

The Media Image of Afghanistan in Europe on the Example of Poland and the Possibilities of its Positive Change Thanks a Pro-environmental Legal Culture



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Abstract

Legal and non-legal factors, including religion, influence legal culture. In Europe, it is accepted that religious factors can have a disruptive effect on the legal system. The situation changes if faith carries positive arguments in favour of environmental protection. Thus, environmental legal norms receive additional justification. The example of Afghanistan is interesting because the image of this country in the European media is usually negative. Therefore, the research problem is the question: whether the negative image of Afghanistan can be changed through the involvement of the Afghan government and the Islamic faith in environmental issues. The thesis of the article is that such a change is possible because European societies do not always support the policies of great powers, are knowledgeable about climate change and at the same time are interested in other cultures. Media information from Poland shows that Afghanistan's religiously grounded approach to climate change provides arguments for international aid. An analysis of digital texts and literature was used for this purpose.

Keywords: Environmental issues, Islam, Sustainability, Afghanistan.

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تصویر رسانه‌یی افغانستان در اروپا

(بررسی نمونه پولند (لهستان) و ظرفیت‌های تحول مثبت آن در پرتو فرهنگ حقوقی حامی محیط زیست)

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چکیده

عوامل حقوقی و غیرحقوقی، از جمله مذهب، نقشی تعیین کننده در شکل دهی به فرهنگ حقوقی ایفا می کنند. در اروپا، این دیدگاه غالب است، که عوامل مذهبی می توانند تأثیری مخرب بر نظام حقوقی داشته باشند. با این حال، زمانی که مذهب استدلال‌هایی مثبت به نفع حفاظت از محیط زیست ارائه می دهد، این وضعیت تغییر می کند و هنجارهای حقوقی زیست محیطی با توجهات بیش تری همراه می شوند. افغانستان به عنوان یک نمونه پژوهشی از اهمیت ویژه‌یی برخوردار است؛ چرا که تصویر این کشور در رسانه‌های اروپایی عمدتاً منفی بازنمایی می شود. از این رو، مسأله اصلی پژوهش این بوده است، که آیا می توان تصویر منفی افغانستان را از طریق مشارکت دولت این کشور و آموزه‌های اسلامی در مسائل زیست محیطی دگرگون کرد؟ فرضیه مقاله بر این اساس بوده است که چنین تغییری امکان پذیر است؛ زیرا جوامع اروپایی نه تنها همواره از سیاست‌های قدرتهای بزرگ حمایت نمی کنند، بل که نسبت به تغییرات اقلیمی آگاهی بالایی دارند و به فرهنگ‌های دیگر نیز علاقه مند هستند. شواهد رسانه‌یی از پولند (لهستان) نشان می دهد که رویکرد افغانستان به تغییرات اقلیمی، که بر آموزه‌های مذهبی مبتنی است، می تواند مبنای قانع کننده‌یی برای دریافت کمک‌های بین المللی فراهم کند. این پژوهش با استفاده از تحلیل متون دیجیتال و بررسی منابع علمی به این موضوع پرداخته است.

واژه‌گان کلیدی: مسائل زیست محیطی، اسلام، پای داری، افغانستان.

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1. Introduction

European nations, especially the Polish, view world history differently from Arab nations. They also have a different periodization of history (Goitein, 1968; Hirschler & Savant, 2014). „Every civilization has its own phases of development” (Demirci, 2016). Arab culture refers to other historical eras (Bütshīsh, 2021). Therefore, it is important to show how other societies perceive a culture.

The theme of the article is the usefulness of the Afghan environmental experience for European legal culture. The author's thesis is that non-legal norms can reinforce legal norms and contribute to environmental security. Research in this area is needed because the image of Afghanistan in the Western media is negative. Media discourse analysis can provide clues for changing this negative image and finding new stakeholders to build a positive image of Afghanistan in the media.

Previous research in the field of Afghanistan's relations with European countries, especially Poland, a country in Central and Eastern Europe, has focused on the history of Afghanistan, the analysis – chronological and thematic – of the war in Afghanistan, the internal situation of Afghanistan after 2021, the relationship between Islam and politics.

