



## **‘SOMETIMES ANTI-SOCIAL, ALWAYS ANTI-FASCIST’ – INTERPLAY BETWEEN MODERATE AND RADICAL ACTORS IN THE POLISH ANTI-RACIST AND ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENTS**

With the populist tide on the rise, comparisons of contemporary right-wing governments to fascist regimes are increasingly common. The rise of the populist right-wing politics has created a number of reactions, using either new or established forms of political resistance. One of such examples is the anti-fascist movement whose strength grows in many national contexts. The recently observed political swing to the right results also in a radicalization of politics. Radical actors intersect and cooperate with moderate ones, influence one another and bring new ideas and repertoires of contention to the streets and into mainstream politics. This trend can be observed in Poland where the 2015 elections (presidential and parliamentary) resulted in the radicalization of the mainstream discourse. This article focuses on the case study of the broadly understood anti-racist movement in Poland that has recently had to remodel itself to face new challenges – in particular the institutionalization of xenophobic rhetoric and the growth of the far-right sector – and has undergone substantial changes in general. The article presents the internal radical-moderate dynamics within the specific context of the anti-fascist movement in Poland. In particular, it explores the role of changes in political opportunity structures for the reinvigoration of the anti-fascist movement in Poland, radicalization in some of its sectors, and change in its priorities and focus.

**Key words:** anti-fascism; Poland; social movement; radicalism

### **Introduction**

Polish politics has recently radicalized: more xenophobic, homophobic, and racist claims are made in public. One of the turning points in the process were the 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections, in which fear against refugees and immigrants became key themes. After the elections victory of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), openings were created within political and discursive opportunity structures for radical right-wing groups.

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This has sparked a chain reaction: a re-invigoration of the Polish anti-fascist and anti-racist movements, with new groups emerging throughout the country, and a growing number of participants at anti-racist and anti-fascist demonstrations. The goal of this article is to critically examine the concept of unspoken intra-movement division of labor between moderate and radical flanks in the context of Polish anti-racist and anti-fascist movement, basing on data from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Poland between 2017 and 2019. Particular focus is put here on the notion of radicalism and the role it plays in alliance-formation processes. The title of the paper – a name of a 1999 punk album recorded by the punk band Stage Bottles – indicates one of the key issues within the broadly understood Polish anti-racist movement (of which anti-fascist activities are part of): the common ground for cooperation between moderates and radicals is rather limited.

The conceptualization of radicalism by both types of actors (radicals and moderates), the use of it as a bargaining tool in coalition-making, and the backfiring of radicalism against the movement that jeopardized the coalitions and provoked repressions are the main questions posed in this analysis. Interestingly, the concept of radicalism observed here has been used by social movements beyond the usual conceptualization of it as a choice of radical repertoire of action or radical political claims. In social movements observed here, radicalism is also visible in approaches to organizational models or in the broadening range of claims caused by increasing intersectionality of the movement.

The article is structured in the following way: first, sources of data are presented; then, methodological and theoretical discussions locate the paper within the broader framework of social movement theory and present modes of analysis. Particular attention is paid to the notion of radicalism and to its conceptualizations. Next, a brief overview of the development of the Polish anti-racist and anti-fascist movement is presented, with a relevant classification of the groups. A political context that has recently favored the actions of radical right is presented, too. The next section critically examines the concept of radical flank theory in the context of the Polish anti-racist/anti-fascist movement. The final section presents conclusions.

## **Data**

The empirical part of this paper is primarily based on 21 interviews collected for a project ‘Anti-racist contentions in the Baltic Sea region - a study of anti-racist activists’ interplay with politicians and civil servants’. With a long experience of activism within the movement context, the majority of the interviewees could offer a perspective on various historical developments; however,

a few less experienced activists were also interviewed as a way to observe changes happening within the movement and to include newly emerging groups in the studied sample. The interviews lasted from one to four hours and were conducted with the standardized interview procedure. The covered topics included the interviewees’ activist biography and their characterizations of the movement (main issues, collective action frames, organizational features, repertoires of action, allies, etc.). The interviewees presented their perceptions of the political and discursive opportunities that the surrounding political context could possibly provide the movement with, as well as their reflections on the meaning of various central concepts. Upon the request of some of the activists all of the interviews were anonymized and data potentially revealing their identities was removed.

The nature of the movement – and in particular of its radical faction – posed numerous challenges to the study. The activists were afraid of revealing their identities for security reasons, as they had often been attacked – also physically – by their opponents. The activists were also occasionally involved in illegal activities (such as acts of vandalism, physical confrontations with their opponents, etc.) and they refused to reveal any information of that kind on record. At times, in the case of “action research” and “militant ethnography” (Juris 2008), the border between the researcher and the objects of the research becomes blurred, while enabling a deeper understanding of processes that take place within a social movement and also the access to crucial information and data. The interviews were supplemented with an analysis of texts from movement-related journals (in particular, “Inny Świat” – the longest continued Polish anarchist journal, and “Alerta Antifascista” – a newly established journal focused solely on anti-fascism) as well mainstream media reports and interviews. Also, numerous websites created by the movement were included in the analysis, together with social media profiles (mostly on Facebook) for more recent developments, as the social media environment have become an important place for public discussions.

