do justice to the critical curiosity that animates sociology”* (Kilby, Gilloch, 2022) as a science to indigenise human rights and political and gender differences.

The commentary on the images is accompanied by a storyc-informative path on the condition of women in Afghanistan. The challenge of this collection is to support and show a praxis that activates sociological knowledge and broadens the sociological imagination.

A method that we will attempt to apply to “social problem telling” that could currently fall under the field of so-called “creative methods” (Giorgi, Vacchelli, Pizzolati, 2021).

3. Recent historical and political events

The Taliban have used a variety of media to convey messages in support of their overall goals of removing the foreign military presence and returning the country to their unique interpretation of Islam. *“Combinations of communication activities by Taliban insurgent groups in Afghanistan and Taliban leadership in Pakistan have continuously hampered the efforts of the international community and the former Afghan government to bring stability to the country”* (Buoncompagni, 2021).

Twenty years after the first effective international intervention, we still know little about the tribes and ethnic groups that comprise the country and how they react, think and prioritise socio-political rather than religious issues (Foxley, 2007; Buoncompagni, 2021).

As stated by Buoncompagni 2021 *“International attempts, not only to export democracy but to manage information and ‘rebalance’ perceptions, have proved rather problematic in recent years. With the use of new technologies almost within everyone’s reach and their application in the military and intelligence fields, information management operations are playing an increasingly important role in generating support or not, in this specific case, for the insurgents, both inside and outside the country”*.

Hundreds of groups and actors are still involved in the crisis: different sectors of the Afghan population, government agencies and NGOs (Arnaldo, 2021; Buoncompagni, 2021). They have received and produced information over the past 20 years and are still trying to persuade and construct truths, some intentionally, some unintentionally.

In 2007, the Taliban's technological sophistication and communicative effectiveness were probably more myth than reality. But the perception that the Taliban were so adept at managing information processes outweighed their real capabilities and the credibility of local and international journalistic narratives, which often tended, consciously or unconsciously, to amplify and spectacularise the terrorists' political and public propaganda skills, thereby reinforcing their power in the local imagination (Foxley; Lanzellotto, 2019).

Especially in southern, south-eastern, and eastern Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan, where the Taliban still have a cultural and linguistic advantage in operating in the Pashtun tribal areas, they have always been much more effective in managing local (organised and DIY) media information.

These groups already had effective means, which improved over time. However, they were already able to manipulate a large part of the population and deliberately misrepresent the achievements of the various international actors present in Afghanistan. The Taliban belief system, which had previously actively rejected many of the symbols of modernity and progress, including the rapid understanding of global communication processes, now observed, experimented with and learned to communicate publicly in a way that staged its goals and gestures.

As stated by Mozart, Ur-Rehman (2021) and cited by Buoncompagni (2021), “***Their approach was therefore increasingly pragmatic, and their understanding and use of the media grew accordingly. They embraced old and new techniques and used an ever-widening range of media and communication resources: fax, landline, mobile and satellite phones, radio and television, newspapers, interviews, intimidating anonymous letters, and finally the Internet and social networks.***“

It has always been difficult to measure the Taliban's strength in the information battle with any degree of certainty. What is certain, however, is that since 2001 the Taliban have increasingly recognised technology and electronic media as useful tools to counter the Afghan government and the international community, exploiting the media logic of Western journalism (Foxley, 2007).



*Fig.1 “[The Latest Taliban Press Release Accuses Coalition Forces Of Planting Roadside Bombs](#)”
Business Insider*

The Taliban's willingness and ability to communicate political and military messages to the international community and to create strong networks, including online, is continuously increasing. This is evident in the quality and content of their video productions, their various information marketing operations and their ability to target specific, no longer casual or purely local, audiences (Fig.1).

Perhaps this is also why, Bockstette (2009) argues, on 15 August 2021 the Taliban entered Kabul without firing a shot, they completed the reconquest of the country after the rapid advance of the past few days. They now control the whole of Afghanistan, as was made even clearer by the images broadcast by Al Jazeera of Islamic fighters inside the Afghan government building. At the same time, the

president, Ashraf Ghani, had already left the country a few hours earlier to travel to Uzbekistan.

In their first press conference, the leaders of the future Taliban government promised above all to respect women's rights and to forgive those who had resisted. Through the words of their spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban then tried to convince the world powers and the fearful population that they would change (Mozart P., Ur-Rehman 2021; Bockstette 2009):

"We have driven out the foreigners and I would like to congratulate the whole nation. This is a proud moment for the whole nation. Striving for freedom and independence is a legitimate right of every nation. Afghans are exercising it after 20 years of fighting for freedom and liberation from occupation: it was our right and we have achieved it (...) I would like to thank God for giving freedom to this nation. We have gone through very difficult times and crises: many mistakes have been made in favour of the occupiers. We want to ensure that Afghanistan is no longer a battlefield."

