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The social position of women in Afghanistan after 2014

Summary

The individual parts of the article present cultural, theoretical and legal aspects of the problem, the actual change in the position of Afghan women, the barriers to their emancipation and the opinions of Afghans on selected issues in the area of women's functioning in society. After completing the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in 2014, the government of President Ashraf Ghani faced major security challenges. There were therefore fears that the issue of women's rights could be marginalised. These speculations have not been confirmed because the Afghan authorities show determination to reform this area. However, the problem is the implementation of new solutions, especially in areas controlled by the Taliban.

Key words: Afghanistan, women, women's rights, Ashraf Ghani, Taliban

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Introduction

Afghan women were the main victims of the Taliban radical regime, which marginalised their position in the society (Giustozzi, 2009, p. 10). Taliban policies have removed women from social, political and economic life in Afghanistan. Women could not even leave their homes by themselves, meet others, study or receive medical care (Tortajada, 2004, p. 5). The role of women was reduced to housework, with doors closed and windows painted over (Cole, 2009, pp. 133–134). In the Taliban State, a woman had the value of *a thing, an object, not a living creature* (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2001, p. 57).

Initially, the Bill Clinton administration saw the Taliban regime as a stabilising factor for Afghanistan. However, the positive attitude of the US authorities towards radicals was weakened as a result of pressure from national organizations defending women's rights (Qassem, 2016, p. 118). However, it was only after a series of terrorist attacks on American citizens in various parts of the world, organised by al-Qaeda and directed from Afghanistan, that the drastic change of policy took place. The spectacular attack of 11 September 2001 on the territory of the United States led to an armed intervention in Afghanistan by the coalition forces under American leadership. Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the Western public opinion insisted on the inclusion of human rights, including women's rights, in the Afghan Constitution. Otherwise, support for the stationing of troops in this country could significantly weaken (Lawless, Constantineau, Dizboni, 2017, p. 58). Privately, President George W. Bush was under the significant influence of his wife Laura Welch Bush, who treated the issue of women's rights in Afghanistan as a personal "crusade" (Keane, 2016, p. 131).

Article 22 of the Afghan Constitution, signed on 26 January 2004 by President Hamid Karzai, states that "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden". The citizens of Afghanistan, men and women, shall have equal rights and obligations under the law (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004, Article 22). The Constitution also guarantees Afghan women support in access to education, as well as social assistance for widows who, after many years of war, can be counted in hundreds of thousands in Afghanistan. In 2003, Afghanistan has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 18 December 1979 (United Nations, 1979). In 2009, the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) was passed. It aims to empower women before the judicial authorities, to introduce effective protection of women's rights and to penalise their violation, particularly violence against women.

Since 2001, the United States alone has spent approximately \$1.5 billion on improving Afghan women's quality of life. This has had a positive impact, for example, on women's access to education and training, medical care and the labour market (Crane, Greenfield, 2014, p. 271). However, much of this money has been wasted and patriarchal culture still persists in Afghanistan. The country continues to be regarded as one of the most difficult countries for women to live in. Disappointment came from the democratic authorities of Afghanistan themselves when, in 2009, President Hamid Karzai approved the family law

discriminatory against women that partly restored the Sharia law towards them. Under pressure from the international public opinion, some of the most controversial provisions have been repealed, such as the ban on women leaving their homes without the consent of their husbands (Jauffret, 2014, p. 302). Nevertheless, this case has shown that equality between women and men in Afghanistan is a façade situation.

The aim of the article is to characterize and evaluate the position of Afghanistan in the society after 2014. It is an important time boundary, because this year the mission of the ISAF came to an end, and after more than a decade of Hamid Karzai's office, Ashraf Ghani took over the highest office in the country. The article does not concern the participation of women in the political and economic life of Afghanistan, which is the subject of separate papers. The research problem is contained in the question whether there is a positive change in the social position of women in Afghanistan in the period under study and whether this trend will continue? The main thesis of the article is that despite the greater determination of the current Afghan authorities to improve the social position of women, there is a number of factors that cause the positive changes to be slow and their future remains uncertain. The article was written using Polish and English literature, documents and materials from Afghan state institutions and international organisations, Internet materials and the English-language press. The article uses the text source analysis method. The results of the survey conducted by the Asian Foundation were also used and an interview with an Afghan citizen, Wesna Aziz, was conducted.

