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Acting Alone Together: Reconfiguration of the Pro-Migrant and Refugee Activists' Arena in Poland

Abstract: The sphere of grassroots and civil activism became highly politicized before the 2015 elections. The introduction of the new policies has resulted in higher levels of mobilizations, both supporting and resisting the new policies of the PiS government. For instance, Poland has switched from a country with the highest acceptance rate for refugees in the EU to the one with the lowest rate within around a year sparking a number of anti-migrant and anti-refugee mobilizations and at the same time fueled the growth of initiatives opposing the trend. The narrative about masses of refugees in Poland and at its borders threatening various aspects of Polish culture, civilization, and identity started to keep heat in the bed and have provoked numerous intended and unintended consequences, political and social, so as further campaigns against LGBT community. In this paper I reflect on the development of the anti-fascist and anti-racist movements in Poland in the face of structural changes that are a result of the political shift initiated in 2015.

Keywords: anti-racist movements, LGBT community, migration, structural changes, polish politics

Introduction

At times, using a metaphor is easier to highlight some processes under study. One of such foundations for a metaphor in relation to social activism is Living Alone Together. It is a concept in contemporary sociology of family that discusses a situation, when a couple identifies themselves as such and has an emotional relationship but nevertheless decides to maintain their own apartments and strict boundaries regarding the private spheres of their lives (Levin, 2004).

Despite creating a new unity (relationship), such couples stress the value of individual lives and identities, that would be spoiled by compromises that stem from the decision of moving in together. Considering the metaphorical use of this concept, in social movement studies there are similar situations located on an organizational level. Coalitions and collaborations – despite fostering tactical and strategic successes are at times overshadowed by compromises necessary to make the cooperation work, requiring to bend the ideological divisions. Such situation is particularly difficult the more radical the social movement organizations (SMOs) are. It is often perceived that such compromises might undermine the identity of such groups and therefore undermines its integrity (Muggleton, 2004; Piotrowski, 2021c).

With a growing intensity of the discourse in Poland one can observe not only more voices of the activists, but also shifts within the broadly understood 'family of movements' (della Porta, Diani, 2016). Interestingly, these transformations affect not only SMOs, but also show growing interactions of movement activists with civil servants and politicians, especially on the local level. These interactions – that undermine previous narratives on social engagement in Poland within the context of changing discourses around the topics of migration – are the topic of this paper. The increase in the anti-fascist and anti-racist rhetoric is a result of changes within the political sphere in Poland, as they are used in struggles against current Polish government – a situation not seen before (cf. Piotrowski, 2017). Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration are the changes within the political opportunity structures that affect movement activists, but also politicians from oppositional parties and some offices of civil servants.

In the last two decades majority of refugees coming into Poland were from post-USSR countries, in particular from Chechnya. There were numerous projects coming from state and agencies in non-governmental organizations into helping refugees, creating a cluster of moderate NGOs focused on service provisions and education programs. With the EU enlargement in 2004 the Polish border has become an external EU border and therefore Poland became a country that was filtering incoming refugees and was on the front line of accepting and helping people from various countries that were coming to the EU. However, in the early 2015 the populist and conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party has made refugee issue one of the central issues in campaigns for parliamentary and presidential elections. Numerous hate speech incidents began to occur, perpetrated by the politicians. PiS leader, Jarosław Kaczyński was warning that the refugees incoming to Europe 'might bring dangerous diseases, such as cholera, dysentery and parasites'[1] and was not isolated

[1] See: https://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polityka/kaczynski-o-uchodzcach-cholera-dezynteria-pasozyty-aa-3Xs7-4euh-ev17.html (accessed: 25.06.2022).

in his statements. Politicians were not acting alone, as it also received help from right wing journals and other media outlets, who portrayed refugees as 'invaders' (*Do Rzeczy*), who 'are coming for us' (*W Sieci*) and that '90,000 Arabs will flood Poland' (*Super Express*).[2] Poles were exposed to the threatening image of wave of refugees physically attacking Polish people, stealing their jobs, bringing in new diseases, creating a threat to the welfare system, and a general threat to the security and safety of the citizens. This message was also visible in the social media. This narrative should not be surprising as it occurs in many radical right wing populist political projects around the world. The creation of a stronghold under siege with the local population being the last defendants of true values, often associated with a certain religion, is a pattern that can be observed worldwide (Górski, Sowa, 2007).

In this paper I will try to present the key processes of changing the narrative about migrants and refugees coming into Poland, the political consequences of these actions, and the consequences for those who oppose these trends. The focus of this paper are various groups and institutions that made the refugee/migrant issue as one of the central themes of their everyday activism. What is particularly interesting is how previously neutral actions have become politicized and how the anti-racist narrative, previously used mostly by civil society and grassroots activists was taken over by part of the political spectrum as yet another tool in the internal political struggle.