On several public occasions, the Taliban then emphasized that "the issue of women in Afghanistan" was an important point in their future political project and that the Islamic Emirate would work for women's rights within the framework of Sharia law. Sharia is not a written, codified, and uniform code for the entire Muslim world. It is a set of customs, practices, and religious and moral rules that can inspire believers in their personal lives and a community or a state. Sharia is based on two main sources: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. In the Koran, however, only 80 verses out of more than 6,000 contain legal obligations. The rest of the Sharia rules result from analysis and evaluation, which can vary from region to region (Pepicelli, 2010). For example, there is no single rule on the use of the veil and women's clothing:

"Our sisters and men have the same rights (...) They can carry out activities in different sectors and in different areas based on our rules and regulations: education, health and other areas. They will work side by side with us. We want to reassure the international community if they have any concerns (...) There will be no discrimination against women, but of course within the structures we have (...) Our women are Muslims. They will be happy to live within our Sharia structures. Women are a fundamental part of society, and we guarantee them all their rights within the limits of Islam."

Another interesting aspect was the words addressed to the local and international media:

"Local media can continue to be free and independent. Islam is a very important value in our country, and nothing should be against Islamic values. Therefore, when it comes to media activities, Islamic values must be taken into account. Therefore, the media should be impartial: they can criticise our work so that we can improve."

The apparent availability of Taliban representatives to the press soon proved to be a facade. Media freedom now seems increasingly at risk as most local and foreign reporters try to flee in fear for their safety. With the advent of the new Taliban government, the few Western journalists left in Kabul, along with Afghan

journalists, tried to document the growing and palpable danger on the streets of the city, the attempts to flee, the harrowing scenes at the airport.

Since 31 August 2021, the date of the Taliban's ultimatum to the United States for the total withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghan soil, TV channels and newspapers from around the world have repatriated their crews and correspondents, creating a news vacuum or fragmented streams of information².

The Associated Press News, a major source of world news from Afghanistan, reported that it had urgently evacuated some of its staff weeks before the withdrawal date set by the new Taliban government. And as for the local press, the regime's apparent initial willingness to work openly and participatively disappeared quickly (Fig.2).



Fig. 2 “Taliban Spokesman's Remarks on Media Guidelines Spark Reactions” TOLONews

² Link: <https://www.agi.it/estero/news/2021-08-23/pentagono-ultimatum-talebani-scadenza-31-agosto-13649672/>

4. Women and Journalists in Afghanistan

Recent data published by Reporters Without Borders shows that at least 85 local reporters have been killed in the last 20 years. Despite the low level of security and the high risk of being killed or taken hostage, an interesting network of independent journalism has developed in Afghanistan since the early 2000s and is well established, though little known abroad.

Attacks on media professionals, judges, prosecutors, religious scholars, health workers, political analysts, civil servants and other civilians, which had declined in 2019, increased again at the end of 2020.

In the months following 12 September 2020, the start of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations (APN), the first intra-Afghan peace talks between representatives of the Kabul government and the Taliban to end 19 years of war, 11 people, including human rights defenders and journalists, were killed by states (UNAMA, 2021).

This event had a strong psycho-social impact on civil society, resulting in many human rights defenders, journalists, and media workers having already attempted to leave Afghanistan. This led to a loss of public confidence and hope in the peace efforts made so far (Pepicelli, 2018).

Afghanistan is considered one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists.

In the recent Special Report entitled “Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021”, Deborah Lyons, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan, emphasised that the Afghan people need (and deserve) a thriving civic space, meaning “a society in which people can think, write and express their opinions openly and without fear” (Pepicelli 2018; Buoncompagni, 2022).

The role of human rights defenders, and especially the media, in activating this process of rebuilding an open and dignified society is crucial in the current socio-political situation of the country. The voice of human rights defenders and the media needs to be heard now more than ever, but instead it is being silenced. Journalists and human rights defenders should never be targeted or killed for promoting and defending social justice. (Pepicelli, 2018). At the same time, those who try to “shut down” the media by silencing and anonymising the information space should be brought to justice. Every part of (Afghan) society benefits from the work of human rights defenders, journalists and media workers. It is therefore necessary to recognise their legitimate and invaluable contribution to the establishment of peace and sustainable development of the country in this situation of constant crisis (UNAMA, 2021).