Cultural and theoretical aspects of the social position of women in Afghanistan

According to the Pashto tradition, women have to perform family duties on an equal footing with men, and her position should not differ significantly from that of a man (Pstrusińska, 1977, p. 75). On the other hand, however, reforms aimed at the actual emancipation of women in the social life of Afghanistan met strong resistance from conservative circles, which effectively mobilised Afghans to counteract these processes. Only in the 20th century did mass protests and armed protests take place against social reforms introduced by King Amanullah Khan in the 1920s, Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud Khan in the 1950s and President Babrak Karmal in the 1980s. It is also difficult to clearly define the position of women in Islam. From the Koran, on the one hand, it follows that men and women are to be equal, but on the other hand, men are to take care of women as weaker beings, which puts them in a dominant position. The prevailing interpretations of Islamic principles contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality, which is observed in many Muslim countries, including Afghanistan (Jureńczyk, 2016, p. 179). As in history, we are also seeing resistance to emancipatory processes in Afghanistan today. It can therefore be said that the Afghan customs resulting from religion and tradition, which are guarded by conservative circles, are in fact disavowing the social position of women

in Afghanistan. Therefore, the persistent stereotype of a Pashtun as an uncompromising guardian of wives and daughters is largely justified (Rzehak, 2009, p. 195).

In explaining the problem of social inequalities on the basis of sociological theories, two points of view can be identified. The functional theory of social stratification links inequality to the necessary organisational imperatives of collective life. The genetic theory of cumulative advantage, on the other hand, refers to the historical origin of inequality, seeing its source in domination and power. The possibility of equalising the differences along with social development is also perceived in different ways. Functional theory interprets inequality as an eternal and irreversible phenomenon that is even necessary for the functioning of societies. Genetic theory, on the other hand, indicates that inequalities are the result of historical conditions. According to it, along with social development, they can and should be abolished, because they are a factor of conflict and disorganisation of social life (Sztompka, 2003, pp. 358–359).

In the case of inequality of the sexes, the key role is played by the so-called gender, which gives men and women different roles and identities and is an important element of social stratification. As a rule, male roles are more valued and rewarded than female roles, which translates into their better position in terms of rights, power, prestige and wealth. Theories of gender inequality formulated from a functionalist perspective indicate how gender differences contribute to the stability and integration of society. They most often reduce division of duties in the family to the issue of natural (biological) differences between men and women. The theories of gender inequality drawn from a feminist perspective are consistent on the issue of lower opportunities for women in society. However, they interpret the reasons for gender differences differently, referring to a number of social phenomena and processes, including sexism, patriarchy, capitalism, or racism (Giddens, 2008, pp. 133–140).

In explaining the reasons for discrimination against women in Afghanistan, it is worth referring to the theory of patriarchy formulated by Sylvia Walby. It was defined to explain the process of female emancipation in the Western civilisation, mainly in Great Britain, yet many of its aspects are universal. The concept of patriarchy is fundamental to any analysis of gender inequality, even though it exists in different forms and varieties. Within the framework of patriarchy in particular historical eras, ethnic and class groups, systems of social structures and practices were created in various forms. Different structures and mechanisms, however, share a common goal: male domination over women, their subordination, oppression and exploitation. According to Walby, patriarchy is formed within six elements, i.e. paid work, domestic production, culture, sexuality, violence and the state. However, women are not passive victims of oppressive social structures created by men. It is natural for them to take action to reduce gender inequalities in society, which over time has led to a change in patriarchy's form (Walby, 1990). In Afghanistan, far-reaching discrimination against women exists in all six patriarchal structures. However, it is possible to gradually increase the empowerment of women in Afghan society, but this process requires time and determination on the part of women in the fight for their rights. Full equality between men and women is practically impossible. It is important,

however, for the form of patriarchy to gradually soften and evolve to the benefit of women.

Legal aspects of the social position of women in Afghanistan

In assessing the social position of women in Afghanistan, reference should be made to the sources of international standards on women's rights. The United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued on 10 December 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly, contains a catalogue of the fundamental rights of every human being, men and women on an equal footing. Although not legally binding, it is considered a customary law that should be universally applicable in all countries. On its basis, on 16 December 1966, by means of a resolution of the UN General Assembly, international agreements were concluded in the form of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966a) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966b). Afghanistan acceded to both treaties on 24 January 1983, which means that their provisions are legally binding on the Afghan authorities. These covenants develop the catalogue of rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in specific thematic areas without discrimination on any ground, including gender. Just as a number of other countries that have acceded to the Covenants, Afghanistan has serious problems in complying with many of the resulting provisions, particularly with regard to women.

On 18 December 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations, 1979). Afghanistan has signed and ratified this convention, but in practice it is not respected in the country, and some of the required laws have not even been implemented nationally. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011), entered into force on 1 August 2014. It is the first comprehensive document to create a legal framework and mechanisms for combating violence against women, including preventing it, protecting its victims and holding the perpetrators accountable. Due to its geographical location, Afghanistan is not a member of the Council of Europe, so it is not a signatory to the Convention either. Nevertheless, the provisions contained in it should serve as an example for all countries in the world to legislate on protecting women against violence. However, it is difficult to expect that the standards set by the Convention will be implemented in Afghanistan in the coming years, and even more so that they will be complied with effectively.

