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Polish autonomous nationalism against the background of social movement theory

Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century brought a noticeable increase in the popularity of right-wing groups. For many years, the stability of the political systems of Western countries seemed unshakable. Therefore, the dynamic development of groupings that question the principles of the democratic system came as a surprise to many observers. The effect of this rightward turn was the electoral successes of those politicians who made no secret of their critical attitude towards liberal democracy. Groups of this trend, often described as populist, have become significant players on the political scene of many Western countries (Mudde, 2007; Tormey, 2019). Donald Trump in the United States, Marine Le Pen in France, Narendra Modi in India, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Viktor Orban in Hungary, or Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland, began to be seen as politicians with an authoritarian mindset. Due to the diversity of the modern populist right, it also includes radical groups, known as the far right (Benveniste, Campani, Lazaridis, 2016)[1]. Factors such as the economic crisis of 2007-2009, the European immigration crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the rise in popularity of right-wing groups. A sense of insecurity, unknown in the West for years, brought political radicalization that was natural under these conditions.

The popularity of the mainstream right has also created favuorable conditions for the functioning of more radical groupings and social movements associated with the right. Their main feature is the radical opposition to liberal democracy and the ideals of the 1968 revolution represented by the New Left. A good example is the Generation Identity

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    [1] The far right, as defined by Dutch researcher Casa Mudde, is a body of groups characterized by opposition to liberal democracy and rejection of egalitarianism as the basis of the political system. On the one hand, the far right opposes the political system of the West, which has dominated for many years. On the other hand, it constitutes a broad bloc of groupings opposed to the social and political changes initiated by the May 1968 revolution. This current includes both the radical right, which rejects egalitarianism and questioning the logic behind the functioning of liberal democracy, and the extreme right, which rejects democracy altogether and often adopts an openly nationalist and xenophobic stance (Mudde, 2019; Mudde, 2018). Attitudes toward egalitarianism as a feature that constitutes, at the most general level, the distinction between the right and the left have also been considered important by Norberto Bobbio (Bobbio, 1996: 73) and Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 2007: 275).

(Génération Identitaire) movement, which originated from the French New Right, has a pan-European and anti-immigrant character (Richards, 2022), or the Italian neo-fascist movement CasaPound Italia (Froio, Castelli Gattinara, Bulli, Albanese, 2020). In the United States, on the other hand, the so-called Alternative Right (Alt-Right) has developed. This informal movement of alt-right groups, associated with Trump's most radical supporters, has gained considerable prominence during the term fought under the slogan "Make America Great Again". The alternative right is involved in activism, such as organizing street demonstrations. The Black Lives Matter movement's protests also saw clashes with Alt-Right supporters. This caused a real social conflict of an ethnic nature in the United States. Not insignificant for the development of the Alt-Right movement was also its association with the Breitbart News website, run by former Trump adviser Steve Bannon (Main, 2018; Wendling, 2018; Hawley, 2019).

The electoral successes of the right also took place in Poland. In addition to the parliamentary right, dominated by the United Right electoral coalition, radical groups have also gained importance. The popularity of far right groupings in Poland is best seen in the case of the Independence March, held since 2010. The Warsaw Independence Day demonstration has become, in both Polish and foreign media, a symbol of the success of the Polish far right. In 2018, the march of national circles was combined with a march under the patronage of Polish President Andrzej Duda, held under the slogan "For You Poland" (Biało-Czerwony Marsz 'Dla Ciebie Polsko', 2018). Against the background of Polish far right groups, most of which referred to the traditions of the Polish national camp of the interwar period, a new nationalist formation stood out at the time. These were not so numerous, but very active, and characterized by considerable radicalism, groups of so-called autonomous nationalists.

The purpose of this article is to present autonomous nationalism in the light of social movement theory. This is particularly true of French sociologist Alain Touraine and his theory of social movements as parties to conflict. This new current of modern nationalism is an example of a social movement expressing opposition to liberal democracy and capitalism, as well as the ideology of the New Left. The movement has become an attractive alternative to supporters of the far right, who have begun to recognize the anachronism of many Polish national groupings. Autonomous nationalism is an instance of how the modern ideology of nationalism was adapted to the conditions of postmodern "liquid modernity" (Pielużek, 2021). The analysis of the autonomous nationalist movement in the context of social movement theory is carried out through content analysis, narrative analysis, as well as the comparative method.