## Theory

This paper uses the label of “anti-fascist movements”; however, in other national contexts equivalent phenomena would occasionally be labelled as “anti-racist” – a term which “is used as an umbrella concept, gathering groups and activities focused on combating different aspects of racism – from ethnic discrimination and structural racism to organized groups within the far right. From this perspective, anti-fascism can be seen as a sub-category of the anti-racist movement that focuses primarily on the latter [...]. Anti-fascist

groups do, however, also often engage in broader anti-racist mobilizations and see anti-racism and anti-fascism as closely interconnected and dependent on each other” (Jämte 2017: 248). In the Polish context of high ethnic homogeneity, the self-labelling of groups as anti-racist is rare; therefore, in this paper the label “anti-fascist” is used as an umbrella term.

The material presented in this paper is analyzed in the perspective of classical approaches developed within the paradigm of social movement studies. One cluster of the concepts used here reflects the structural approach to the question of social mobilizations. The first concept is that of Political Opportunity Structures (POS) that focuses on how the shifts within the polity change the operational sphere of social movements and collective actors.

In the studied case, a few elements of the POS shift are more than clearly visible. Firstly, there was a decrease in political pluralism, as the parliament in the years 2015–2019 was composed of right-wing, liberal, centrist, and farmers’ parties respectively, without any representation of leftist groups, parties, or movements. Connected to that were the decreasing divisions among the elites, especially when it comes to issues labelled as anti-fascist. Also, the political enfranchisement – sometimes interpreted as the ‘openness’ of the political system – has decreased since the ruling party (Law and Justice) won the parliamentary elections, securing majority in both chambers of the parliament and presidential elections. The change in government has resulted in a weakening of the repressions against far-right and nationalist movements, which received more space for their activism, became more involved and flourished in the public sphere, thus generating a stronger reaction from the anti-fascist movement (which, in turn, has always been the target of state repressions, and of police response in particular).

The second theoretical foundation of this paper is the concept of Discursive Opportunity Structures (Koopmans, Statham 1999), which emphasizes that the ideas that the broader political culture deems to be “sensible”, “realistic”, or “legitimate” significantly affect the kind of support movements receive for their “collective action framing”. In short, “discursive opportunity structures reveal that cultural elements in the broader environment facilitate and constrain successful social movement framing” (McCammon 2013). When it comes to self-positioning within the political spectrum, discursive opportunities seem to have a pivotal role in the process and remain the core cultural challenge for social movements’ ideological self-positioning. In the case of radical social movements, the cultural context, in particular the question of movements whose radicalism is challenging common cultural codes or protest cultures, the structural approach seems to be quite effective. This seems to be a particularly important issue for social movements operating in a discursive field that is hostile to the movements.

Both structural elements – political as well as discursive opportunity structures – cannot be seen as detached from human agency. Following Tarrow’s (2007) understanding, it is the activists’ *perception* of these structures that truly affects the choice of repertoires – and this connection is what connects these issues with the concept of framing. The shift in politics in Poland has mostly affected the diagnostic element of framing of rising pro-fascist tendencies in Poland portrayed by the activists. Numerous analyses conducted by the activists have pointed out to the growing involvement and responsibility of the state in the diagnosed problem, shifting away from the previously used narrative of ‘war of subcultures’. The new understanding of the issue of fascism allowed the activists also to try to include anti-fascist themes into the everyday political struggle against PiS government. Similarly, the new fascist tendencies within the society and the state have allowed for new kinds of frame alignments, extensions, and bridging, expanding the usual Polish understanding of fascism to include new areas of patriarchy, social and economic inequalities etc., and allowing for new coalitions to be forged.

This article uses the notion of radicalism (either self-defined or used analytically) and focuses on the movement’s internal dynamics. For this reason, it needs to be mentioned that radical movements have been implicitly defined in opposition to mainstream or moderate groups. Pizzorno (1978) suggested that instrumental movements establish a separation between means and ends, while countercultural movements scrutinize collective action as an end in itself. Fitzgerald and Rodgers (2000) wrote that radical social movements differ from other (moderate ones) in terms of structure, ideology, tactics, methods of communication and their ways of understanding success. Such movements emerge during or after particular cycles of protests or “consequences of social dynamics that push groups into processes of radicalization” (Portes, 1971; Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2010) resulting in an implicit, sometimes conflict-ridden, internal division of labor between different movement factions. While radical activists tend to be skeptical towards contacts with the representatives of state authorities, moderate activists often see this as necessary for solving the problems at hand.