This article begins with presentation of the theoretical framework and methodology, later it presents historical and current political contexts in Poland, regarding discourses around migration and refugees. Later I present the changes within the political opportunity structures and move to the analysis of the activist arena in Poland. The final section concludes.

Theoretical model

The broadly understood anti-racist movement (treated here as a broad sector acting against any forms of prejudice justified through belonging to a race or ethnic group) in Poland (as in majority of other Central and Eastern European countries) 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 – sometimes associated with the militant antifa groups – is overlooked and present only in publications stemming from the movement (see Kubarczyk, 2009 for a focus on the anti-fascist strain of the movement; Piotrowski, 2021b for an overview). In post-communist countries

[2] See: https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/okladki-w-sieci-do-rzeczy-i-super-expressu-przeciw-uchodzcom-karnowski-po-prostu-nazywamy-problem (accessed: 25.06.2022).

such as Poland, the distance between the state and anti-racist actors in civil society has, however, tended to be larger than in western democracies. Finally, antiracism (and also antifascism, for this paper these will be treated as very close to each other) was an important issue within the broader Radical Left-Wing Libertarian Movement (RLLM – see Wennerhag et al., 2019 for a comparative European study) in Poland and in the recent years is gaining importance, expanding its semantic range to women's and migrant rights, LGBT community issues etc.

The contemporary research on social movements undergoes important changes. One of them is the strategic interactionist theory, developed by James Jasper et al., that is a theoretical response to the challenges posed by the blurred boundaries between institutional politics and social movements (Jasper, Duyvendak, 2015; Duyvendak, Jasper, 2015). This concept looks at strategies, or 'efforts to get others to do what you want them to' (Jasper, 2015, p. 19). To achieve this, actors – or players in the jargon of this approach – may utilize economic transfers, persuasion or coercion. An additional fourth tool is to hold positions (either occupying a physical space or organizational post), which results in the charitization of politics and politicization of charity. Here, possessing important resources, such as money or reputation, is also an advantage for the players. Each player (both individual and group actors) may join forces with other players in order to increase their chances of success. (Jasper 2015, p. 11).

In order to achieve their goals, players enter diverse arenas. Jasper has defined this concept as follows:

> Arenas are physical places where players interact to generate decisions and other outcomes; they contain objects (…) but they also have formal rules and informal expectations, as well as something at stake in the decisions made. (…) Arenas vary in formality, from ritualized court procedures to ad hoc meetings like Occupy Wall Street's general assembly (Jasper, 2019, p. 2).

The concept of arena might resemble the one of the field that focuses on power relation and power games between two types of actors: 'incumbents' and 'challengers' (Fligstein, McAdam, 2011). In the players and arenas concept, the idea is to pay attention to the actual goals and tactics of the players. There is also a possibility of unexpected affinities and alliances that are worth investigating. Thus, in this approach there is an opportunity to overcome the deterministic presuppositions of the field theory (Jasper, 2015, pp. 17–18). When one includes political parties and parliamentary arenas in general, some limitations of the concept can be seen. Following Jasper's argumentation, protest and parliamentary arenas could be understood as clusters of arenas (Jasper 2019, p. 10). However, Duyvendak and Fillieule have suggested that such arenas might develop around emerging problems and do not exist prior to them (Duyvendak, Fillieule, 2015, p. 306).

One of the types of players identified for the purpose of this article are parliamentary actors with political parties being one of them. These can be divided into two categories: 'cartel parties' that are more focused on seeking office and winning elections and are usually less interested in establishing contacts with movements and opposed 'peripheral parties', who primarily strive to change the political agenda or represent specific constituencies (Katz, Mair, 1995; Mair, 2011). What is interesting, the difference between established and 'movement' parties plays lesser role as the political genealogy of particular politicians, where previous involvement in social movements increases their will to cooperate with movements but also to appropriate their agenda and argumentation. Also, opposition parties to be more interested in seeking contacts with social movements, as this may increase their possibilities to mobilize public opinion and voters (della Porta, Diani, 2006, p. 215), by opening new fronts of political struggle and seeking new arguments to use in their struggles with the party in power. When studying party involvement in pro- and anti-asylum protests in Austria, Hadj Abdou and Rosenberg (2019) found out that political parties mainly attended protests that had modest and narrow claims. Moreover, the likelihood of party involvement was also greater if the party was not responsible for the political decisions under criticism. Such situation puts particular emphasis on oppositional parties in Poland.