Working to provide timely information, the professionals of information are exposed to a variety of risks on a daily basis (threats, intimidation, harassment, surveillance, arbitrary detention, to name a few). Over the years, there have been several attacks on journalists, carried out with the clear aim of silencing them through the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Since 2019, this *modus operandi* has become increasingly common. This trend continued in 2020, peaking in the last months of the year after the start of the negotiations.

Taking some cases from the UNAMA Report (2021), here is a summary of some of the most violent attacks on journalists in 2020 alone, some of which have not been claimed or resolved:

On 2 January, the police found the body of Safar Muhammad Atal (Samoon radio presenter) in the town of Lashkar Gah. There was no claim of responsibility for the attack; on 30 May, in the city of Kabul, the detonation of a roadside home-made explosive device killed Khurshid TV reporter Mir Wahid Shah 'Zamir' Amiri and manager Shafiq Zabeah Amiri. The ISIL-KP branch later claimed responsibility for the attack (..) On 10 December, in the city of Jalalabad, gunmen on a rickshaw shot dead the reporter - women's rights activist Malalai Maiwand - and the driver of Enikas TV, Tahir Khan (..) Finally, on 21 December 2020, in the city of Ghazni, men armed with motorbikes shot and killed the head of the Ghazni Journalists' Association, Rahmatullah Nekzad.

For Shaharзад Akbar, chairman of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, the long-awaited start of peace negotiations has not brought the hoped-for reduction in violence. On the contrary, it has led to a significant increase in civilian insecurity; we have reached the point, says Akbar, where “people die, there is a tweet, and people move on”. The only tangible thing that has happened to Afghans with the peace process is that they used to know who their killers were, and now they don't' (NYT, 2 January 2021; Buoncompagni, 2021; 2022).

Following the recent Taliban takeover of Kabul, very few journalists continue to work. In contrast, others try to leave the country for fear of their safety. Tolo News, one of the most popular local TV channels, still has a high profile in the local and international media landscape, especially after it broadcast the news of former President Ashraf Ghani's departure and journalist Beheshta Arghand's interview with a Taliban representative.

The same Tolo News website reports numerous cases of journalists being attacked. Facts sometimes manage to enter the logic of digital environments and are read and reposted in real-time by users on their Western social channels. The editors of local television stations and international crews themselves recommend that female journalists stay home in protected places. The fear is that the situation will soon return to the 1990s when there was no free press in the country, and the available news came mainly from Taliban-controlled channels.

The image of the Taliban today is certainly different from that of the past.

It is almost curious to see how they use the media to communicate and gain visibility. They have a spokesman; they use social networks to organise press conferences. There are “media” and “local voices” reported by independent media, and local citizens seem to confirm the new government's intention to repress the most basic rights without fear, even by force. And Afghan citizens and women journalists are currently the main targets.



Fig. 3: Afghanistan, 1972. Some schoolgirls in Kabul while walking in miniskirts vs. Kabul



Fig. 4: Afghanistan, 4 July 2002. A group of women protest in front of the UN offices against US military attacks on civilians in Oruzgan province. Source: Photo left by Laurence Brun; photo right by Natalie Behring-Chisholm, Getty Images

5. Freedom of information: a gender issue

After 9/11, freedom of expression was one of the most important and valuable achievements for women in Afghanistan; the "Muslim public sphere" levelled the arena of discussion, delocalised and de-structured the centres of power (Eickelman, Salvatore 2002; Pepicelli 2018).

The eventual return of the Taliban began to unravel 20 years of important gains in the empowerment of globally engaged women (Fig. 3) and the dictates of local journalism. Television programmes and entertainment shows, for example, are being reshaped to reflect radical Islamic thinking, and women are once again being portrayed as stereotypical wives and mothers (Fig. 4).

Over the past decade, the strong growth of independent media in Afghanistan has also contributed to job opportunities in the media and audiovisual sector throughout

the country. However, this growth has been accompanied by many challenges, including the difficult integration of journalists into the work environment.

In order to better understand the situation of those who report, particularly Afghan women who decide to work as communicators, it is necessary to consider two aspects: the political and cultural situation in the country (and the social position of women) and the general situation of journalism in the country. In general, women in Afghanistan enjoy fewer privileges and less security than men.

Among the many social ills that Afghanistan has inherited, gender discrimination and sexual harassment are the most perceptible cultural pathologies that are the result of decades of war and partly a direct product of prevailing traditions and customs. In Afghanistan's traditional, patriarchal society, being born a woman can mean not having access to many social opportunities and having rigid barriers to success throughout life.

Traditionally, male-dominated environments, both public and private, are often unsafe for women.