Considering the popularity of autonomous nationalism among the contemporary far right, it is not the subject of a significant number of scholarly studies. German autonomous nationalism has become the subject of research by scholars such as Jan Schedler, Alexander Häusler, Raphael Schlembach, and Daniel Fleisch. The first monograph on the subject was Autonome Nationalisten Neonazismus in Bewegung (Autonomous Na-

tionalism. Neo-Nazism in Motion), published in 2011. The issue of Polish autonomous nationalism from a media studies perspective was analyzed in Marcin Pielużek's article.

The origins of autonomous nationalism

Autonomous nationalism emerged at the turn of the 20th century in Germany (Schlembach, 2013: 295-296). The very term 'autonomous' used in the context of nationalism gives the impression of contradiction. For a long time, nationalism was an ideology that legitimized the dominant model of the nation-state in the 20th century. The transformations that took place in most Western countries pushed nationalism outside the mainstream. Today, nationalism is a movement of resistance to the establishment. The adjective 'autonomous' in nationalism refers to a specific organizational formula, based on a decentralized network of groupings devoid of supremacy and formal ties among each other. The various locally active groups are united by their worldview and participation in common activities. The influence, popular among leftist activists, of the concept of leaderless resistance is evident (Posłuszna, 2022: 7-8; Tomasiewicz, 2009). Autonomous nationalists are a movement that can be described as postmodern nationalism, the result of a process of identity construction (Castells, 2010). Autonomous nationalism as a social movement takes an active part in the creation of what Anthony Giddens called "post-traditional social order" (Giddens, 2007: 5).

From the beginning, autonomous nationalism was seen as a new incarnation of the neo-Nazi movement, which took on a new form (Schedler, 2014: 242-244). It is difficult to deny the links between autonomous nationalism and neo-Nazism, but this needs to be clarified. The autonomous nationalist movement emerged from a milieu known as the Free Nationalists, an informal movement that was loosely affiliated with the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) (Schedler, 2011a: 29-31). The movement's founders, inspired by the methods of activity developed in the environment of the New Left, especially the anarchists and so-called antifa, created a new model of far right grouping. During the decade, autonomous nationalism as a way of functioning became popular in most European countries. The proper image of autonomous nationalists and the way they operated was adapted by other groupings. This has resulted in most far right supporters abandoning the ill-associated image of the skinhead (Schedler, Fleisch, 2011: 249). The new model of activity is particularly popular in Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Russia (Schedler, Fleisch, 2011: 244-246). Groups of autonomous nationalists have also emerged in Western European countries and Scandinavia (Schedler, Fleisch, 2011: 241-244).

Autonomous nationalists, like their opponents in the anti-fascist movement, advocate against the dominant modern free market economic model. They are characterized by radical opposition to liberal democracy, the revolution in morals and emancipation movements. Against the backdrop of the economic crisis of 2007-2009, as well

as the progressive inflation resulting from the global pandemic and the armed conflict in Ukraine, the movement of autonomous nationalists became an alternative to far right groups advocating the free market. The popularity of autonomous nationalism, as with the groupings associated with the interwar currents of the German Conservative Revolution or national radicalism, represents a shift of modern nationalists in a social and explicitly anti-capitalist direction.

Although the movement originated at the turn of the century in Germany, autonomous nationalists admit to being inspired by groups operating in a similar way in the second half of the 20th century. These are primarily nationalist groups operating in Spain in the 1980s, referring to themselves as Bases Autonomas (Autonomous Bases) (Bases Autonomas – protoplaści autonomicznych nacjonalistów, 2010). Another movement that inspired autonomous nationalists was France's Groupe Union Défense (GUD) (O Czarnym Szczurze i pewnej czcionce, 2012). The GUD was formed in reaction to the events of May 1968. The group's activities were intended to oppose the New Left, which was dominant in student circles at the time (Tomasiewicz, 2013).