In this context, Haines’ (1995, 2013) concept of “radical flank effect” offers an explanation of differing views on relevant objectives, action frames, and tactics of mobilization. Haines’ perspective focuses on the impact the radical flank has on the moderate flank. He claims that we can speak of positive effects (a) in situations in which the existence of the radical flank benefits the moderates – when attention is given to a given topic due to the involvement of radical flank in the campaign. Also, authorities might play the ‘*divide et impera*’ tactic and decide to meet the demands of the moderate flank and oust the radical one, giving the moderate flank an opportunity to negotiate or grant access to

resources. A negative effect (b), in turn, can be observed when – as a result of the presence of a radical flank – repressions increase to the broader movement or when the broader movement is associated with the radical flank only, thus receiving a bad publicity. Gupta (2002) points to yet another effects – that is, (c) situations when the whole broader movement radicalizes, therefore marginalizing the moderate flank, and constituting a negative flank effect for the moderate. Finally, (d) both flanks might benefit from the split by being able to address different audiences and by multiplying possible ways of introducing the desired change. In order to achieve this, groups must (i) signal their differences, either through different tactics, approaches, or in other ways, in order to address the external actors (e.g. authorities) with different means. External actors, and authorities in particular, might differ in their (ii) vulnerability when addressing both flanks, which depends on the degree of capacity to impose repressions against the movement. In authoritarian regimes, when this capacity is higher, a whole movement might suffer repressions; in less hostile environments social and political costs of repressions might lead to the acceptance of the moderate flank's demands and claims. Connected to this is the (iii) costliness of meeting the demands: when it decreases, there is a higher chance that moderate claims will be accepted.

The label 'radical' used here for social activism depends on contexts and periods, being a relational definition constructed by comparison to other movements. Occasionally, "the term radical is used for groups, organizations, networks, and activists that share a certain type of collective action frame and tend to favor certain repertoires of action. The radical analysis is characterized by a systemic and materialist approach that understands fascism, or other forms of far-right activities, as the outermost expression and defense of existing power structures and systems of subordination within modern society. The solutions that radicals propose entail profound and far-reaching structural changes" (Jämte 2017). Cesar Guzman-Concha (2015: 671) suggests that radical groups (a) "pursue an agenda of drastic changes that concerns a broad range of issues, especially the political and economic organization of society, whose implementation would affect elite interests and social positions. In order to implement their agenda, they (b) perform a repertoire of contention characterized by the employment of unconventional means, specifically civil disobedience. In addition, these groups adopt (c) countercultural identities that frame and justify unconventional objectives and methods, although this identity might not be present at early stages. On occasions, such an identity is the outcome of contentious interactions between these groups, authorities and opponents/counter-movements". Of course, at times some of the movements self-label themselves as radical; however, this is a rare situation. The dividing lines in the division between moderate and radical flanks within a movement are the

choice of repertoires (legality vs. beyond legality), radical approach to politics (anti-systemic vs. reformist approach) and self-identity. In short, they can be reduced to actions within the legal environment and outside of it. As Jämte summarizes it: “radical activists do not believe that established political and economic actors have the will or ability to solve the problems facing society, and therefore they see the need to take matters into their own hands. This means that the radical activists do not limit themselves by existing laws, and consider direct action and militancy as a part of their repertoires of action” (Jämte 2017: 249). Other factors playing pivotal role here are discursive opportunity structures – that determine which claims and actions are ‘rational’ and accepted (expressed in support for some of the ways of doing unconventional politics) – and local protest cultures and history, leading back to path dependency and its significance for social activism.

With the change of power in 2015, the dynamics between both flanks changed; the support from the state (that constitutes 55% of the income of the third sector in Poland) was severely limited, in particular for organizations fighting with prejudices and for the rights of migrant, refugees, and minorities. In late 2019 one influential NGO – refugees.pl – decided to close its operations due to the lack of funding. Other NGOs are struggling, especially since all funding from the state (previously distributed by particular ministries) now is channeled through state-controlled National Freedom Institute – Centre for Civil Society Development (Narodowy Instytut Wolności – Centrum Rozwoju Społeczeństwa Obywatelskiego).

The aforementioned shift has resulted in a change of subject matters that third sector organizations take up. Nowadays, one of the main themes concerns “the quality of democracy and relations between the state and the citizens, underlining the need for introducing more transparent and participatory mechanisms to both involve people in decision-making processes as well as hold public officials accountable for their decisions” (Domaradzka 2016: 135). This means that numerous NGOs moved from acting side-by-side with the state to acting against the state and state policies.