According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation, Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places to be a woman, regardless of socio-economic status; local women face the daily risk of sexual harassment, even outside the home.

As well as being a difficult country to be born into, Afghanistan is also one of the most dangerous places to be a journalist.

Since 2009, the AJSC (2016) has recorded dozens of incidents of violence every year against women journalists, mostly local, who all too often carry out their work in conditions and contexts of gender discrimination and hostility towards the local or international media, especially when a woman provides the information.

Female journalists in Afghanistan fight for their rights and to have their voices heard in media, usually trying to overcome two obstacles. The first is convincing their immediate family members. Sometimes, their entire tribe is expected to permit them to work outside the home and in the media. Many families are against their daughters' or wives' choice to work outside the home, outside the country, especially if the chosen profession requires a public subject, in public.

Once the first obstacle has been overcome, their career path enters a new realm of hostility from individuals and groups opposed to freedom of information and expression.

Families and/or employers often impose similar conditions and restrictions on women to work in local or national media. Conditions are common to all regions of Afghanistan: for example, working at a specific time on official days and returning home at a specific time, not participating in live entertainment programmes that involve direct contact with the public, and staying as far away as possible from verbal contact with men at work (AJSC, 2016) (Fig. 5).

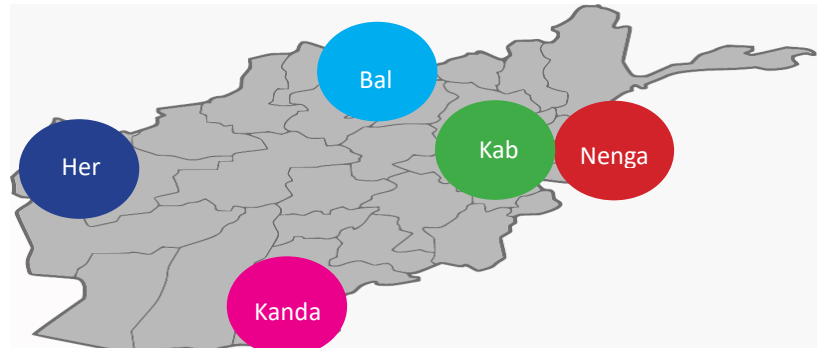


Fig.5: The families against the work of Afghan women in the media

Furthermore, according to a survey published by the Afghan Committee for the Safety of Journalists (2016), sexual harassment in workplaces such as newsrooms in Afghanistan (69 per cent) occurred in various forms: verbal harassment (including comments of a sexual nature), visual harassment (including safe faces and sexually suggestive faces), physical and bodily harassment (including touching women's bodies), harassment over the phone, and harassment on the internet (Fig. 6). Harassment also took place outside the workplace. Women reported being harassed not only when they left home or the workplace. They also reported being harassed by media audiences during live broadcasts and by colleagues at work.

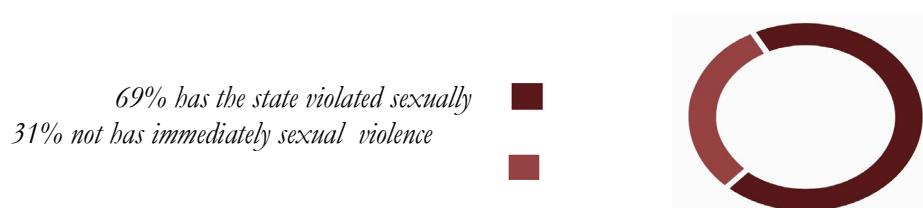


Fig 6: Percentage of sexual harassment experienced by Afghan women journalists.

In addition to the many gender issues that Afghan journalists face daily, they also have to deal with a sense of insecurity and threat that affects all journalists working in the Afghan context, both men and women. Thirty per cent of the participants in the study stated that they had experienced intimidation or violence at least once since they started working in the media.

In the most serious cases, threats have been and continue to be such that journalists are forced to leave their jobs or even the country.

The resulting scenario, however, is that hundreds of women journalists continue to work in Afghanistan, and hundreds more study journalism in various universities in the country, training to become protagonists of information and speak in the media's public space despite the unfavourable social situation.

The women and journalists of Afghanistan have been called “heroines” by the Western media for these reasons. They are minority female voices fighting for freedom of expression, speech, livelihood, and the future of media workers in the country (Buoncompagni, 2023).

The "hero journalist" figure is (unfortunately) a recent one.

We had to wait until the new Afghan crisis that began on 15 August 2021, a crisis that has once again hit the world of information hard, for the courage and passion of Afghan women journalists to be recognised, recounted and denounced, no longer in a fragmentary and situational way in the international context, in the Western media.