The autonomous nationalists, compared to other far right groups, are characterized by a specific way of operating. The movement has adapted for its needs methods developed on the other side of the political barricade. Borrowing in the sphere of image and the know-how of street activism come from radical leftist circles, especially the movement known as antifa. From the activists of the antifascist movement, the autonomous nationalists took over a specific clothing characterized by the dominance of the black color. The unified image of activists is imposed by the developed in anarchist circles the tactics of the so-called black bloc. The black bloc as a form of manifestation became a regular feature of many nationalist demonstrations over time (Nowy ruch a zapożyczenia z lewej strony, 2009). This tactic makes it very difficult for activists to be recognized by police or members of antagonistic groups. Borrowings from the left are also present in the symbolism used. Being a symbol of autonomous nationalism, the black flag inscribed in a circle is actually a modified symbol of the anti-fascist movement (Schedler, 2011b: 73).

Social radicalism of autonomous nationalists

As mentioned earlier, the autonomous nationalists stand out from other nationalist groups by their commitment to social issues. Although such a tendency is also evident in the case of national-radical groups, but it in the case of the movement under study, it occurs with much greater intensity, and anti-capitalist slogans take on a particularly radical character. The main inspiration for German and later autonomous nationalists from other countries is the political ideology created by brothers Otto and Gregor Strasser. So-called Strasserism was described in the 1930s as the left wing of the NSDAP

(Schlembach, 2013: 301). Supporters of Strasserism, after an internal conflict within the NSDAP, left the grouping and formed the Black Front, whose leader became Otto Strasser (Kosiński, 2017). Strasserism in an amplified form expressed one of the main ideas of the German Conservative Revolution, which was to combine nationalism with a specifically conceived socialism (Cygański, 1985: 119-122). This tendency found expression at the time in ideas such as Oswald Spengler's Prussian Socialism (Sosiński, 2003) and Ernst Niekisch's National Bolshevism. The latter trend in particular was an inspiration for numerous European groups combining nationalism with social radicalism.

The inspiration of Strasserism is clearly visible in the symbolic layer of the movement. The symbol of the German Social Union (die Deutsch-Soziale Union) founded by Otto Strasser, depicting a hammer and sword, is one of the main symbols of the autonomous nationalist movement (Młot i miecz – symbol społecznej i narodowej rewolucji, 2013). The popular slogan used by autonomous nationalists, the slogan "Free-Social-National" (Wolni – Socjalni – Narodowi, 2015), is also an expression of inspiration from Strasserism.

Autonomous nationalism as a new social movement

New social movements became a factor in the cultural and political changes taking place in Western European and US societies in the second half of the 20th century. Alain Touraine noted that after 1968, social movements were identified with the left, counterculture, as well as the search for an alternative to liberal democracy and capitalism (Touraine, 1995: 218). The ideals of 1968, despite the passage of years, have been strongly influencing the New Left ever since (Paleczny, 2010: 94). However, the wave of the 1968 student revolt also saw the emergence of groups reactionary to it, such as the French metapolitical New Right (Bar-On, 2013).

According to Piotr Sztompka's definition of a social movement: "a social movement is the making or at least an attempt to make some changes in the external structures of society" (Sztompka, 2005: 225-226). The cited definition emphasizes collective action and the goal of bringing about a change in the social order, establishing new patterns or opposing change (Sztompka, 2005: 226). A special feature of the new social movements is that they go beyond the realm of politics, beyond economic and class issues, and focus on problems at the intersection of the public and the private. Claus Offe believes that the new social movements have gone beyond the realm of "old politics" in their activities to create a new paradigm. There has been a break in continuity with groupings representing earlier phases of social movement development. (Offe, 2005: 221). The blurring of the boundary between the public and private spheres is a potential cause of conflicts that centre around emerging new identities, cultural patterns and lifestyles (Della Porta, Diani, 2006: 62-63).