The moderate cluster is comprised of NGOs with a hierarchical structure, formal organization and membership and a moderate repertoire of action. The conducted interviews prove that in the Polish context there is also another factor that stresses the difference between organizations – that is, their organizational form. The radicals rely on an acephalous, horizontal model. What Jeffrey Juris, basing on the works of Deleuze and Guattari, calls ‘rhizomatic networks’, combined with the growing importance of new communication technologies, result in a completely different kind of a social movement – one that lacks structure, hierarchy and leaders. For David Graeber (2009: 11) such organization models are at the core of the groups’ ideologies. Regarding the countercultural

identities, one of the key issues for subcultures is the preservation of the purity of subcultural groups and their members; therefore, any sign of diversion from the imagined model of the subculture member is seen as treason. Such practices reinforce the groups and their members' sense of belonging, which might be surprising, considering how much individualism is stressed in their statements. Subcultures are more oriented towards their internal dynamics (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003) and focus on building the groups' strength and unity. At the same time, groups that are more politically oriented are focused on the outcomes of their actions (Tilly 2004; Tilly and Tarrow 2006), on policy change and the like. Actions of the latter group concentrate on possible recipients of their claims and decision-makers and activists are more flexible in negotiating their positions.

### **Anti-Fascism in Contemporary Poland**

Within the broader environment of the anti-racist organizations, the moderate vs. radical divide is quite evident. When the main groups start to cooperate with the police, a conflict rises between the grassroots initiatives and the NGOs. Secondly, a lot of attention in Poland (and elsewhere, too) is focused on anti-racist and anti-fascist activities that contradict the actions of the current government. When far-right attitudes have been on the increase all over the world (reaching a peak in Europe after the 2015 'refugee crisis'), and the far-right / anti far-right divide constitutes one of the major fields of conflict between the right and left wings of the political spectrum, marginalizing other issues, such as the question of social benefits (cf. Wennerhag et al. 2018). Another reason for studying the anti-fascist movement in Poland is that until today it has remained an uncharted territory for the academia. The anti-racist movement in Central and Eastern Europe has tended to rely and focus more on human rights policies and anti-discrimination laws promoted by supranational actors such as the EU (Fella, Ruzza 2012, whereas the radical flank has been overlooked and presented only in publications stemming from the movement itself (see Kubarczyk 2009). In post-communist countries such as Poland, the distance between the state and anti-racist actors in civil society has, however, tended to be getting larger and larger. Anti-fascism is an important issue within the broader Radical Left-Wing Libertarian Movement (RLLM – see Wennerhag et.al. 2018 for a comparative European study), which has only recently been gaining importance in Poland.

First antifascist groups in Poland were organized in the second half of 1980s to provide security for punk and reggae concerts. Some of those – like the Róbreaggae festival – were cancelled due to the intensity of skinhead violence (which illustrates how grave the situation might at times have become). Militant anti-fascists clashed with skinheads, who were the main current at the far-right

end of the political spectrum. The emergence of the Neo-Nazi movement can be traced back to mid-1980s; their appearance on the social scene is claimed to have been inspired by the secret police to pacify the growing youth counterculture and the politicized subcultures (this claim is supported by some punk rock singers, appearing in Lizut 2003, also in a 2007 documentary movie *Beats of Freedom*). In the early 1990s, a network of groups emerged under the names of Grupa Anty-Nazistowska (GAN, Anti-Nazi Group), Radykalna Akcja Anty-Faszystowska (RAAF, Radical Anti-Fascist Action) and the Anty-Nazi Front (ANF) (Tomasiewicz 2000). Also NGOs such as Nigdy Więcej (Never Again, connected to the “Searchlight” magazine) and other local NGO-type initiatives were established. The NGO sector focused on policy advising, information campaigns and publishing. In the second half of the 1990s, the skinhead movement was in retreat and the majority of anti-fascist groups disbanded due to a lack of (visible) enemy; the NGOs shifted towards educational policies and actions. Other NGOs were established that work against hate speech (HejtStop!) or against discrimination (Otwarta Rzeczpospolita). Amnesty International was also involved in some anti-racist and anti-fascist actions, focusing on educational programs. What is worth noting is that while for many years AI members were not supposed to work on the cases coming from their own countries, the situation has recently changed. As one of the activists from Polish AI explains:

For many years at Amnesty, it was the case that we had guidelines to deal with matters concerning other countries. And this has only recently changed. The organization’s policy changed after many discussions that were conducted inside. On the one hand, it is safe to deal with what is happening in other countries due to the fact that activists themselves are more secure and do not face any consequences at home. On the other hand, it concerned us so much and it excited us that it was difficult to calmly deal with the affairs of other countries when so much is happening with us. So at the moment we are officially dealing with our affairs and external affairs.

The repertoire of possible means at their disposal ranges from legal solutions and litigation, to publicly outing authors of racist or xenophobic internet comments (as it is done by Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich), to preventing racist meetings from happening, by pressurizing venue owners or generating negative publicity for the events. Other organizations focus on educational programs; however, with the dependency of school principals on politically-appointed officials, there seems to be less demand for equality-oriented educational projects. What is more common, is the public condemnation of instances of hate speech or hate crimes, in order to force public officials to act in the case. As one NGO leader explained to me, the repertoire of actions of NGOs limits their involvement in public demonstrations (but does not exclude it):

As a peaceful organization, we do not take part in activities that we know in advance may end up in some physical confrontation. Instead, we avoid such situations because we are not there to engage in fights. Generally, we care more about reaching people who want to talk to us about it.