Important are publications of Joanna Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, Jadwiga Pstrusińska, Jolanta Sierakowska-Dyndo and Stanisław Zapaśnik (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 1998; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2001a; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2001b; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2009; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2010; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2016; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2021; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2022; Pstrusińska, 2007; Sierakowska-Dyndo, 1998; Sierakowska-Dyndo, 2002; Sierakowska-Dyndo, 2003; Sierakowska-Dyndo, 2008; Sierakowska-Dyndo, 2013; Zapaśnik, 2014). The law of Afghanistan discussed Ewa Suwara (Suwara, 2015). A popular scientific description of the journey and his own experiences in Afghanistan was presented by Piotr Balcerowicz (Balcerowicz, 2001). The books of Jan Petrus, Polish ambassador to Afghanistan from 1966 to 1972 (Petrus, 1987), are still in flow of scientific information. The concept presented in this article relates to environmental protection and climate change.

Within the framework of the specific objectives, selected aspects from the history of relations between Poland and Afghanistan and the image of the war in Afghanistan in the Polish media are presented - this is the background for further considerations. Due to the cultural differences between Afghanistan and Poland, a broader coverage of this topic was necessary. Then - as a contrast - a positive picture of Afghanistan's environmental policy was shown. In this way, the perception of Afghanistan can be changed for those European societies that are critical of US policy and those that are sensitive to climate protection issues. The research question identifies arguments that can be used to show the Afghan experience. The research method is an analysis of internet sources and literature.

2. Results (current image of Afghanistan in Polish media)

International relations between Europe and Central Asia are important because the communication routes between Europe and the Far East pass through the Central Asian states. The geopolitical situation of the Central and Eastern European countries, especially Poland and the Baltic States, is peculiar because they are vulnerable to

attacks from Russia. Poland is in a specific situation because political action against it is also taken by Israel. Poland's security depends on US policy, and US policy is pro-Israel. As long as Russia threatens Poland, Poland's security will depend on the US and the Polish state will not be able to pursue a friendly policy towards Arab states and a critical one towards Israel.

Polish politics is strongly conditioned by historical experience. Every child in a Polish school learns that the only country that did not accept the partitions of Poland in the 18th century was the Ottoman Empire. Poles remember Iran's assistance to Poles during the Second World War. The Iranians rescued some 116 000 Polish refugees from the Soviet Union, including more than 78 000 soldiers, 37 000 civilians, including 18 000 children (Błażejowski, 2019; Ewakuacja Armii Andersa, 2024; Kalbarczyk, 2022; Kombatancki, 2016; Odślōnięto tablicę, 2014).

Polish-Afghan relations are weaker, but have been maintained at various times in history. Probably the first Pole and also one of the first Europeans who describe Afghanistan was Judas Thaddaeus Krusinski. His book „Prodromus ad historiam revolutionis Peersicae” was a very important work about Persia and Afghanistan (Amanat, 2017; Skowron, 2020). At the beginning of the 19th century, Polish newspapers published information about Afghanistan, but through the English press. For example, they wrote about Mountstuart Elphinstone's expedition (Afghanistan, 1842; Obraz Królestwa Kabul, 1817). The newspapers also printed accounts by Western travellers. In the 19th century, Poles reached Afghanistan: refugees from the Tsarist army and soldiers who fought on the Persian side against the Russian Empire, or researchers and geographers (Czarnecki, 2024). A well-known secret agent who operated in Afghanistan was Jan Prosper Witkiewicz (Massalski, 1928). In 19th century Poland, Włodzimierz Kulczycki and Waclaw Nałkowski wrote about Afghanistan (Kulczycki, 1885; Nałkowski, 1879).