Social movement as a type of conflict

Moving beyond the framework of classical politics has made it difficult to classify some of the new social movements into a specific political option. It turns out that the axis around which contemporary new social movements function has become the issue of social change, or rather the conflict that arises between its supporters and opponents. According to Touraine, a social movement is first and foremost "a particular kind of social conflict" (Touraine, 1995: 212). In this view, a social movement expresses a demand for change that goes beyond the realm of politics, thus having effects in the private (non-political) sphere as well. This is evident in conflicts that involve issues such as dominant cultural patterns or equality for minorities. Through the strong connection of these issues with axiology, they are a particular subject of conflict between proponents of change and movements of a conservative nature. In a similar vein, Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani write about social movements. According to them, the essence of a social movement is participation in a conflicting collective action. Participants in social movements acting together take part in competition with a specific opponent, become part of informal networks, and share a certain identity common to movement members (Della Porta, Diani, 2006: 20-21).

Touraine, adopting this definition of a social movement, detailed the types of conflict. The following types of conflict are the most relevant to the study of autonomous nationalism as a form of social movement:

- Conflict concerning the reconstruction of social, cultural or political identity. In this case, the opponent is a stranger or intruder who threatens the values held by the group in question.
- Conflict whose parties see each other as a political force seeking to change the rules of the game. The opposing camps define the opponent by reference to a particular aspect of the decision-making process or specific rules that the participants in the conflict believe should be changed or maintained.
- Conflict in defense of status or privilege. Often takes the form of a call for consolidation to defend moral values, or against dangerous minorities.
- Conflict for social control over dominant cultural patterns.
- Conflict aimed at creating a different social order than before, the most prominent form of which is revolution.
- Social conflict involving opposition to changes that destroy traditional values and threaten traditional social organizations.

The last indicated category of conflict is particularly important. According to Touraine, this "anti-revolution" has become as important at the turn of the century as the revolutionary movements a hundred years earlier. The parties to the conflict are becoming, on the one hand, supporters of progress (liberal democrats, the left), and on the other, movements of a neo-communitarian nature. The second group includes reli-

gious fundamentalists, nativists, or movements of a nationalist nature. This axis of contention has now become much more important than the class-based conflicts that were once waged. Most of the types of conflict cited are at the metapolitical (supra-political) level. In this case, the competition is for dominance over the cultural patterns that shape the political-level political and social forms (Touraine, 1995: 213-216; 2010: 348-349). This type of conflict is also relevant from Poland's perspective. Anna Jawor described this conflict as a "culture war" taking place in Polish society. Jawor stressed, however, that the conflict, which in the West had been going on since the 1960s in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe began only in the 1990s, and only reached its apogee in the 21st century (Jawor, 2014: 93).

Polish autonomous nationalism

In Poland, autonomous nationalism emerged at the end of the first decade of the 21st century (Schedler, Fleisch, 2011: 247-248). This had to do with the appearance of the website Autonom.pl – Portal niezależnych nacjonalistów (Portal of autonomous nationalists) in 2009. The first Polish groups of autonomous nationalists were formed in Upper Silesia (White Eagles) and Greater Poland (White Boys Greater Poland). Other groups were also formed in Warsaw, Toruń, or Stalowa Wola (Pielużek, 2021: 37).

Polish autonomous nationalists, being radical opponents of liberal democracy, are part of the Polish far right with the most anti-systemic attitude. Representatives of this movement consider most Polish right-wing and nationalist groups to be too liberal, which would contradict the nationalist principle of solidarity (Powstrzymać wirus liberalizmu w ruchu nacjonalistycznym, 2014). Autonomist nationalists preach the need to radicalize nationalism in a social direction. They believe that the reactionary nature of classical nationalism, as well as its association with conservatism, makes it impossible to care about the well-being of the entire national community, which becomes dominated by the power elite (Konieczność radykalizacji w ruchu nacjonalistycznym, 2015). Nationalist activists question the desirability of fighting other movements that preach the need to change the existing system (Wróg realny i urojony, 2015). They similarly view hostility towards other nations, which, due to the global dominance of liberal democracy, has lost its meaning (To system jest wrogiem, nie inne narody, 2015). They define their anti-systemism in the most radical terms possible. They believe that the groupings of the conservative right cannot pretend to be anti-system. They represent "a decidedly conservative, reactionary current that seeks to preserve and at most slightly reform reality". As they write on their portal Autonom.pl, anti-systemism is a revolutionary drive to change the current system, which involves its complete destruction (Antysystemowość – co to takiego?, 2015).