In the mid-2000s, the *modus operandi* of anti-fascist groups changed: they began to be organized as a loose antifa network. Rafał Pankowski explains this in the following way: “Until 2001, the Polish extreme right was almost completely insignificant in the mainstream arena. By that time, however, it had developed sizeable cultural resources. They proved to be very useful in allowing nationalist populism to enter the political mainstream in 2001, when it won its first parliamentary seats, and even more profoundly in 2005 when it came to dominate the Polish political landscape” (2010: 209). Antifa networks were also joined by the people from outside of the anarchist movement and politicized subcultures. Some football hooligans joined and many people with no political connections did, too. The most well-known groups are 161 Crew (Warsaw), Barykada 161 (Białystok), Antifa Jaworzno, Antyfaszystowski Konin, and Radykalny Śląsk. A number of such local initiatives are more difficult to be observed – some do not run social media accounts.

Around 2011, a group called Antyfaszystowska Warszawa was established as a continuation of the activities of 11 Listopada (11th November), which used to block far-right marches in Warsaw on Polish Independence Day. Now the main antifascist demonstrations (involving 1000–3500 people) take place around the anniversary of the Kristallnacht (8.11) or on the Polish Independence Day – but in different locations than Warsaw (the movement has itself deemed the blockades in the capital ineffective and counterproductive). Another regular date is the 21<sup>st</sup> March (or close to the date) – the International Day Against Racism.

Yet another breakthrough occurred with the political elections of 2019 and the creation of an even deeper political divide within the society. Political elites have started making claims against immigrants and refugees after the refugee crisis and in particular in the context of the EU re-location program. In 2014–2016, the percentage of people who have experienced or observed hate speech in the media or in everyday situations significantly increased. According to reports, in 2014 about half of young Poles (16–24 years of age) observed anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim or anti-Ukrainian hate speech; today, 75% of young people say they have observed anti-Semitic statements in the Internet, 80% have observed Islamophobic statements, and 71% – anti-Ukrainian (Winiewski et al. 2017). Since 2015 the public opinion on whether Poland should accept refugees has flipped: in 2015, 68% of Poles were in favor (one of the highest scores in the EU), in 2018, 72% reject the proposal. After the elections in 2015, state institutions also became far more liberal towards the far-right – with prosecutors

dropping cases against far-right activists. Thus, it seems only reasonable to analyze fascism/racism as a phenomenon closely associated with the activities of the state – a state that creates a limited POS and DOS for moderate activists while offering a clear-cut grievance for the more radical activists. As one of the activists summarized:

A few years ago, there was a different situation in the country, it did not look the same. Now it is so that the better we work together, the more of us there are, the better. We don't have to argue with each other.

As a result, a number of new groups emerged, some of which link anti-fascist struggle with political opposition against current government. One of such groups are Obywatele RP, who describe themselves in the following way: *“Citizens of the Republic of Poland have been operating for a year as a citizens’ movement acting in defense of the fundamental rights of the democratic system of the Republic of Poland. In April 2017, we established the Free Citizens of the Republic of Poland Foundation whose aim is to support the Citizens of the Republic movement”*<sup>1</sup>. At first, they blocked the monthly commemorations of the Smoleńsk plane crash; later they have been also trying to block events such as the Independence March and other nationalist protests. In 2017, fourteen women connected to Obywatele RP tried to block the Independence March in Warsaw by sitting on its route. Insulted and beaten up, they were removed by force from the event and in the end sentenced with fines for “blocking a lawful demonstration”. In other case, people that were identified as attackers and participants of the Independence March were declared not guilty as “they were expressing their political views and acted without intent to harm the group blocking the March” (quote from a court sentence). What is significant, there are far more women in Obywatele RP than in other groups, and their average age is much higher (40+) than elsewhere. This group has a more liberal understanding of anti-fascism (instead of leftist interpretations of the phenomenon) that perhaps results from the members’ social and political background.