Broadly understood anti-prejudice politics are more often the domain of leftist parties, making Poland a particularly interesting case as in 2015–2019 term of parliament there was no leftist party in the Polish parliament. Being extra parliamentary opposition, the influence of the Left party in Poland was much smaller, whereas after 2019 some of its members (usually with activist background) have used their legal tools to inspect police stations, intervene during protest pacification and were bringing up movements' agendas onto the floor of the parliament.

Another 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 policy change the operational sphere of social movements and collective actors.

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 (i.e. ideologically).

The other theoretical point is that in social movements literature politicians and civil servants have most often been regarded as static representatives of the political context that movements have to relate to and handle in order to be successful. Studies of how public actors such as politicians and civil servants are influenced by, social movements, are rare. However, there is new research on how state actors and social movements 'overlap and forge relationships, how these relationships shift, and how the arenas and institutions in which they are working shape their choices and actions' (Goldstone, 2019). There has been some international research on aspects of these two movements' interplay with politicians and/or civil servants, analyzing how movements' tactics and successes vary due to differences in national political opportunity structures (Fella, Ruzza, 2013; Flam, Lloyd, 2008). The development within the area of civil society studies, as the growing intersectionality between state or institutional actors (Ombudsmen offices, municipal authorities) and civil society actors, as local authorities are often in conflict with the central government and are strongholds of the liberal opposition in Poland requires academic attention to the phenomenon. Such situation, similar to the one described by Klein and Lee (2019) – raises questions about the conditions of the 'forward and backward infiltration' of the civil society sector taking place that asks for a more dynamic approach to the topic than before.

A specific form of activism, rather widespread in Poland, is related to volunteering. As Feischmidt and Zakariás (2019) write:

> Large body of literature assigns a key role to volunteering, philanthropy and charity in making democracies work, these institutions being understood as part of civil society and forming the core terrain for democratic political socialization and political engagement in which the know-how of democratic communication can be learnt,

> practiced and incorporated (Arato, 2000), and trust and social capital acquired (Putnam 2000) (Feischmidt, Zakariás, 2019, p. 61).

Such approach allows for looking for agency outside of the usual actors.

In Poland, volunteering becomes at time a politicized issue and a part of the heated internal conflict, for instance with the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy, WOŚP), which collects money to help the health care system since 1993. WOŚP has been under attack by right-wing and catholic media for their 'laissez faire' approach and liberal lifestyle and views of the leader of WOŚP, Jurek Owsiak. Since 2015 public media joined the group of critics, pushing it to erasing the read hearts (symbol of WOŚP) from the jackets of people appearing on public TV, as it is since 2016 strictly controlled by PiS. As Feischmidt and Zakariás (2019) continue:

> Concerning volunteering, Nina Eliasoph (2013) formulates her definition of 'political' by pointing to the importance of expanding networks of responsibilities, and the need to identify complex causal models of human actors – on the widest scale possible – when conceptualizing a social problem (Feischmidt, Zakariás, 2019, p. 62).

Because the racism/anti-racism activism bring emotions and moral standpoints into the discourse and discussion, including charity into reflections on anti-racist politics seems to be justified, especially that some of the campaigns against (institutionalized) racism use the language of charity. This is the case of groups active at the Polish–Belarussian border who help refugees that are otherwise subjected to (illegal) pushbacks by the Polish Border Guard. Majority of these refugees are non-European, which might explain not only the illegal practices but also the attitude of the society that supports the pushbacks and building of a wall at the border. The language used by Grupa Granica and other initiatives at the border is closely connected to the language of charity organizations.

Methodology

This paper is primarily based on long-term observations of the Polish civil society sphere, and the arena of anti-racist (and antifascist) politics (Piotrowski, 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b). They stem from my long-time involvement in studying social movements in Poland, but for this article the main source was observing secondary sources, in particular the changes in discourses, identified with critical discourse analysis. These observations are supplemented with 21 interviews collected for the project 'Anti-racist contentions in the Baltic Sea region – a study of anti-racist activists' interplay with politicians and civil servants'. Majority of the interviewees with activists were selected due to their longer experience of activism within the movement context to ensure that they could give a perspective on

the movement's development; however, a few less experienced activists were also interviewed as a way to look for changes happening within the movement and to include newly emerging groups in the sample. The interviews lasted between one and four hours and were conducted using a standardized interview guide. The covered topics included the interviewees' activist biography, their characterization of the movement (main issues, collective action frames, organizational features, repertoires of action, allies, etc.); the interviews also focused on the respondents' perceptions of the political and discursive opportunities that the surrounding political context could possibly provide the movement, as well as their reflections on the meaning of various central concepts. The sample included both radical and moderate activists, as well as civil servants and politicians.