President Ashraf Ghani believes that discrimination against women is not part of Afghan culture. According to him, there is a strong link between democracy, security and gender equality. The Afghan government's understanding of this dependence is to translate into its intensive efforts to strengthen women's rights in the country (Akseer, Yousufzai, 2017).

Based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000 (United Nations, 2000), which addresses the impact of armed conflict on women, the National Action

Plan for Women, Peace and Security (NAP 1325) was launched in Afghanistan in July 2015. The aim of the program is to increase the activity of women in the social, political and economic life of Afghanistan, strengthen their rights and protect women against violence and poverty. It also aims to increase the involvement of women in the peace process and the security sector. The detailed objectives of the plan are as follows (MOFA, 2015, pp. 1–2):

- participation of women in civil service decision-making and leadership, in resolving security, peace and social reintegration issues;
- active involvement of women in national and regional elections;
- women's access to effective, efficient and accountable justice;
- medical and psychological support for victims of sexual and domestic violence;
- protecting women from all types of violence and discrimination;
- increase funding for measures in the field of protection of women in emergencies;
- counteracting impunity for violence against women and other crimes against them;
- involving boys and girls in the fight against violence against women;
- institutional support for women's organisations and associations;
- increase women's economic security through increased employment opportunities;
- increase access to education for girls and women, including higher education, especially for those returning from external and internal migration.

On December 31, 2017, the Anti-Harassment of Women and Children Law came into force. It introduces a number of definitions of offences against women and strengthens the complaints procedure in this area. This right has been introduced with good intentions, but it is full of inaccuracies and errors, as well as provisions that will not be able to be implemented in practice. This raises concerns among observers that, in practice, this law may prove ineffective and may not provide adequate legal protection for women victims (ACBAR, 2017). So far, only a fraction of the reported cases of violence against women subject to ERAW have become the basis for prosecution proceedings. A common practice is “mediation”, the outcome of which women are most often forced to accept under pressure from their families, the elders or justice officials.

It is worrying that the amendment to the controversial family law, including the divorce law, has been halted in Afghanistan. The Penal Code, amended by the Presidential Decree of 4 March 2017, also raises serious concerns. Due to the pressure of conservative milieus, the ERAW chapter has been removed from it. The government has not even fully complied with its promises to end the practice of imprisoning women for so-called “morality crimes” and the “virginity examination” of adopted girls (Human Rights Watch, 2017). This shows that changes in Afghanistan's laws on women's rights encounter the greatest barriers when it comes to sensitive issues of family life and relations between women and men.

Changes in the social standing of women in Afghanistan

The social position and rights currently enjoyed by women in Afghanistan are incomparably greater than under the Taliban regime. At present, Afghan women can move around the place of residence or even travel without the presence of a man. The girls arrange

and go to play with their friends without being afraid to dance and sing there (Aziz, 2018). Those living in larger cities have access to modern communication technologies, including the Internet and its communicators and social networking sites. They attend schools, graduate and some of them study abroad (Sadaat, 2016). Such freedoms, including the almost unrestricted possibility of self-fulfilment, apply above all to girls from more open-minded, intelligent families who are in a better economic situation. Girls originating from the province, conservative families, economically backward, and lacking in education, are subject to a number of restrictions on the above issues (Aziz, 2018).

Mundane issues such as increasing access to electricity and heat, access to drinking water in close proximity, or the use of electric cookers and other household appliances have a significant impact on improving the quality of life of Afghan women. All of this makes Afghan women more likely to meet their basic biological needs, and their daily household duties are lighter. Moreover, they have more time to read, learn, take care of themselves and satisfy their needs for self-development (Levi-Sanchez, 2017, p. 103, 110).

In recent years, significant progress has been made in terms of Afghanistan's access to the education system. In 2001, the number of children attending school did not exceed 1 million and only 3% of them were girls who could attend primary school at best. There were no women among the 20,000 officially active teachers because their work in this area was prohibited (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2010, p. 8). Only the most courageous female teachers gave secret classes, risking corporal punishment or even losing their lives. In the financial year 2016/17, the number of pupils already amounted to 8,868,122, of which 3,418,877 were girls and women. However, the decrease the number of in female students by 5.8% compared to the 2015/16 financial year was worrying. This is likely to have been mainly due to increased parental concern about the safety of students-daughters in Taliban-controlled areas. In the 2016/17 financial year, the number of teachers was 197,160, of which 64,271 were women. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data, the literacy rate of women is steadily increasing and by 2015, 24% of Afghan women aged 15 and over were able to write and read. Despite progress, this result was still much worse than that of neighbouring Iran (83%) or even Pakistan (42%) (Akbar, 2017).