Attempts of far-right groups to enter schools and universities with their propaganda resulted in the establishment of university groups (Studenckie Komitety Antyfaszystowskie, SKA – originally established in Warsaw and Gdańsk, later also in other cities). One of the founders of SKA described their approach in this way: “We are not limited to the fight against fascism. We have taken part in protests regarding the anti-abortion law, and organized our own protest outside the gates of the University of Warsaw”. A member of a similar, newly established group points to a similar characteristics:

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<sup>1</sup> Facebook profile of Obywatele RP, [accessed 09/07/2021], <https://www.facebook.com/ObywateleRP.org/>

It seems to me that, first of all, our activity is a voice of opposition. If we do not like something, such as neo-fascist marches, for example, we try to go out and say 'no', for example to picket at the gates of the University of Warsaw, when the organization that created the bench ghetto [ONR] and attacked Jewish students before the war, stands there and distributes its leaflets on the day after the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

What is significant for the last wave of engagement and activism is that these groups do not stem out from the usual environment of Radical Left Libertarian Movements in Poland, but involve and engage different social groups: former dissidents and people of the 50+ age group or students, many of whom are without prior experience in activism. Thus, they break the stereotype of "professional" and experienced activists. One event that also seems to play an important role was the Polish Women's Strike in October 2016. The new wave of feminist activists that emerged from that event began to interpret feminism more broadly, as part of a larger struggle against exclusion and oppression; many activists got engaged in anti-racists/anti-fascist activities.

The final contextual factor is the decline of the narrative about state anti-fascism, which has been observed by both academics and the activists. Tomasz Rawski (2019) shows the development and discussions around parliamentary declarations accompanying major anniversaries of the Victory Day (end of WWII) in 1995, 2005, and 2015 and how the anti-fascist narrative from the communist times was dismantled and replaced with a martyrdom narrative of victims of "two totalitarianisms". In a very similar manner, one of the activists interviewed summarized it as follows:

Something else appeared, which was the result of historical policy pursued by Tomasz Nałęcz. It was an alignment of two totalitarianisms – fascist and communist. At the same time, all possible left-wing, grassroots, proletarian anti-fascist uprisings were included in the second category. Because leftist forces constituted the core of resistance to fascism in Italy, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania [...] And this was crossed out by this liberal approach to historical politics. Perhaps this is the result of an endemic or broad-right thought of the students of history and law faculties in the early nineties.

This situation affected the radical anti-fascist and anti-racist activists in particular, not only cutting them off their historical roots, but also creating a closed DOS imposed by the state. This allowed for a new narrative about anti-fascism portraying the anti-fascist activists as subculturally motivated thugs who do not differ that much from their opponents. This was a more general narrative, detached from state authorities and agencies. As one of the interviewees said:

"Gazeta Wyborcza" portrayed earlier blockades as "wars of subcultures", claiming that there were some skinheads or other fascists and that there were anti-fascist and they were beating one another, but in fact were not that different at all.

Such a symmetrist narrative became one of the main challenges of the contemporary anti-fascist movement that tries to show that the roots of the current situation are not located within subcultural groups but emerge from the connection between the radical nationalist groups and the state, thus reorienting the actions of the anti-fascist movements towards anti-state activism and towards a more holistic and systemic interpretation of the phenomenon, thus radicalizing the whole sector and the moderate actors in particular.

## Discussion

The operational changes in the anti-fascist movement – as well as the path-dependency – can be interpreted on three different levels, all of which correspond with theoretical approaches. These levels reflect the shifts in repertoires and narratives of the contemporary Polish anti-fascism that largely results from the change in how fascism and anti-fascism are understood in contemporary political context. The second change is reflected in the new forms of composition of the movement that affects the radical / moderate dynamics within the broadly understood anti-fascist movement.

The activists occasionally seem to strategically play the radicalism card even when such radicalism is not backed by any evidence of the movements' actions. Because of media reporting, imagery taken from movies or history (not necessarily history of local struggles), some of the movements – like anarchist, alterglobalist, animal liberation – are perceived as radical ones, even if a comparison to their counterparts in other countries would prove them to be moderate at best. It is also the case with the antifascist movement, that in general is associated with the militant antifa groups rather than with the moderate NGOs. At times, the radicalism of the groups is not grounded in any way in their actions or in any other factual way but rather relies on the groups' public image relying on symbolic expressions of radicalism (faces covered with ski masks, etc.). One interviewed activist addressed the subject in this way:

Of course, if one of us, for example, did not feel comfortable doing some things with his or her face exposed, then it would not be good for us at all. [...] We would not call him a criminal because he covered his face. Some people do, some don't. Rather, the majority don't. Our actions are also not that radical, unless they need to be.

Additionally, it turns out that the political orientation of the activists (such as their inclination to associate with leftist ideology) might also label them as 'radicals':

The very fact that we will come with red flags is too radical for them. Sometimes we are ready to stand and block the road. They say, “Cool, good that you are doing something against fascism, but these red flags, the blocking, I don’t know.”

On the other side, ideological affiliation might exclude some moderate actors (i.e. associated with liberalism) as “too weak” and missing the point of the struggle:

Liberal anti-fascism is not completely anti-fascist, because it raises some problems that are quite current at the moment and convenient for someone – but forgets about others, because really anti-fascism means a lot of different things.