Diplomatic relations between Poland and Afghanistan were established in 1927 (Traité d'Amitié, 1927). In 1928, Poland was one of the destinations of King Amanullah Khan (Flasiński, 2018; Paraskiewicz, 2014). Before World War II, Poles came to Afghanistan to work as engineers and researchers, such as Adam Drath and Edward Stenz (Fedirko & Fedirko, 2013). Political and popularisation activities were developed by Вассан-Гирей Ижиевич Джабагиев (Dżabagi, 1928). An interesting study was published by Marian Uzdownski (Uzdownski, 1928).

After World War II, Polish-Afghan contacts resumed after 1956, after the death of Stalin. Polish experts, ethnographers, surveyors, geographers, geologists, Himalayan explorers (Hindu Kush) went to Afghanistan, and students from Afghanistan studied in Poland (Kałuski; Kultura, 1981; Penkala, 1979; Penkala, 1981; Wolski, 1969; Wolski, 1972; Wolski, 1975). Polish scientists have organized a lot of research expeditions (Fedirko, 2007). The Soviet-Afghan War stopped these contacts (Komorowski, 2008). When in the 1980s was the Soviet-Afghan War, Poles sympathized with the Afghan resistance movement. They published leaflets and articles in the underground and anti-Soviet press outside the communist censorship (Afghanistan, 1985). Activists put up posters ‘Afghanistan - Poland. Common cause. One enemy’. 1982, Poles hoisted a flag ‘Solidarity with the fighting Afghan people’ at the top of Mont Blanc mountain. Poles were active in Afghanistan at that time, helping the Afghan people (Fijałkowski, 2017; Pawłowski, 2021). After the collapse of the USSR, Poland supported humanitarian

action in Afghanistan: Polish Humanitarian Action built schools and wells (Kozioł & Kaca 2021; Polska Akcja Humanitarna).

The situation changed when the US attacked Afghanistan in 2001. The Polish government decided - despite criticism - to send a contingent of soldiers to Afghanistan (Krzyżanowski, 2022; Zubek, 2021; Zajac, 2007). Almost 83% of the Polish public was against the Polish military going to the US war in Afghanistan (Lorenc, 2008; Żuk, 2009). Despite this, the Polish government has taken this decision. For more than 20 years, more than 33,000 Polish soldiers and Ministry of Defence personnel have been in Afghanistan (33 tys. żołnierzy). It was Polish Task Force and Task Force White Eagle, under the command of the United States Army, from 2001 to 2021, in Ghazni Province (Drapikowska, 2017; Kajetanowicz, 2009/2010; Jureńczyk, 2016; Kosman, 2016; Matuszak & Prześdziecki, 2011; Nurzyńska, 2016; Pacek, 2015; Winid, 2007). At the end of the mission, it was highlighted: „There are no military solutions in Afghanistan” (Duda, 2021). Polish experts wrote that the political responsibility for the war lay with the US (Frelich, 2021b). Some considered Afghanistan a failed state (Kowalczyk, 2007).

The war ended humanitarian aid. Poland had previously provided financial and material help to the Afghan people to build and equip schools, especially agricultural schools, organized training and language courses, helped the disabled, equipped hospitals, especially against tuberculosis and malaria, built roads, repaired bridges, installed street lighting and carried out many other projects (Zalas-Kamińska, 2022). A programme of multicultural classes on Afghanistan was even developed for Polish schools (Pazdur & Woźniak, 2013).

On the military side, Polish authorities emphasized the advantages of Polish involvement on the US side (Koniec misji, 2021). The military command said that Polish soldiers had gained a lot of military experience (Frelich, 2021a; Lakomy, 2013). The increased importance of Poland in NATO structures was emphasized. The Polish military was modernized, new training programmes were introduced, war veterans received better care, medical rescue was developed, and the Polish military industry was expanded (Frelich 2021b; Krzemińska, 2016; Skwarski, 2014). It was very important for Poles that the Polish Army was better evaluated than the Germans.