Positive, albeit slower changes are also taking place in Afghan women's access to the health care system. In the financial year 2003/04, Afghanistan employed 4,082 doctors and 6,835 so-called professional medical staff, the vast majority of whom were male (Ministry of Public Health, 2013). In the 2016/17 financial year, these numbers increased to 9,842 doctors, of whom 2,037 were women and 21,502 were professional medical staff, of whom 8,236 were women (Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, 2017, pp. 139–140). During this time, the number of hospital and other healthcare facilities has increased significantly, as well as their equipment and access to medicines. As a result, women's access to medical care is incomparably greater than it was under the Taliban regime. This translates positively into all health data. For example, maternal mortality during pregnancy and childbirth fell from 1,600 per 100,000 live births in 2002 to 396 in 2015 (UN Women). However, the cost of access to the health care system remains a serious

problem, and for many families, including economically disadvantaged women, it is an effective barrier factor. Despite the positive change, the level of medical care provided to the Afghan women is dramatically lower, for example, than the one provided to its female citizens by the neighbouring Iran (Trust in Education).

Women are increasingly visible in the public space, including the Afghan media. In May 2017, the first television station run exclusively by women, “Zan TV”, opened in Kabul. The morning news service of this station gathers an average of 90 thousand viewers in front of TV sets. The mission of television is to “encourage women to live independent lives outside the home”. The broadcast programmes address a number of issues important for women—from discrimination and domestic violence to maternity and fashion (Banks, 2017). In the same month, the first women’s magazine in Afghanistan, *Gallara*, was published, the first issue of which was printed in 2,000 copies. As in the case of Zan TV, *Gallara*’s content is primarily aimed at women and covers both light lifestyle topics and serious social issues (Mashal, 2017). On the one hand, such undertakings activate women to act, but on the other hand, they cause agitation among the conservative part of Afghan society. The pioneers are accused of spreading feminist ideology hostile to Islam and the radicals are threatening them.

External actors have played a major role in improving the social position of Afghan women. The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) played a special role in the implementation of ISAF operations. Their employees have been involved in the procedures for building schools, hospitals and other public facilities, which today Afghan women can enjoy in principle on an equal footing with men. Employees of civil-military cooperation organized a number of trainings for women, which were supposed to stimulate their activity and entrepreneurship. At the same time, they conducted anti-discrimination courses for men in order not to stifle the growing aspirations of their wives and daughters. The PRT staff sought to ensure adequate representation of women in local institutions, co-created jobs for women and made women’s voices heard, for example through local media (Kulesa, Górka-Winter, 2012, p. 219). Support for Afghan women has been and continues to be provided by a number of international institutions, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and numerous foundations based in countries around the world. Without this aid, the quality of life of Afghan women would have been much lower.

Main limitations to the social position of women in Afghanistan

As mentioned earlier, Afghan girls and women have different possibilities for emancipation. Those who live in rural areas, in conservative Pashtun communities or especially in areas controlled by the Taliban, are finding it difficult to exercise their rights. Moreover, they are often victims of abuse and ill-treatment, usually unable to count on the help of the state apparatus (Aziz, 2018). Forced marriages, sexual harassment and physical and mental abuse continue to be common. Millions of Afghan women still live in poverty, fear and humiliation (Sadaat, 2016). According to research by Global Rights,

87% of Afghan women has experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence, and 62% have been subjected to various forms of violence (UN Women).

In 2017, the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan (MoWA) reported an increase in gender-based violence against women, mainly in the Taliban-controlled areas of the country. A similar proposal was made by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. These institutions noted thousands of cases of beatings and mutilations, including acid attacks and murders, including so-called "honour killings". Most of these cases, however, are not reported to the police. Among the main reasons are the inaction of the authorities in bringing the perpetrators to justice, traditional customs that put men in a privileged position, stigmatization of victims and their fear of negative consequences (Amnesty International, 2018). Public officials are reluctant to prosecute and punish crimes against women, which leads to the perpetuation of violence against women in society (UNAMA, 2018). Women are usually forced by family members, tribal elders or police to refrain from making a complaint against their husbands. The traditional justice system does not implement legal changes aimed at increasing the protection of women and continues to work against the interests of Afghanistan. Abusive women who seek help most often face indifference and are sometimes accused of a so-called "moral crime" themselves (UN Women). It is standard practice to use mediation that perpetuates impunity for men and rarely improves the fate of women in marriage. The "conservative lobby", which fights against the provisions of EVAW, has its representatives at all levels of government. It seeks to remove provisions such as those on punishing men for domestic violence, providing shelter for abused women and the Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation. The remedy for this situation is to introduce many more women into the public space. Women in politics, the media, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary would be more open to women's problems, hearing about and preventing their traumatic experiences (Janjua, 2018).