Due to requests of some of the activists, the interviews were anonymized and data potentially revealing their identities were removed where needed. The activists were afraid of revealing their identities for the reasons of their security, as often they were attacked – also physically – by their opponents. The activists were also occasionally involved in activities labelled as illegal (including acts of vandalism, physical confrontations with their opponents etc.) and refused to reveal any information of that kind on the record.

Migration in Poland

Central Statistical Office's (GUS) data show, that by the end of 2019, there were over 2 million foreigners living in Poland, with the majority of Ukrainians (over 1.3 million). After this date the data available are not representative, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine in 2022 that has resulted in 5.8 million refugees coming from Ukraine, many of whom have stayed in Poland for a longer time period. Around the same time (end of 2019) the official numbers indicated 12,673 refugees, 4,791 asylum seekers and 1,328 persons under UNHCR's statelessness mandate living in Poland. Within the last two decades Chechens were the biggest group of asylum seekers that have been coming to Poland. Although in official statistics this group is considered as Russian citizens, it is estimated that between 2003 and 2016 about 90 thousands of asylum seekers of Chechen origin claimed asylum in Poland (Anacka, 2015), but only 3–5% of them were given a positive decision to grant some form of international protection (Alieva, Jaworska, 2018). The acceptance rate of asylum seekers seems to be equally low, regardless of the country of origin and under the Law and Justice government, a number of practices of questionable legality were introduced, with the key issue of not allowing people to present their cases and submit documents at the borders. Moreover, in 2021 the beforementioned tactic of 'push-backs' were legalized after the parliament voted through appropriate amendments to the law on foreigners and the law was signed by the president.

Even before these drastic measures large part of the refugee system was outsourced from the state towards NGOs, showing a significant shift between actors in the arena of migrant and refugee politics. As Magdalena Muszel (2020) writes:

> The system of refugees' integration in Poland is still quite poorly developed and is lacking many resources and instruments that are crucial for integration of foreigners. If they are lucky and they get one of the forms of internal protection, refugees are entitled to taking part in the so called Individualised Programme for Integration. Within this one-year programme, some social work is offered, but usually, because of limited opportunities, the programme does capture even basic needs of its participants, and eventually it mostly just focuses on providing payments of a low allowance (…) (see: Frelak, Klaus, Wiśniewski, 2007; Chrzanowska, 2007). Instead of treating refugees as whole individuals with potential to become Polish residents, they are left in an indeterminate state and trapped in an unequal relationship in which they are dependent upon charitable groups, NGOs, and the black labour market to survive (Klaus, 2017).

This quote shows the dependency of many social programs in Poland on the work of NGOs and other 'third sector' organizations, and the risk connected to any change in the funding structure that might affect the system as a whole. Such delegation of responsibilities towards the civil society is one of the inherent vices of the process of development of the Polish civil society.

Grassroots activists and the NGOs

Simultaneously to the development of the moderate cluster, a different type of groups emerged that constituted the radical flank since the late 1980s. First attempts of self-organization against prejudices and actions of groups spreading prejudice were made in the second half of 1980s, when first loose self-defense groups were organized to provide security for punk and reggae concerts often attacked by skinheads and some were cancelled due to the intensity of violence. Militant anti-fascist were active mostly during clashes 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 and there are several voices that this process was inspired by the secret police to pacify the growing youth counterculture and politicized subcultures (Lizut, 2003, documentary movie 'Beats of Freedom', 2007). In the early 1990s a network of groups emerged and also NGOs such as Nigdy Więcej (Never Again) and other local NGO-type initiatives were established. Over the years, NGOs shifted towards educational policies and actions. Other groups were established that work on the hate speech (such as HejtStop!) and against discrimination (such as Otwarta Rzeczpospolita).

These developments made movement activists and numerous activists to analyze the phenomenon of fascism/racism as part of a structure of the state, creating a closed Political and Discursive Opportunity Structures (POS and DOS) for the moderate activists (mostly NGOs), but at the same time creating a visible clear-cut grievance for the more radical activists to formulate their actions around. The attitude towards the refugee issue is a good illustration of the changing structures (both political and discursive) and narratives that balance between de- politicization and re-politicization over time.