Military authorities affirmed that strengthening the Polish army is necessary in case of aggression from Russia. For Poland, the enemy is Russia. Since the only country in the world that can stop Russia is the USA, Poland, as a country, is geopolitically doomed to the USA. This is why military commanders emphasize that 20 years of war in Afghanistan have changed the Polish army. The Polish government has proven its usefulness to the US government. Poland therefore has a chance to get help from the US in the event of a Russian attack (Zalesiński & Kowalska-Sendek, 2021). In this way, geopolitics affects the situation of so different countries as Poland and Afghanistan (Kardaś, 2024; Klupa & Smolarek, 2012; Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2021b; Paszyn, 2014).

Catholic publicists had a different view. They believed that political arguments were more important than freedom and justice (Pięciak, 2011). They wrote that the attack on Afghanistan made no sense and no one could win the war (Jagielski, 2017). They judged US policy as hypocritical. In their view, it was a gamble at the expense of the Afghan people (Jagielski, 2021). The media often talked about the retreat of Americans.

The Polish press wrote of panic, political disaster, and disastrous organization (Kojzar, 2021; Piotrowski, 2021).

Quoted in Poland, Mark Juergensmeyer said that the war in Afghanistan was unnecessary and the US government had rejected the possibility of a compromise with the Afghans (Juergensmeyer, 2021). Polish experts added that the Americans had lost morally and humanely. They criticized military commanders and those who did not understand the culture of Afghanistan and its ethnic differences (Kłyszewko, 2022). The Polish government lacked a strategic, long-term policy vision for Central Asia (Otłowski, 2012; Strózyk, 2021). Instead, the war resulted in an influx of refugees to Europe, especially Germany, and triggered a political crisis in Europe.

Left-wing authors were highly critical. They wrote that Western politicians lied about the peace mission (Ogdowski, 2021). For them, the war in Afghanistan was a failure of the West (Kęciek, 2013). They wrote about the killing of civilians too (Kęciek, 2010). It was clear to them that the Polish soldiers were fighting for US interests and that it was just an occupation (Tumiłowicz, 2009).

The publicists pointed out the economic aspect: the cost of the war to the Polish state budget was as much as 6.5 billion zlotys, or more than 1.5 billion dollars (Gigantyczny koszt, 2021). For example, the cost of building a large bridge in Poland across one of the largest rivers is 300 million zlotys. Jerzy Domański commented: „There is no money that the military machine will not spend” (Domański, 2009). Only after the war publicists confirmed that the Polish government never set itself up for economic profits from economic cooperation with the US in Afghanistan. Political and training benefits for the Polish army were assessed as doubtful (Kraiński, 2016).

Piotr Grochmalski wrote: „Both the Russians and the Americans (...) consciously sought to radicalize sentiment and to destroy pre-existing social mechanisms ensuring political stability” in Afghanistan (Grochmalski, 2008, p. 90). Krzysztof Marchlewicz commented similarly: “The fact that for almost two centuries Afghanistan has relatively often become the focus of attention from the outside world means nothing good for most of its inhabitants” (Marchlewicz, 2016). Marian Muszkiewicz concluded that the occupiers have left Afghanistan in chaos, and it is our duty to help the Afghans (Muszkiewicz, 2009).

The Polish scholars have proposed solutions to be implemented in Afghanistan, including the development of rural areas (Jureńczyk, 2018). In their publications, they referred to the aspects of international humanitarian law, work and situation of the medical services and the psychological effects of war on soldiers (Goniewicz et al. 2016; Predel, 2017; Zaręba, 2010; Ziajka, 2017).

3. Discussion (perspectives of a new image of Afghanistan)

The war in Afghanistan has been widely reported in the Polish media and academic papers. Today, news about Afghanistan appears periodically, more often than about other countries in this part of Asia. In scientific and press publications, Afghanistan is portrayed as a country without international recognition, poor, and threatened by humanitarian disasters (Otłowski, 2021; Machniak, 2023). Governance in Afghanistan is considered temporary (Stempień, 2017). The authors of the publication draw attention to the situation of women (Błaszczuk, 2024; Dolińska, 2024; Jureńczyk, 2019; Kruczkowska, 2024; Krzyżanowski, 2015; Sadowa, 2015; Wantuch, 2024a; Wantuch,

2024b; Zakrzewska, 2024). They describe the regulation of public and private life (Kazimierczuk, 2024a; Kazimierczuk, 2024b). They emphasize the lack of communication connections and infrastructure (Piotrowski, 2011a; Piotrowski, 2011b). On the other hand, they describe untapped natural resources (Duc, 2022; Natkaniec-Nowak, 2010). They also point to the possibility of redefining Afghanistan's place among Central Asian states (Brudnicka-Żółtaniecka, 2021). A fascination with Afghanistan is evident in Polish publications all the time (Korzeniewski, 2006).