It is worth mentioning the data on women's service in the Afghan National Police (ANP). At the end of 2014, female employment was less than 1.3%. Only 2,182 women served in its structures, 280 of whom were officers, 886 non-commissioned officers, 950 posts, and 66 were undergoing preparatory training (U.S. Department of Defense, 2014, p. 54). This asymmetry is primarily conditioned by cultural and religious factors that give women and men different social roles. In addition, the female officers' service is particularly dangerous because they are targeted by radicals. They cannot patrol the streets in uniform because they are threatened by harassment or even death. Women officers in their daily work also encounter prejudice from their male colleagues (Jureńczyk, 2017, p. 59).

As mentioned, the situation of women is most difficult in areas where Taliban influence is significant. There have been cases where women tortured by their husbands have been killed by the Taliban after seeking help from local authorities. In addition, the Taliban use brutal corporal punishment against women having sex outside marriage and prostitutes. Sometimes there are even public executions of women for deviating from the Sharia rules. For example, in March 2018, a woman was stoned to death for extramarital intercourse in the Vardoj district of Badakhshan province and the man was whipped (Amnesty International, 2018).

Girls' access to schools is restricted or even prohibited in areas controlled by the Taliban. This is due both to ideological reasons and to the use of educational institutions for military purposes and their recruitment (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Situations of restrictions on girls' access to schools also occur in areas controlled by conservative warlords cooperating with the authorities. Another problem is the safety issues and threat to the lives of schoolgirls. Not agreeing to the education of girls, the Taliban, for example, throw poisonous gas containers into school buildings or set fire to them. In February 2018, due to threats, the authorities were forced to close several girls' schools in the province of Farah, temporarily depriving 3.5 thousand people of schooling. The schools were reopened after 10 days, but most of the girls were afraid to return (Amnesty International, 2018). In the provincial Afghanistan, many girls are not sent to school because their parents believe that they do not need education. They prefer them to perform household duties and work in the homestead (Aziz, 2018).

As Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, women and children are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of poverty, including malnutrition. Approximately 21% of Afghan women has too low a body mass index, 48% suffer from iron deficiency and 55%, from iodine deficiency (Mehran, 2017). Since men are usually responsible for finances in Afghan households, they can use the issue of buying food to actually enslave women. If a woman cannot find employment or her husband does not allow her to work, the fear of starvation can force a woman to full submissiveness. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Afghan women cannot count on support from men because their husbands and fathers lost their lives, were mutilated or became addicted to drugs during the war (Aziz, 2018). Due to poverty, women's access to healthcare is restricted. There are still millions of Afghan women at risk of suffering as a result of disease and injury, due to the lack of access to medicines and professional medical assistance.

In Afghanistan, many women are still locked up in homes that they cannot leave without the company of men. In addition, in provincial Afghan, but also in certain urban districts, there are areas where women do not appear in public places without the burqa, although this is not required by law. This most often remains a taboo issue, although it is clear that it is often not a free choice of woman (Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation). Many Afghan women wear burqas because of religious and cultural pressure or sometimes even fear of repression from the Taliban or conservative residents of their localities (Aziz, 2018). However, there are women who wear burqa of their own choice, proudly paying homage to the traditions and customs of Afghanistan (Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, 2001, p. 435). However, unlike during the Taliban rule, they more often choose more vivid colours than the black or dark style prescribed at that time.

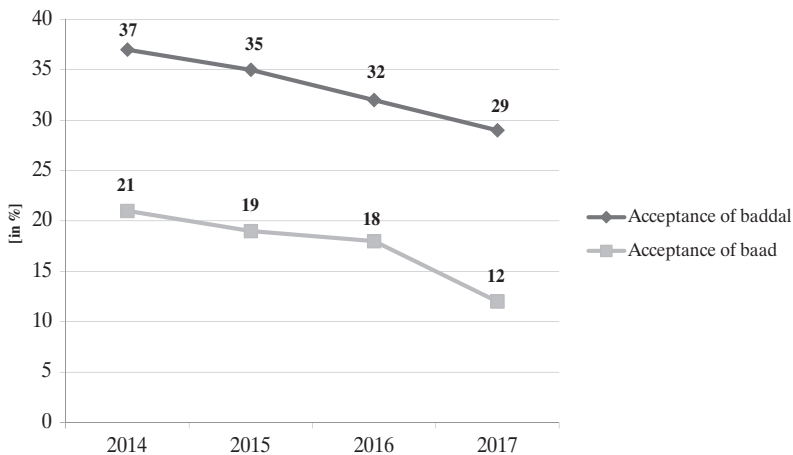
In the context of women's rights and social position in Afghanistan, it is worth to consider the problem of national reconciliation with the rebels. The most far-reaching proposal in this respect was presented by President Ashraf Ghani in February 2018. By making a proposal, he set a number of preconditions for the Taliban, including the recognition of a democratic rule of law that respects human rights, including women's