The context of Polish politics

After winning the 2015 elections and securing full power in the country (securing majority in both chambers of the parliament and the president) the Law and Justice party continued to push their anti-migrant agenda. On top of the changes within Discursive Opportunity Structures, there have been numerous and concern considerable changes in the Political Opportunity Structures. These changes show how the whole system changes when the power is secured by one actor and how it is influenced by its political agenda. Majority of the changes in the structures are connected to changes in funding of external actors that were one way or another connected to the migrant/refugee issue. The main change was the reduction of funding towards municipal and non-governmental initiatives and projects aimed at supporting migrants and pro-refugee actions. There have been projects and helping people from abroad in need or assimilating refugees in Poland, but - as it is the case with majority of NGOs in Poland – biggest part of the funding came from central budget. As indicated by reports of the Klon/Jawor Association, the main income for NGOs was money from local governments and government programs. Although raising money was indicated as the biggest problem of organizations, not many of them had ideas on how to diversify sources of income: in 2015, only less than 30% of the organizations examined by Klon/Jawor used three or more different sources of financing. Few organizations also used support from individuals. As Elżbieta Korolczuk observed:

> (…) between 2003 and 2014 the share of income from payments from private persons increased slightly (from 3% to 9%) and from transferring 1% from tax (to 5%), the percentage of income from membership fees (from 8% to 3%). In recent years, there has been a growing tendency for organizations to use mainly public, domestic and foreign funds, which in 2014 accounted for 55% of all inflows (Korolczuk, 2017, p. 6).

However, in the recent years this has changed as crowdfunding tools became more accessible and more popular.

When it comes to municipal policies, the situation has been different as big cities in Poland are the stronghold of liberal and left opposition. In the recent local elections, none of the major cities has elected right wing president or mayor, and the migrant/refugee policies have been used one of the tools of anti-governmental struggles of the local municipalities. However, majority of the local news policies budget comes from the central budget anyway, so the support for local NGOs has been a troubled one, and there was a bigger difficulty in funding countrywide projects.

Another contextual factor is a more discursive one. After the 2015 elections 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 the years 2014–2016 the percentage of people having contacts with hate speech in the media and everyday situations significantly increased.

According to the cited report in 2014 about half of young Poles (16–24 years old) met with anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim or anti-Ukrainian hate speech, in 2016 75% of young people say they have seen on the Internet anti-Semitic statements, 80% – Islamophobic and 71% – anti-Ukrainian (Winiewski et al., 2016). Since 2015 the public opinion on whether Poland should accept refugees has flipped: in 2015 68% of Poles were in favor of such solution (one of the highest scores in the EU), in 2018, 72% rejected such an idea.

After the elections in 2015 more political opportunity structures' changes were introduced that reflect the states' capacity and willingness to repress social activism, introducing changes in regulations on policing of protests. State institutions also became far more liberal towards the far-right with prosecutors withdrawing cases against far-right activists, funneling large subsidies towards far-right organizations and introducing a 'cyclic gathering' with priority over other demonstrations, introduced into the legal system particularly for far-right organizers of the Independence March in Warsaw. This resembles closely a situation of 'counter-movements' that often in illiberal democracies are designated to perform some of governmental policies and express some positions of the government without directly involving the party in power.

Furthermore, in terms of grievances related to the 2015 'refugee crisis', out of Central and Eastern European countries, only Hungary witnessed some refugees coming in or conflicts around social minorities (in particular Roma), whereas in general ethnic prejudices are often strong in Polish society, creating a situation that Buchowski (2019) called 'phantom refugees' – present in the discursive sphere and only there. In Poland, radical right wing organizations use the appeal of 'welfare chauvinism' frame in their propaganda, following the narrative of 'stealing jobs' or 'living off welfare' perpetrated by the migrants or minorities (Piotrowski, 2021b). In addition, to the general changes in Discursive Opportunity Structures, 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 (see: Winiewski et al., 2016) opening space for a purely xenophobic rhetoric and mobilization. There has been a mainstreaming of radical right discourse, from the margins to the center of the public political sphere. During the Independence March in 2018, whose organization – due to the 100th anniversary of Polish independence – was taken over 3 days before the event by the President, slogans such as 'Europe will be white or deserted' were observed, as well as many other anti-migrant and anti-refugees slogans.

Changes in acting

The major change in the configuration within the arenas and the positioning of the players is closely connected to the changes within the political arena. These changes should bring different actors to function more closely – together, following the metaphor included in the title of this article. One such change is the increased popularity of protests. In recent years, many have been drawing attention to a certain civic awakening, resulting in closer cooperation between radical and moderate activists as well as politicians. After years in which mass demonstrations and protests were a rarity in Polish cities, in which we were reluctant to organize, Polish society has changed. There are manifestations of various things going on through big cities (Podemski, 2020), and sometimes also through small towns (Muszel, Piotrowski, 2018; 2020), city movements take an active part in local government elections, charities often accumulate large amounts of money and can really help those in need, and local authorities often lack the hands to handle projects submitted to a participatory budget (Gajewski, 2019). Policies of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) party has sparked several protests and conflicts in Poland in recent years, politicizing numerous actions (including charity activism) and actors. In some cases, new players entered arenas previously not occupied by them. Many of these reconfigurations are a result of structural changes present in Polish politics and public sphere, allowing to link the more traditional structural opportunity (both political or discursive).