Most importantly, there was interesting news in the press about Afghanistan's approach to climate change (Noack, 2024). The Afghan government declared that it must defend the climate, water, and soil as it does the state borders (Kucharczyk, 2024). Media quotes Lutfullah Khairkhow: « آب و خاک خود به همان اندازه که از خود در برابر تهاجمات، دفاع می کنیم». Polish media described the Afghan government's participation in the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan (Beldowicz, 2024).

Contrary to what some politicians in the West claim, Afghanistan - in the opinion of journalists - sees that climate change is real. The fact is that the great powers destroy nature the most (Lipczyński, 2023). In addition, the traditional Western approach “top-down, focused on hard security rather than human security and highly state-centric – tends to ignore the impacts of climate change” (Abdenur & Tripathi, 2022).

Climate change is hitting Central Asian countries hard (Jawid & Khadjavi, 2019; Kazemi, 2022; Khakimov, 2021; Omerkhil et al., 2020; D'Souza, 2024). “Climate change is a great threat to human rights and can harm and destroy human rights” (Zaki, 2023). Afghanistan produces only 0.05% of emissions and is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to global warming. It is an example of climate injustice (Mirowski, 2024; Václavíková, 2022). This country alternates between droughts and floods, which are increasingly tragic (Climate, 2022; Hagen & Teufert, 2009; Khalili, 2022; Kochbar & Knippenberg, 2023). Otherwise, the illegal occupation of Afghanistan by powerful foreigners caused that this land cannot use its natural resources: land, water, forests, and minerals (Azizi, 2023). The wars destroyed Afghanistan's ecological, food, and raw material potential (De Joannis, 2008).

Paradoxically, Afghanistan is relatively rich in water resources, but due to constant conflicts, cannot make rational water policy (Mahmoodi, 2008). This situation hurts food security (Salman, Amer & Ward, 2017). However, climate change may be irreversible and will make it impossible to rebuild ecological and water potential and thus rebuild the economic base (Nabavi & Mohammadi, 2024; Shokory, Schaeffli & Lane, 2023). The researchers emphasize the role of the «Mirab» system in managing the irrigation systems and water distribution, paying particular attention to local tribal laws and the local needs of the population (Gauster, 2021; Mahaqi, 2021; Qureshi, 2002; Safi et al., 2016; Thomas & Ahmad, 2009; Viala, 2004).

The West does not understand the pro-environment arguments, which are based on religion. In western culture and politics dominate another approach: «And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...» (King James Version, Gen. 1.28). It says that the Earth should be appropriated, not protected. In the West, nobody speaks like Farisullah Azhar: «Carbon footprints will weigh heavily on judgment day» and «God will ask: How did you make your money? And then he will ask: How much suffering did you cause in the process?»

(Nguyen, 2024). The eco-Islam trend emphasizes that the inhumane treatment of animals violates the world order. Respect and care for animals, plants, and inanimate matter is a human responsibility (Islam a ekologia). «Essential elements of nature – earth, water, fire, forests, and light – belong to all living things and not only to the human race» (Bsoul et al., 2022). If people do not protect the planet, God will hold them accountable for their actions (Ali, 2023). «Protecting the environment is the responsibility of every Muslim since it is closely related to religion» (Sukri, 2023). Another argument flows from Sahih al-Buchari: «There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it but it is regarded as a charitable gift for him.» (Hadith on Charity, 2011; Sahih al-Buchari). Destroying nature is destroying God's work (Taliban tries, 2024). Important is the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change (Islamic Declaration, 2015; Islamic Teachings, 2024; Ozdemir, 2020). In this way, Islamic environmentalism can support legal changes. Of course, there is the question of how Islamic doctrine can influence environmental law as a part of the administrative law, but we see the incorporation of environmental crimes into the penal code (Hakimuddin, 2024).