rights. On the other hand, however, he suggested the possibility of organizing new elections and what is particularly debatable, a revision of the constitution (Shalizi, Mackenzie, 2018). Circles defending Afghan women’s rights would certainly not agree to the inclusion of the Taliban in social and political life, if this were to be done at the expense of women (Dobbins, 2014, p. 166). On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that the Taliban would respect gender equality. At the moment, this is only a diversion, because so far the Taliban have not expressed interest in the President’s proposal.

The social position and role of women in Afghan citizens’ opinions

The Asia Foundation conducts annual opinion polls in Asian countries. In Afghanistan, research has already been carried out thirteen times, with more than 97,000 participants from Afghanistan. In a 2017 survey, the sample was 10,012 adult Afghans from all 34 provinces of the country (The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 188). One of the nine thematic sections concerned the issue of “women in society”.

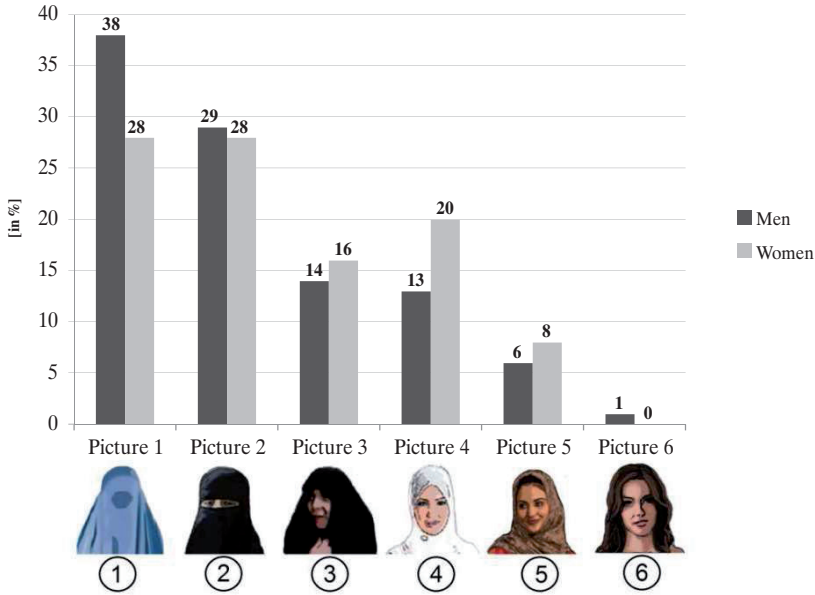
Figure 1. Levels of social acceptance for *baddal* and *baad* in the years 2014–2017



Source: own work, based on: The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 141.

Between 2014 and 2017, permission for the practice of forcibly marrying girls fell. *Baad*, which is marrying a daughter in debt or to settle a dispute with another family, was accepted by 21% of Afghans in 2014 and by only 12% in 2017. A slightly smaller decrease was observed in the acceptance of *baddal*, i.e. the exchange of daughters for marriages between families, which in the same period decreased from 37% to 29%. This positive change may show that Afghans are opening up to the world and are beginning to see that some of their practices towards women are not compatible with the universal values of humanism.

Figure 2. Opinions on the appropriate dress of an Afghan woman in a public place in 2017



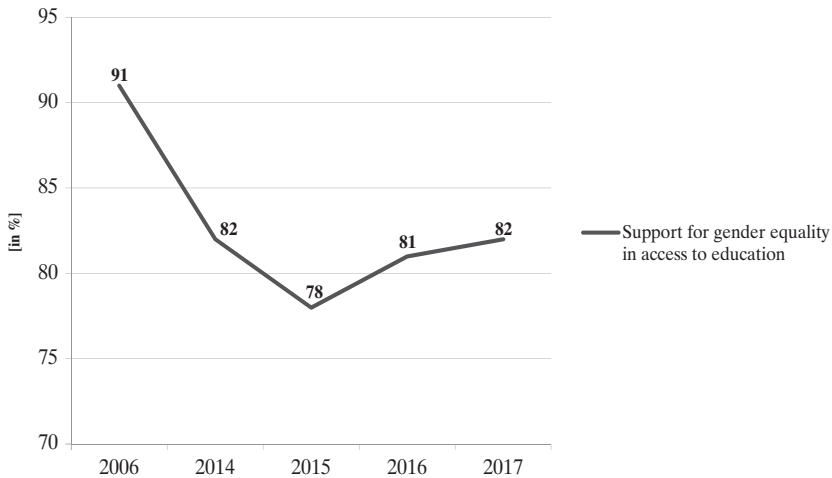
Source: own work, based on: The Asia Foundation, 2017, pp. 142–143.