For the new generation of activists, the understanding of antifascism and anti-racism has changed to include other forms of discrimination, whose roots are – like the roots of contemporary fascism – located in broader social structures:

It seems to me that everything is related and if someone causes a racist incident at the university, we will react as strongly as possible. Also, this marching event on 17<sup>th</sup> March [2018] had a slogan against racism and xenophobia. Anti-racist activities count for us, all kinds of discrimination: referring to sexual orientation, to ethnic origin or religion. There was an incident when anti-Semitic leaflets were found in the Institute of History and we also reported it to the university’s president.

The perceived radicalism could be also a bargaining tool with other actors, with whom the activists do not necessarily maintain friendly relationships. The spectrum of groups involved in anti-fascist campaigns was broadened to include not only political parties, but also NGOs that used to constitute an altogether different sector of political activism (see Piotrowski 2015). This has generated numerous issues derived from such cooperation. One anti-fascist recalls a meeting about co-operation with political party representatives during an anti-fascist demonstration. It had been decided that a “no logo” strategy should be employed, meaning that flags or banners of the co-operating groups should not be displayed during the protest, and instead only a common “logo” for the event would be used. However, this sort of strategy always becomes problematic for some of the actors and creates numerous conflicts. As the head organizer (coming from the moderate flank of the movement) in an anti-racist demonstration in 2017 claims, the no-logo model was a complex matter:

Ultimately, it was a no-logo formula, meaning no one was to show off and explain who organized it and why. This, moreover, was due to an internal quarrel within the organization. [...] First of all, they argued with the RSA, they began to say why they are, and who others are. FEBRA also did not want to deal with the KOD, because there was PO, and some would invite you to Nowoczesna. Ultimately, a lot of participants withdrew. And the KOD did another demonstration. When this quarrel started, the KOD members stood up and left. So I decided, to save the day, to say that the only option was for us to

make a logo, and even better, because then everyone recognizes that it is for a cause. The KOD did not agree and they registered the manifestation for 13:00. They did the same manifestation with a similar font, similar layout at 13:00 at the statue of Neptune. This was just embarrassing.

At the same time members of student anti-fascist organizations, who also took part in organizing the same protest, recall this situation in a slightly different way:

And then they had a lot to say. They behaved so that it would seem we did not throw them out, but that everyone agreed to use a logo. Unfortunately, then the KOD said that they were not ashamed and did not want to participate, because we want to take people away from them. They stated that if there was no logo ... it was also a chance that they would get us money. We didn't throw them out, they left by themselves.

One of the activists, who had been in the movement for 10 or 12 years, shared the following observation with me:

The hard core of the antifascists movement is not accepted by the majority of the population because of their practices, which are not that different from the neofascists, [...] and you have also all the Roma organizations, who are campaigning against racism, and so on, and the question is why they are not or why they should not be a part of the same movement as the anti-fascists are. Even if they use different methods, they are still part of the same movement. [...].

Such an approach seems to be supported by younger activists, as a woman from a student antifascist group from one of the cities described:

There are plenty of negative associations with anti-fascism, connecting it with something very aggressive and with something that does not match the vision that there should be a balance (even an artificial one) between fascism and anti-fascism. And we are also trying to conjure it up a bit that this anti-fascism is needed if there is fascism. And it doesn't mean that we will now follow them and burn cars, because you have seen it on TV and you will associate us with it.

As a reaction, the activists introduce practical tactics in order to change the public image of contemporary anti-fascism in Poland:

What the Student Antifascist Committee does is a little disenchanting of anti-fascism, which for some reason people have negative associations with. Because you often hear that being anti-fascists, we are fascists because we limit someone's freedom of speech. Secondly, that we are aggressive and say what we think. That we burn cars. They accuse us a lot of covering our faces. It is all negative associations. But you also have to note that we don't do it with bad intentions, that we don't cover our faces because we have to be visible in the streets, it's just not nice to get pepper gas sprayed on the face. It's always better to be veiled.

The ongoing cooperation and intersections between feminists and antifascists can be seen on various levels and are another piece of evidence supporting the claim that changes can be observed within the Polish anti-fascist movement, and that one of them is its growing intersectionality. On one hand, the Polish antifascist movement became more inclusive and less “manly”, i.e. less expressing their masculinity and macho-style behavior. One of the key slogans of the 2018 anti-fascist demonstration in Warsaw was: “Glitter, Pink, Antifascism”. This is a significant step: a shift from the interpretation of queer identity questions and similar topics as “redundant” towards interest in class economic conflicts, that was present a few years ago among antifascists and anarchists in Poland in interviews I conducted. Also, many members of Student Antifascist Committees entered their activism through Black Monday and currently they often object not only to the presence of nationalists or neo-Nazis at the universities, but also to the use of homophobic or misogynist language; such cases are immediately communicated to the public through their Facebook profiles. One of the activists of the Warsaw’s section of Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet explains why her group joined the anti-fascist protest:

We have decided to join the anti-fascist coalition, because we believe that in 2017 it is not enough to be a feminist. Women must become anti-fascists. We are set against the wall. Neo-fascists are part of the movement that pushes us to serve a merely reproductive role. There is nothing left for us but to take matters into our own hands.