The PiS party won the elections in 2015 (and in 2019) with a promise of social transfers in the forms of child benefits, extra payments of pensions and alike, but also with a strong ideological program concentrated on combatting the enemy. A clearly defined ideological enemy is taking various faces (of a liberal, leftist, LGBT activist, 'gender ideology', or migrants and refugees), but the mechanism remains stable and unchanged as visible in numerous analyses of populist politics (Napiórkowski, 2019). Besides pushing of their propaganda, a process that gained momentum after taking control over the public media in Poland, the PiS government began to change and rearrange the structural context in which NGOs, politicians, and civil servants were functioning until recently, thus

changing the structural context in which NGOs (and primarily those working with anti-racist issues) operate. Below are listed some examples of the introduced changes and processes.

In 2011, the Council for the Prevention of Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was established as a subsidiary body for the Council of Ministers, chaired by the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (whose office changed name numerous times stressing family issues etc.). The work of the Council consisted primarily in planning, coordinating and evaluating the activities of government administration and ensuring their cooperation with local governments in the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance. However, the work of the Council was brought to an end in April 2016 when Prime Minister Beata Szydło disbanded the Council and no succeeding body was established.

Some governmental bodies are more resilient to governmental pressure for instance due to legal constrains, as it is with the Ombudsman for Civil Rights. As a constitutional body, the Ombudsman is an independent monitoring institution, solely responsible to the Parliament. The Commissioner is responsible for protection of human and civil rights and has legal instruments to intervene in cases of racial and other forms of discrimination. However, the Ombudsman's office budget was restricted in 2017 by the right-wing government, and it is currently lower than in 2012, as one of the deputies of the Ombudsman, has stressed in an interview.

As mentioned earlier, one of the lines of resistance against the current government are the local governments, and anti-racist and pro-refugee/migrant narrative became one of key tools in this struggle. It is achieved through various means, including support for local NGOs or by their own policies.

In 2016 the "Wrocław Declaration against Discrimination" was signed and its aim was to cooperate on openness, dialogue and countering intolerance via strategic promotion of tolerance, exchange of good anti-discriminatory practices, monitoring of acts of xenophobia-motivated violence, and shared reactions to racism. The same year, The Council for Prevention of Discrimination and Related Intolerance was established. Tasks of the council are monitoring of hate crimes against minorities, reactions and mobilisation of municipal or non-governmental institutions, supporting of their activities, providing educational programs and to "take care of the city's good name as a city of freedom and solidarity."

The "Cities without Hatred" campaign is seconded by a program for integration of immigrants to be executed by local NGOs. The main point is to prepare places for several families from the war-ridden Syria by means of establishing the Local Integration System and School Integration System. The city cooperates with the EU-funded "Wielogłos. Integration of refugees in Polish communities" project.

In Gdańsk, the Immigrant Integration Model proved to be particularly important for this kind of integration. It was established in May 2015 in order to assess the available resources and capabilities to support the immigrants in Gdańsk, and to identify their key needs and problems, after the 2015 elections became a highly politicized issue. It concerted efforts in various areas of policy-making and social services, including education, healthcare, social security, public security, labor market, housing, culture, and sports.

Gdańsk has always been a welcoming multicultural city. It has been a destination for immigrants and a home to people from all around the world who chose it as a place to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Gdańsk is a proof that cities need migrants to develop, wrote the late Mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz in 2016 in the introduction of the Immigrant Integration Model. However, one of the most prominent activists from Gdańsk seems to be skeptical about how effective is the introduced model (emphasis in original):

> EFFECTIVENESS of the activities of the Gdansk Model is negligible, not that it is not implemented. After all, from the Gdańsk budget went, since 2018, a thick few billions of public money for activities that are included as recommendations in the Model. Only that the effects are unknown, not announced to the public. Here is the biggest problem, in communication, and in the façade PR activities of the Gdansk magistrate, which mainly serve to promote the image of Gdansk as a city of freedom and equality. But image and PR cannot be used in the field of human rights, what is needed here are real actions and ACTIONS, not words and ideas.

Gdańsk has also introduced the Gdańsk Equal Treatment Model, that is a set of suggestions and recommendations for civil servants regarding equal treatment of potentially excluded or discriminated groups. This initiative also became politicized and a target of political attacks perpetrated by actors close to the ruling party.

Discussion

Do these changes result in closer cooperation among various types of actors (moderate NGOs, radical grassroots groups etc.)? Or – referring again to the metaphor used in the title, do they strive to maintain their independence from other actors?