Afghan society continues to advocate that women in public places wear traditional Muslim garment that cover most of their bodies, including their heads. In the survey conducted in 2017, 32.7% of respondents voted in favour of the burqa (no. 1) covering the whole body, including the face and eyes, including 10% more men than women. For the eye-exposing niqab (no. 2), 28.5% of respondents voted, with a similar number of men and women. A slightly less conservative hijab (no. 4) and chador or headscarf (no. 3) were followed by 16.4 and 14.7%, respectively, with the majority of women supporting these outfits, especially the hijab. The least frequent respondents were loose hijab (no. 5) and no headwear (no. 6), 6.8 and 0.6% respectively, with no significant difference between men and women (The Asia Foundation, 2017, pp. 142–143). These figures show that Afghans are not open to the far-reaching emancipation of women on moral issues. This is particularly true of those issues that are not seen as harmful to women. The Afghans believe that the outfit that covers a woman’s body ensures her purity and keeps both men and women from sinning.

The highest support for equal access to education was noted in 2006, when 91% of Afghans voted for it. In the following years, it started to decrease, especially in the period of withdrawal from the country of foreign quotas, dropping to 78% in 2015. In the next two years, however, this trend was reversed and in 2017 82% of Afghans supported this issue. Much greater support for equal access to education exists in urban areas. In 2017, 56.6% of the urban population and 35.4% of the rural population declared their strong support of this idea. This resulted both from a more conservative approach

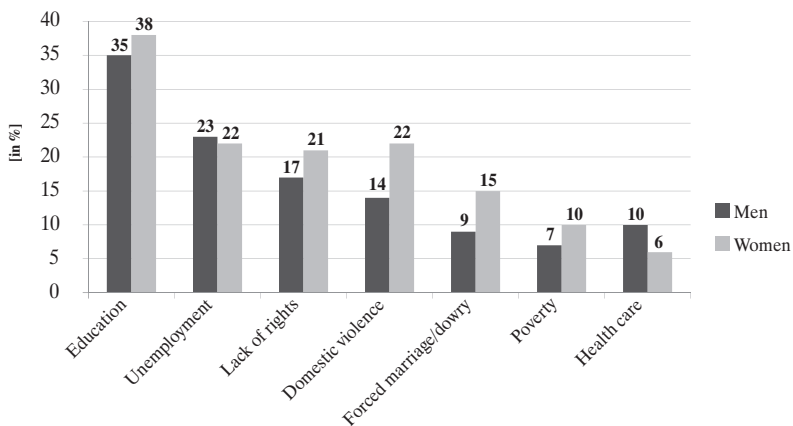
of the rural population and a much lower level of security and influence of the state authorities in these areas. There is also a significant difference in the approach to this issue between women and men. In the year under review, 47.8% of women and 33.6% of men were strongly in favour of equal access to education. In terms of ethnic division, the number of Hazars (53.2%) and Tajiks (44.8%) strongly supporting that issue was much higher than that of Pashtuns (34.6%) and Uzbeks (32.6%) (The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 153).

Figure 3. Opinions on equality of access to education for Afghan women and men



Source: own work, based on: The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 153.

Figure 4. Opinions on the most serious problems faced by women, disaggregated by gender in 2017



Source: own work, based on: The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 162.

Both women and men at similar levels see access to education as the most serious problem in Afghan women's lives, followed by unemployment, which is linked to education. In the subsequent places there are issues such as lack of rights, domestic violence, forced marriages and dowries, and poverty. It is telling that all these problems are less noticeable to men than to women, with the biggest difference in perception being in violence and marriage. This may indicate that men still traditionally believe that they should play a dominant role in marriage, and what happens at home should not go beyond its walls. More men than women see the issue of women's access to medical care as a problem.

Conclusion

In Western civilisation, the 20th century brought about formal recognition of human rights irrespective of any factors differentiating people, including the legal empowerment of women on an equal footing with men. At the beginning of the 21st century, Afghanistan also saw a formal equalisation of the rights of women and men. However, the formal equality of the rights granted does not automatically mean *de facto* gender equality. This is because it is conditioned by equivalent possibilities to use the granted rights (Firlit-Fesnak, Magnuszewska-Otulak, 2007, p. 267).