This intersectionality not only affects the repertoire of claims and topics taken up by the activists, but also radicalizes them, as being feminist in the context of Polish post-2015 politics has also become a radical label (Muszel, Piotrowski 2018). This affects the moderate groups as well; besides the aforementioned changes in focus of the activism (Domaradzka 2016), the moderate activists are beginning to formulate political claims. Observing the recent changes in Polish civil society and social activism, Elżbieta Korolczuk lists three main challenges to civil society today:

- the third sector committing more strongly to current politics;
- a growing political involvement of the society, including people who have not been involved in such activities so far,
- attempts by activists, especially urban movements, to be part of institutional politics.

In her paper, Korolczuk also writes that “the current situation can bring good results, because it makes us finally question the fiction of the civil society that allegedly operates in isolation from politics, has no political agenda and is ideologically homogeneous” (Korolczuk 2017: 4). The politicization of the civil society is not merely an observable fact. In previous analyses, the majority of politically oriented actions were excluded from the civil society discourse,

as they were deemed to be merely actions of social movements and advocacy groups. This, however, is sometimes not enough for the more radical activists, as one of the “new” activists in the anti-fascist student group claims:

We are less polite – and rightly so, in my opinion. People who fight in feminist organizations have ceased to be so polite. They have realized that they do not have to be, and secondly that they should not, because if their rights are broken there is no point in being polite. There was an article in “Wysokie Obcasy” [a weekend extra to a liberal daily “Gazeta Wyborcza”] claiming that women should learn to fight with class for their rights, that they should write articles instead of going out the streets. As we were at the Black Protest in Warsaw, our representative of the Tri-City FEBRA had a speech about what was happening in Gdynia, that the march interfered with a religious procession. Then she said that they asked them to be civil and polite, not to disturb anyone, because there were good people in the procession. And how can you be polite and cultural when people break your rights and behave the way they do?

At the same time the authorities respond with a more intense police repressions, showing the decreasing vulnerability of the external actor, in this case the state. This might have a severe effect, as the activists from Warsaw described, when discussing police repressions after one of the demonstrations:

And that didn’t discourage you, such brutal police action?

– I think it only hardened us. It showed that you really need to do something.

Even if not being subjected to repressions, activism in a movement of this sort is subjected to harsh criticisms from the authorities, mass media, and direct repressions by the police. Because of these political and discursive challenges, anti-fascist activism can change people’s ideological and political stance, showing similarities with the process in the south of the USA described by McAdam (1986):

Not only [xxx], a lot of people were radicalized, those who came so liberal and then really radicalized.

## Conclusions

The song title that was used in the title of this article – Sometimes antisocial, always antifascist – corresponds with the reality of Polish anti-fascist and anti-racist activists. Although they are all involved in similar types of activities (of a broadly understood anti-racist activism), they form separate clusters of social activists that rarely cooperate with each other, becoming anti-social rather than truly cooperative. This separation results from the complex nature of radicalism: of how it is understood and how it interacts and resonates within the

realm of political activism. The complex nature includes such elements as the approach to politics (more holistic and politically interpreted vs. more meritocratically oriented), choice of repertoires of action (legal vs. not necessary legal), and the development of countercultural identities, that are reflected in organizational modes, self-vision of political activism, and their genealogy. At the same time, the radicalism of these groups can backfire and result in higher repressions to the movement and to the cause as well, making the goals in question more difficult to achieve.

But due to the changes in political opportunity structures that are generated by the developments in Polish politics, the radical actors tend to play an increasingly important role. On the one hand, the moderate actors seem to radicalize, in particular in relation to their analysis of roots of fascism and of the circumstances of its development with connection to the state and its structures. This also makes the role of radical actors more important in the broader coalition and their radical voice is heard stronger in public. Also, the newly emerging groups are more leaning towards radical politics, with several characteristic features, such as the growing intersectionality and the inclusion of, for instance, feminist claims. Other, more moderate groups that emerged after the right-wing shift in Polish politics also bring anti-fascism into their agenda; however, their understanding of the target of the activism is different than of the previous cluster: it is more liberal and identifying fascism in contemporary political life is more understood as a tool in political struggle rather than the goal of it. Interestingly, there are other features that play an important role in the formation – or rejection – of broader anti-fascist coalitions. These are political self-identification with particular exclusion of the self-labelled left – types of groups belonging to the coalitions (with political parties and formalized NGOs being the most rejected groups). But because of the harshness of the daily activism and the non-conformist approach of the authorities that give arguments for anti-fascist activism every day, the dividing lines between the radical and the moderate flanks seem to be less and less important, making the anti-fascist activism in Poland more “social”.

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