A specific feature of autonomous nationalists is a strongly anti-capitalist stance (Schlembach, 2013: 307). The Polish representatives of the movement take an equally

radical approach to the issue of capitalism. They reject the common view that only the left is anti-capitalist (Antykapitalizm, 2009). Like the pre-war German National Bolsheviks, autonomous nationalists believe that socialism as an idea has been distorted. As they point out, 'true' socialism (i.e., which rejects internationalism) is compatible with nationalism (Kilka słów o socjalizmie, 2010). Autonomous nationalists emphasize in their journalism the negative role of big business and multinational corporations (Wielkość przedsiębiorstwa a kwestia wyzysku i sprawiedliwości społecznej, 2015). Members of the movement attach great importance to the struggle for workers' rights and organize annual demonstrations on the occasion of Labour Day (Warszawa: Nacjonalistyczny 1 maja 2013, 2013, Święto Pracy: Konferencja i pochód w Warszawie, 2018).

Autonomous nationalists express anti-imperialist and anti-globalist views to a greater extent than other far right groups (Schlembach, 2013: 307). Visible in this milieu is overt anti-Americanism and opposition to NATO. It is expressed both in journalism and in organized demonstrations condemning the military actions carried out by Western countries in the Balkans (24 marca 2014 – 15. rocznica NATOwskiej agresji na Serbię, 2014), in Iraq (Piętnastolecie zniszczenia Iraku, 2018), or in Afghanistan (Kolejne cywilne ofiary sił NATO w Afganistanie, 2013).

Opposition to the process of advancing globalization is equally radical in the surveyed community. It is explicitly described by autonomous nationalists as a "plague", closely linked to liberalism (Walka o tożsamość, 2019). Globalization is also the main cause of immigration to Europe, against which they express radical opposition. They see immigration as the greatest threat to the preservation of identity by European nations (Globalizacja i migracja a utrata tożsamości narodowej, 2019). According to autonomous nationalists, immigration is also largely blamed on the free market right, which has formed an "alliance with capital" (Imigracyjny produkt wolnorynkowej prawicy, 2015).

Autonomous nationalists are an exception on the Polish far right in terms of their attitude towards Ukrainian nationalists. Adhering to the principle of nationalism devoid of chauvinism (Nacjonalizm wobec szowinizmu, 2015), Polish activists have repeatedly collaborated with autonomous nationalists from Ukraine. They even stirred up some controversy among the far right when they invited members of the Carpathian Sich organization to the Independence March. However, the visit of the Ukrainians to the march did not materialize (Oświadczenie w sprawie przekłamań dotyczących wizyty ukraińskich nacjonalistów na Marszu Niepodległości, 2018). Polish autonomous nationalists have repeatedly expressed solidarity with the attacked Ukraine, both in 2014 (Nacjonalizm wobec konfliktu na Ukrainie – stosunek europejskich ruchów narodowych do wydarzeń na Wschodzie, 2014) and 2022 (Oświadczenie polskich środowisk narodowo-społecznych z powodu agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę, 2022), and also organized a campaign of support for fighting Ukrainians (Warszawa: Pierwsza tura wsparcia dla walczących Ukraińców, 2022). Despite this, Polish autonomous nationalists are critical of immigration from Ukraine. They primarily point out the impact of immi-

grants on the labour market (Ukraińcy zatrudniani głównie na czarno, 2018; Ukraińcy zajmują kierownicze stanowiska, 2019), and oppose the introduction of further facilities for Ukrainians seeking work in Poland (Ukraińcy będą traktowani priorytetowo w urzędach pracy, 2019).

Against the background of the other groupings of the Polish far right, the autonomous nationalists have maintained a considerable distance from the All-Poland Women's Strike. On the Autonom.pl portal, there have been articles critical of this, as they write, initiative launched by liberals ('Strajk Kobiet' wymknął się liberałom, 2020), which has been taken over by leftist circles quarreling among themselves (Wystarczy dać im mówić, 2020). It should be noted that the autonomous nationalist milieu did not criticize the Women's Strike from the perspective of Catholic axiology, but aversion to interfering with the traditional family model 'Strajk Kobiet' chce ingerować w życie rodzinne, 2020.