An Afghan female MP said that equal rights for women were “an illusion”, a “cultural fiction” for the “self-contentment” that helps to sell an American enterprise to them (Jones, 2010, p. 97). These words most aptly refer to the situation in areas controlled by the Taliban. The members of this movement pursue a policy of removing women from public space. They do so by using ruthless methods, including intimidation, beatings, mutilation and even murder. They order men to lock women in their homes and deprive them of their constitutional rights, including access to education and health care (Akbar, 2017).

Even more outrageous is the attitude of numerous politicians, officers and public officials, whose actions are in clear contradiction to the constitutional principles of gender equality and the prohibition of discrimination against women (Jureńczyk, 2016, p. 178). They act on behalf of a formally democratic state governed by the rule of law and yet they betray its values, perpetuating patriarchal models that harm women in society. This is happening with an increasingly passive attitude of the international community. As the security situation in Afghanistan becomes increasingly destabilised, debates on women's rights in the parliaments and media of individual states are gradually ending (Destradi, 2016, p. 144).

According to S. Walby, the main barrier to gender equality is the patriarchal structure, which in all its areas, both private and public, leads to the *de facto* discrimination against women. In Afghanistan, we are dealing with patriarchy in the six areas distinguished by Walby, i.e. paid work, domestic production, culture, sexuality, violence and the state. Afghan women focus on households, have limited access to gainful employment, cultural factors limit their ability to participate in society, many are victims of violence, including sexual violence, and state institutions and services only protect their rights to a certain extent. Although patriarchy does not have an innate evolutionary mechanism, it can

change. In Afghanistan, the most far-reaching changes in recent years have taken place in the area of the state. Even the complete elimination of the patriarchy within one of the areas designated by Walby will not, however, lead to the collapse of the patriarchy system as a whole. There is a need for multi-level actions initiated at all the strata of the national and social structure. Only such a comprehensive approach can weaken the patriarchy in all its areas (Walby, 1990).

The legal and institutional changes introduced in recent years in Afghanistan clearly contribute to weakening the patriarchal system and improving the social position of women. This is shown by individual indicators concerning women's activity in the social life of the state. In principle, millions of Afghan women have ceased to be prisoners in their own homes and have access to a range of social services, including education and health care. In recent years, UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) has noted significant progress by the Afghan authorities in empowering women, protecting their rights and implementing EAW provisions. International observers note the determination of the administration of President Ashraf Ghani to improve the social position of Afghan women. The ongoing processes are supported from outside by governmental and non-governmental organisations from all over the world.

As indicated by S. Walby, women themselves, both in their immediate environment and in a wider social structure, play a major role in introducing changes to the patriarchal system (Walby, 1990, p. 200). In Afghanistan, the role of pioneers of change is played by women's rights activists, female police officers, journalists and civil servants who risk their health and lives to work for the benefit of women (Saqeb, 2016). An important way to strengthen the social position of Afghan women is to allow them to take up more and more public positions. Equally important is educating society about women's rights, strengthening the system of their protection and penalising crimes against women. These actions are complementary and gradually lead to an improvement in the position of Afghan women in society. They also change the mentality of Afghan society, which accepts a gradual easing of the form of patriarchy in all its areas. They break the stereotype that Afghan women do not play an important role in society (Aziz, 2018).

Despite the positive changes, Afghanistan still remains one of the most unfriendly and dangerous countries for women to live in. In 2015, Afghanistan was ranked 154th of 188 countries classified according to the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2016). It is difficult to predict the prospective further changes, because the security situation in Afghanistan is uncertain. The reconstruction of the forces and influence of radical groups that do not agree with the process of emancipation of women is a matter of serious concern. If the security situation is not stabilised or stabilised, the achievements made so far with regard to women's empowerment can be undermined.

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Spółeczna pozycja kobiet w Afganistanie po 2014 r.

Streszczenie

W poszczególnych częściach artykułu przedstawiono kulturowe, teoretyczne i prawne aspekty problematyki, faktyczną zmianę pozycji Afganek, bariery ich emancypacji oraz opinie Afgańczyków na temat wybranych zagadnień dotyczących funkcjonowania kobiet w społeczeństwie. Po zakończeniu w 2014 r. misji ISAF rząd prezydenta Aszrafa Ghaniego stanął przed poważnymi wyzwaniami w zakresie bezpieczeństwa. W związku z tym pojawiły się obawy, że kwestia praw kobiet może zostać zmarginalizowana. Spekulacje te nie potwierdziły się, ponieważ władze Afganistanu wykazują determinację w reformowaniu tego obszaru zagadnień. Problemem jest jednak wprowadzanie w życie nowych rozwiązań, szczególnie na terytoriach kontrolowanych przez talibów.

Słowa kluczowe: Afganistan, kobiety, prawa kobiet, Aszraf Ghani, talibowie