There is an observable change in relations between grassroots activists and political parties and within the positioning of political parties versus social challenges. Previously numerous tensions between activists from grassroots groups (more often leaning to the radical side) and NGO activists (usually more moderate in their claims and repertoires of action) were observed. Both sides accused

themselves of 'not serious ways of doing politics' and 'becoming sellouts for the system' on the other hand (Piotrowski, 2009).

The changes in the *modus operandi* for both the grassroots activists and the political party members resulted among others in withdrawing from no logo rule, previously a *sine qua non* condition for any movement-party cooperation. In the period of first PiS government (2015–2019) the cooperation looked different than nowadays, as there was no left-wing party in the Polish parliament. Therefore, left parties – a natural ally of progressive grassroots groups – became an ally in extra-parliamentary politics. This allowed left wing party members to remain active on the streets and with grassroots groups, and to include such actions in the program of the left party.

The emergence of the new wave of anti-racist narrative has coincided with the growing political cleavage between PiS and the rest of the political spectrum. Verbal, symbolic and physical attacks on migrants and refugees that intensified during the electoral campaign in 2015 in Poland, resulted in counter-actions organized by various groups and organizations and in including the state as the important agent in development of 'fascism' and – connected to it – racist policies. Using anti-racism (and antifascism) as a political narrative in domestic political struggles lead to the emergence of 'liberal antifascism', disjointed from the RLLMs, who have been so far their natural political background. As Oskar Szwabowski (2012) noted that the changes in activism can be seen:

> (…) in the form of 'self-censorship' denying one's own inferior identity, which consisted of consensus on the capitalist order and zealous support for neoliberal reforms; second, in stigmatizing the left as heathens, supporters of Stalinism. (…) One can even say that the word 'left' is a tool in the discourse of the right, which is used to define everything that is incompatible with their vision. (…) The discourse established by the "official" and "unofficial" right excluded all, even moderate leftism, as [Orwellian] "thought criminals". Hardly any more "progressive" liberal thought can be considered "leftist". In a given system, any leftist thought or practice can only appear as "extreme leftism", beyond the threshold or margin of legality.

The heavy politicization of funding schemes available to civil society actors to some point result in their depoliticization. However, after a certain threshold the outcome is opposite and results in radicalization.

With the involvement of politicians, anti-racist (and antifascist) narratives entered mainstream as an another tool for current political struggle. Politicians – mostly of local level and mostly coming from the liberal party – began to appear at demonstrations organized by the 'usual suspects' – in this case the anarchist and leftist groups. As Szwabowski (2012) continues:

> The narrative of the "anti-fascists" also does not lead to real changes or at all to putting the problem in perspective, which would make it possible to solve it. Following the example of Western defenders of "democracy", a "moral" narrative is emerging.

> The extreme right is simply evil, sometimes stupid, superstitious, xenophobic – its identity is simply not acceptable to enlightened societies. The liberal definition of fascism as a "disorder" or "psychological deviation" prevails. In turn, the movement itself focuses on cultural and identity issues, without considering the systemic possibilities and impossibilities of identity construction. The "normal" identity itself has been constructed like the heroes of most Polish TV series – as upper middle class.

Such a critique is merely a reversal of the right-wing narrative, which also establishes the opposition on the basis of an enemy rather than an adversary. It focuses on its "flaws" rather than its views. Thus, "fascists" can only be blocked by seeking to remove them from public space. However, there is another dividing line emerging in the already complex picture. Organizers of these protests remained ambivalent, maintaining the previously developed prejudice towards 'professional' politicians.

The 'true' activists remain skeptical to the developments bringing various factions (radical and moderate) and different actors: grassroots activists and local and national-level politicians. As one of the activists I have spoken with, an anarchist and a squatter involved for many years in pro-migrant/refugee initiatives who – among others – helped refugees on the 'Balkan Trail' in 2015–2016 said:

> For me the people from NGOs are there, because for them it's a job, like any other job. When the [political] climate is in favor for migrants, they support migrants, if the climate turns to kittens, they do things for and around kittens. For us, it's a calling, we help the migrants, not because its popular, we're helping them, because it's our struggle to abolish borders, abolish power and authority and to change the society.

However, actors on the other side – politicians in this case – are either not happy with collaboration with grassroots activists. As one of the former leaders of the Left party, member of its National Council, has told me:

> (…) we went to all of these demonstrations supporting the migrants, refugees, against racism and fascism. We co-organized many of them, we also had all the necessary equipment, like the megaphones. But sometimes the radicals – mostly anarchists – were pushing for the 'no logo' rule – no party colors, no party or group banners. And we agreed to that, because it was more important to do something together, so we agreed on those terms. From today's perspective I think we should have been more persuasive in promoting our position and to show at the demonstrations with our flags and banners. Especially that we incorporated policies against racism, prejudice, and pro- migrant and refugee points into our program.