As mentioned, the autonomous nationalist movement does not refer to Catholicism in its ideology. This is an exception on the Polish far right, which is dominated by Christian nationalism. What is popular in the movement under study, however, is neo-pagan symbolism. It is not a coherent system, but more of a patchwork of both Nordic and Slavic symbols. This is intended to emphasize the ethnic unity of Europe. This symbolic system created in the autonomous nationalist movement can be described as the new neopaganism.

Conclusions

The analysis of Polish autonomous nationalism as a new social movement made it possible to observe the uniqueness of this new formula of political activism compared to the Polish far right. This current of nationalism, thanks to the adoption of methods of action developed in the milieu of the New Left, made it possible to adapt modern ideology to the conditions of postmodernity. Nationalism pushed outside the mainstream of Western politics had to try to adapt to different conditions. In the 21st century, it no longer constitutes an ideology of power, legitimizing the existence of the nation-state, but has become a movement of resistance to liberal democracy.

Some of the groupings of the Polish far right have remained faithful to the traditions of the Polish national camp, the national-democratic option (All-Polish Youth, National Movement), as well as the national-radical option (National Rebirth of Poland, National-Radical Camp, Falanga). The movement of autonomous nationalists, on the other hand, is a completely new ideological current of Polish nationalism, breaking with 20th-century tradition (Nowe czasy, nowy ruch, 2012).

The essential feature of autonomous nationalism is a categorical rejection of liberal democracy and a revolutionary approach to regime change. The movement's uncompromising anti-systemism allows it to be seen beyond the classic division into left and right, and perhaps even, as approaching the so-called alliance of extremes. The auton-

omous nationalists are strongly influenced by the interwar tradition of mixing nationalism with unorthodox socialism. This is especially true of the political thought of Otto Strasser and his Black Front. Given the phenomenon of the emergence of national radicalism in the interwar period that went beyond the right from an economic perspective, it can be said that autonomous nationalism went even further in a socialist direction. The autonomous nationalist movement rejects capitalism and consumerism. It sees immigration and the concept of a multicultural society as the greatest threat to the identity of European nations.

Autonomous nationalists see the nation mainly as a community of blood, placing ethnic issues above the cultural concept of the nation. This is due to the strong influence of German political thought, as well as the neo-pagan European New Right. The formula of cultural nationalism as strongly linked to Catholicism remained the domain of the neo-National Democratic groups of the Polish far right. This 'racial' approach to nationalism also goes hand in hand with the popular use of neo-pagan symbolism in the movement. This is not a coherent symbolic-religious system, but an open-ended collection consisting mainly of Nordic and Slavic symbols. This is intended to emphasize the ethnic identity of Europe. It is also an expression of the rejection of Christian universalism, which is so strongly declared to this day in the circles of the neo-National Democraticright. Particularly against the background of circles faithful to the pre-war tradition of the national camp, autonomous nationalism appears to be an innovative formula that attracts people who are skeptical of formalized groupings. Given the current global economic situation, it is possible to foresee an increase in the importance of this social version of nationalism, as an alternative to supporters of the far right who are critical of the free market economy.

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze autonomous nationalism as a new social movement. This current of nationalism, which emerged at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, is characterized by a radical rejection of liberal democracy, as well as the ideology of the New Left. As a result of the analysis of the published content, it was possible to conclude that autonomous nationalism is a formula of nationalism as a movement of resistance to the establishment, adapted to the conditions of the 21st century. Economic conditions also influence the success of this social nationalism, which is inspired by the political thought of Otto Strasser. Autonomous nationalism is a novelty on the Polish far right also because of its rejection of Catholicism, as well as the formula of cultural nationalism associated with the national-Catholic current. Instead, a commitment to the ethnic concept of the nation as a 'community of blood' is noticeable in the movement under study. This goes hand in hand with the new neopaganism popular in the milieu.

Keywords: autonomous nationalism, far right, new social movements, populism, anti-globalism