Fig. 7: NPR, 14 May 2022 “Male Afghan TV anchors cover faces in solidarity with women after a Taliban order”.



Fig. 8: TOLOnews, 12 May 2022 " All TOLOnews Presenters, in Solidarity with Women, Cover Faces"

Faced with this scenario, some journalists have tried to flee abroad, while others are using media spaces in their own countries (newsrooms, online networks, acronyms) to defend impartiality and journalistic freedoms (CPJ, 2021; Garcia, 2021) (Fig. 7 and 8). Ensuring equality and plurality of information is a concrete duty, not a speculative goal. Talking about the facts - comprehensively - means having a gender dialogue. Gender discrimination is a concrete tool that deeply penetrates every social sphere. Although Islamic radicalism does not reject either traditional or digital publishing (De Poli, 2007; Orsini, 2018), it does not agree with giving women the exclusive opportunity to narrate and disseminate facts and news (Fig. 9).

However, the "voices" of the various global media form a 'polyphony' in support of women's civil society in Afghanistan, where Afghan women journalists are daily "heroines" fighting for their rights and freedom of information. Despite the restrictive measures imposed by the new Taliban government, they continue to seek new strategies for journalism in their country and to preserve media space. At the same time, however, they are afraid and "show" their emotional state, displaying in the public media space their fragility and fear of a dark future, their professionalism and desire for freedom,

They are aware of the difficulties they will have to face from now on with the Taliban presence in Kabul, and of the concrete options of leaving the country or returning to an exclusively domestic life.



Fig 9 "In Afghanistan the TV journalists challenge the Taliban with their faces uncovered - La Stampa

6. Conclusions

Although seemingly short, the period analysed, thanks to the media image and the available literature, proved to be fundamental for understanding both the political-cultural and socio-communicative changes taking place in Afghanistan and the narrative forms that characterised the public discourse on the birth of the new Taliban government and, in particular, the figure of the female journalist in the

Western media space. The fall of Kabul was the third takeover of the Afghan capital by the Taliban. It led to the end of the Islamic Republic that had ruled the country since 2004 and the restoration of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

On 30 August, the last American soldier left Kabul ahead of schedule [57]. With the Taliban's entry into Kabul airport, the 20-year war in Afghanistan (2001-2021) can be said to be over, and the remaining Afghans who collaborated with the West will only be able to leave when Kabul airport is reopened to commercial flights.

Over the past few weeks, the world's media has reported many local and international facts and news of a political and social nature through multiple channels and languages. This global media attention has grown exponentially, in parallel with the increasing complexity of the ongoing crises. The difficulty of capturing and categorising significant information in the two eventful weeks mentioned above is evident.

It is also important to consider that the 'cut' of media resources and female newsroom staff was very high.

In 2019, there were more than six hundred active media outlets in Afghanistan.

The return of the Taliban to Kabul and the full political control of the local media resulted in the closure of 135 editorial offices. Afghan women, a significant half of Afghan society, constitute an important part of the public and media workers, which underlines the urgency and importance of the role and presence of women journalists.

The situation is currently very different for women journalists in the big cities of Afghanistan. They have somehow managed to cope with family and community pressure. As a result, we can see the active participation of women journalists in metropolitan areas such as Kabul, Balkh and Herat. But in many small-medium cities, there are many restrictions on the work of women journalists. The few female journalists in the province of Nangarhar, for example, constantly receive death threats and are told to wear a burqa to work or have thought about leaving the profession as communicators (UNAMA, 2021).

Women journalists have faced and continue to face serious security threats from terrorist groups and unidentified individuals in several Afghan provinces, including Nangarhar, Farah, Kandahar, Ghazni, Paktia, Logar, Paktika and others.

With the increase of these threats in different parts of the country and the national political instability, many journalists have been forced to leave their jobs to protect themselves and their families.

Although many male Afghan journalists sacrifice a great deal and fight for freedom of expression, female journalists remain the most vulnerable to various forms of violence and threats, as well as the most suppressed and least heard voices.

To conclude, it is clear, therefore, that the return of the Taliban to power has had a clear impact on the lives of women in Afghanistan. However, resistance by feminist and women's groups has a history in the country. It continues to exist, and although its reach is limited, it remains vital to keep the demand for justice and equality alive.

Resistance, like any form of political participation and active citizenship, is a tool for defending democracy and freedom of assembly, expression and thought. Bottom-up politics is essential to "create thought" and solidarity, and to ensure that the needs of the territories and the people who live there are truly represented in decision-making processes and not mediated by other interests.

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