With the high politicization of the (occasionally often non-political) actions of grassroots activists and NGOs, the obvious questions arising is, how actors more involved in politics are reflecting upon these changes. The openness of the

political system and the existence of potential allies within the system is a key to success of the activists, according to the concept of political opportunity structures approach. The growing cooperation between the activists and politicians and the changes in the rules of this cooperation suggest that the roots of the changing nature of anti-racist activism lays in the structural context in which the movements operate. This also suggests that in many cases the anti-racism is not part of the groups' DNA, but is used instrumentally to achieve other goals or to in everyday political struggle. This resulted among others in withdrawing from the no-logo-rule (no party and group banners, flags or colors at demonstrations), previously a *sine qua non* condition for any movement-party cooperation.

Overall, the Polish activists are skeptical about co-operating with political parties during protests. In particular, they see a risk that the political parties gain further political capital from such co-organized events, while the activists end up doing a disproportion-ate amount of the grass-roots level work. In Poland grassroots activists have enforced the "no logo" rule both during smaller events and within broader coalitions as, for instance, happened during the anti-ACTA protests of early 2012. This approach also limits the party's representatives access to microphone during the protests because the activists suspect party members to use their presence at a street demonstration to promote their own party.

Such approach of grassroots activists does not seem to change much over time, however, in the case of strong polarization of the political scene, certain topics, and growing repression from the police and counter-movements, members of political parties are more and more accepted at demonstrations organized by grassroots activists or – in particular the Left party – organize their events and invite activists to join. This can also be a result of a generational turnaround within the ranks of the Polish left party, whose many MP's have activists experience in grassroots groups, and one of the groups forming the Left party – Partia Razem – can be called a movement party.

Observing the recent changes in Polish civil society and social activism, Elżbieta Korolczuk (2017, pp. 3–4) lists three main challenges, not only to the sector of civil society but also to our understanding and conceptualizations of it, being:

- Changing the orientation of part of the third sector towards a greater commitment to current policies;
- Growing political involvement of the society, including people who have not been involved in such activities so far; and
- Attempts to enter institutional policy by activists, especially coming from urban movements that is an evidence for the link between CSOs and local politicians.

In all of these points mentioned by Korolczuk, anti-racist and pro-migrant/refugee topics became important.

Conclusions

Korolczuk (2017, p. 4) writes: "the current situation can bring good results, because it makes us finally question the fiction of the existence of civil society, which operates in isolation from politics, has no political agenda and is ideologically homogeneous". In previous analyses, the majority of politically-oriented actions were excluded from the civil society discourse as being actions of social movements, advocacy groups and the like.

However, with the politicization of more and more areas of life and activities (such as the education system, environmental issues, and topics connected to identity), this juxtaposition fails to accurately describe the current state of affairs. As Feischmidt and Zakariás (2019) write:

> Certain political positions (in the present case, rejection of the government in general, as well as rejection of the securitization discourses endorsed by the Hungarian government) may result in civic helping. Thus, charity may become a modality of revolt and a means of acting against politics, thus an alternative form of public responsibility. This is what we call the charitization of politics (Feischmidt, Zakariás, 2019, p. 89).

Similarly in Poland, pro-migrant/refugee or anti-racist and even anti-fascist actions and initiatives have become in Poland as a way of rejecting the policies and politics of the Law and Justice party, politicizing volunteering, and charity activism.

In sum, the developments within the anti-racist politics point out to couple of new developments: intrumentalisation of anti-racism as part of politics opposing the current regime in Poland and therefore adapting it to this purpose (that includes other political parties but also municipal politicians and civil servants); reconfigurations within the civil society sector with a more intersections between civil society actors and state/municipal institutions; and significant changes within the agenda of anti-racist organizations that are a reaction to the changing POS and DOS.

However, such developments are also facing a critique, to finish with a quote from Szwabowski (2012):

> Anti-fascism presented in such a way is blind to recognizing the nature of fascism and consequently becomes helpless towards it (unless it repeats the fascist gesture towards fascists). The relationship between the state, capitalism and the fascist movement is not addressed. Consequently, as some left critics note, condemned to support the state (banning demonstrations, etc.) (See, for example: Barrot, 2009).

Grażyna Kubarczyk rightly notes that Polish antifascism is apolitical, "it has no social context, nor does it seriously analyze the problems of the development of the extreme right in contemporary societies" (Kubarczyk, 2009, p. 68). Joining

the "anti-fascist front" of *Gazeta Wyborcza* only diluted the already thinly veiled criticism.

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