The Western culture speaks of a conflict between legal and non-legal norms, especially religious norms. For European people, religious norms weaken legal norms and religion is a threat to law. The example of Afghanistan shows that it can be different. Secular as well as religious societies face the problem of public awareness (Rahmani, Wafa & Yar, 2021). Without public awareness, there can be no compliance with the law.

In Western culture, religious organizations support conservative and right-wing parties. These are the same parties that do not believe in climate change. In Poland, the conservative and right-wing government, supported by the Catholic Church, has led to more tree-cutting and less protection of nature-value areas (Czy naprawdę; Kojzar, 2021; Pawlak, 2023). In the case of Poland, religion does not protect nature. The example of Poland shows that political-religious institutions sabotage positive changes in the law, for example, the introduction of a ban on bird hunting. The same right-wing conservative parties criticize Islam the most. The implementation of religiously-driven legal norms into the legal system, on the other hand, allows for higher environmental protection.

Western societies are secular. They are resistant to religious arguments but accept pro-environmental arguments. If Afghanistan, on the basis of religious arguments, builds a positive pro-environmental narrative, it can use it to improve the media image of its policies. Environmental policies can improve Afghanistan's international standing (Grondecka, 2024). The experts from the International Crisis Group argued that climate protection is a field worth discussing with the Afghan government (Smith & Eberle, 2023). American journalist Bill McKibben wrote that the Afghan plan of climate protection is better than an American (McKibben, 2024). The climate crisis is destabilizing the Central Asian region. It is forcing drought-prone communities to mass immigration (Přivara & Přivarová, 2019). Without Afghanistan's help and without helping the Afghans, the crisis could be even worse (Sie haben keine Wahl, 2024). Afghanistan's actions are being watched by international environmental organizations. They can become important stakeholders in supporting Afghanistan internationally (Outriders Podcast, 2023).

The negative discourse on war can be transformed into a positive discourse on nature protection. The argument against another war is also given by anthropology. For example, Joseph Pugliese wrote that war is a destruction of animate and inanimate nature. The military operations create an ecocide and global militarism deepens the ecological destruction of the planet (Pugliese, 2020). Other states, rather than attacking Afghanistan once again, should be thinking about how to jointly prevent climate change while respecting the cultural distinctiveness of other nations. In the case of Afghanistan we see that the environment is a «forgotten victim of war» (Khan, 2022, p. 82).

4. Conclusion

Smaller states are dependent on great powers. Poland is depending on the USA for its external and internal policy because it has to defend itself against Russian aggression. Afghanistan was attacked by the Soviet Union and the USA. It is difficult for states embroiled in complicated relationships to maintain international partnerships. They can, and should, instead maintain cultural contacts and contribute to environmental protection.

Poland has a centuries-old tradition of friendship with Arab states. The internal situation in Afghanistan has always aroused the interest of Polish public opinion. It is not true that the whole Polish society supported the participation of Polish troops in the war in Afghanistan. The picture of Afghanistan in the Polish media is often negative. However, the information on Afghanistan's environmental policy is very interesting. It is based on religious grounds. Building a pro-environmental legal culture based on religious arguments is a new phenomenon in public debate. This is why Afghanistan's approach has received so much media attention. In Polish political practice, religion blocks environmental protection. Pro-environmental legal culture, based on religious argumentation, is changing the perception of Afghanistan in the Western media.

A legal culture, in which legal and non-legal norms do not conflict and legal norms refer to non-legal norms has a better chance of building a coherent legal system. Such a system, if based on a common religion, unites society. Theses in a religion about the need to protect the environment can strengthen the state's legal order. The example of Afghanistan shows that such a path is possible.

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