

ALTER-GLOBALISM A LA POLONAISE: A STORY OF AN ACTIVIST

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Historical Background

The alter-globalist movement came into the public arena after the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in late November and early December 1999. It was the moment when the term “anti-globalization” appeared in media and in the public debates. However, most of the activists have distanced themselves from the “anti-globalist” label. They have argued that the term falsely implied isolationist stance and irrationality. Moreover, the alter-globalists have emphasised that they were not against globalization, but for another form of globalization. Consequently, they have commonly made use of terms such as global justice movement, globalization from below, alter-globalization, anti-capitalist movement, anti-corporate movement or simply the globalization movement.

Symbolically, the most significant moment for the emergence of the movement, except the Battle of Seattle, was the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (hereafter EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico on January 1, 1994. The “Intergalactic Encounter for Humanity Against Neoliberalism” hosted in the jungles of Chiapas in April 1996 and attended by five thousand activists from over forty countries, was probably the most crucial single event (Krzemiński 2006: 19-21). A follow-up meeting took place in 1998 in Geneva and resulted in the proclamation of Peoples’ Global Action (PGA), a network of autonomous organizations opposing capitalism, imperialism and cultural domination. Some of activists mention the emergence of ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial for the aid of Citizen) in 1998 (Grefe et al, 2004) and a successful campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) launched in late autumn 1999 as the movement origins.

After the Battle of Seattle the most important activities of the movement were events known as anti-summits organised during the meetings of global economic multilateral

institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Found (IMF), WTO, and G8 leaders. The next step in the development of the movement was World Social Forum organised in January 2001 in Porto Alegre in reaction to the World Economic Forum. Its annual meetings, inspired by the French ATTAC and Brazilian Workers' Party, were convened for several years in Brazil and after in Bombay, India. The idea of Social Forum has also regional and thematic forms, for example European Social Forum which was convened in Florence (2002), Paris (2003), London (2004), Athens (2006), and Malmö (2008).

The emergence of the alter-globalist movement in Poland was related to the events in Seattle, when the very label 'anti-globalism' began to attract both media and activists attention. Its participants came from a variety of left-wing and anarchist groups, ecological movements, squatters' milieu and politically disorganised students. The diffusion of alter-globalist ideas was connected with the anti-summit against the IMF and World Bank meeting in Prague in 2000. In preparation for this event, anarchists and squatters organised educational meetings, developed international contacts and coordinated mobilisation in their squats and the centres of alternative culture. One of the participants of the events in Prague reported that the anti-summit involved around 1000 people from Poland¹. The demonstration attracted significant attention of Polish media, which contributed to increasing interest in the movement among its potential participants. In 2001, the Polish division of ATTAC was created.

In the next phase (2000-2003), the activity of the Polish alter-globalist milieu was limited mainly to attending European Social Forums and anti-summits. The change came with the protests against the second war in Iraq. The movement, which began to combine antiwar and alter-globalist ideologies, went through the new phase of mobilisation. The latter manifested itself in the intensified meetings of radical milieu and relatively numerous, at least for Polish standards, demonstrations. The culminating point was *Antyszczyt* (Anti-Summit) against the meeting of the European Economic Forum held in Warsaw, from the 28th till 30th of April 2004. According to organisers, around 7 thousands of people took part in this event. Police claimed that no more than 3,5 thousands took part in the alter-globalist demonstration (Wiśniewska et al. 2006: 69).

Since 2004 the activity of the movement slightly lost its dynamism and was given less attention in mainstream media. It rarely involved joint actions under a banner of 'alter-globalism'. The activism took two main forms: (a) information and communication activities

¹ Information from an interview conducted within the research project of Piotr Antoniewicz.

and (b) interventions. Information activity concentrated around establishing alter-globalist web portals, paper media, and broadcasts. Interventions included such activities as blocking the evictions, organising protest actions aimed at defending trade unionists persecuted by management in some private firms, developing the tenants' movement, carrying on an anti-militaristic charity action Food not Bombs. Polish alter-globalists (among others Lower Silesian division of ATTAC Poland) were also involved in protests against the EU service directive in 2006 ("Stop Bolkestein").

An important aspect of the institutionalisation of the employees' wing of the movement was the creation of an anarcho-syndicalist trade union, OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza (the All-Poland Trade Union Workers' Initiative) in 2004. The union has now around 700 members and 32 company-level organisations. In 2006, the Committee for the Defence and Help of Repressed Workers (KPiORP) was also founded as a loose association of trade unions, left-wing groups and anarchist milieus, whose initial goal was to support the unionists fired from work for their union activism. The main forces within KPiORP were two trade unions, WZZ Sierpień 80 (the Free Trade Union August '80²) and OZZ IP. While OZZ IP exists until now and on many occasions refers to the global dimensions of anti-capitalist workers' struggles, KPiORP lost its impetus in 2007-2008.

Organisation

The main difference between the alter-globalist movement and its left-wing predecessors is its network structure (Castells, 1997). Its structure is horizontal, dynamic, non-hierarchical, informal, and it is deprived of a formal leadership. The movement has been initially organised around network organisations, such as Direct Action Network (DAN) and Peoples Global Action (PGA). Their structure was based on democratic and anarchist principles and assumed a grassroots political involvement. At the same time, it reflected a conscious activism of the people involved. As remarked by Klein (2002: 21), the movement responded to "corporate concentration with fragmentation, to globalization with its own kind of localization, to power consolidation with radical power dispersal" (see also: Głowacki 2004: 350).

Both in Poland and in a global scale, basic organisational units during protests are affinity groups (McDonald 2002; Bramble & Minns 2005). They are composed of 5 to 15

² The Free Trade Union August '80 is a radical break away from Solidarność '80, which left NSZZ Solidarność at the beginning of the 1990s.

people, who know each other and act together, being involved in different tasks, such as cooking for other participants, taking care of communication, preparing spectacles during demonstrations, organising the first aid etc. Most of the affinity groups are temporary and exist only during an event which involves its members, e.g. a protest against an G-8 summit. The experiences of affinity groups were used by Polish alter-globalists during the anti-summit in Warsaw in 2004. There were medical groups and legal-aid groups created to assist participants. During other events, affinity groups distributed vegetarian food or prepared musical setting for actions. The form of activism is exemplified in a best way by the groups of drummers (“radical cheerleaders”) accompanying most of the alter-globalists’ actions.

The Polish alter-globalist movement consists of a whole variety of mostly small organisations. The most important of them are the Polish division of ATTAC, Pracownicza Demokracja (Workers’ Democracy)³, the Association “Społeczeństwo Aktywne” (Active Society), and the Association “Lepszy Świat” (Better World). Taking into account the fields of their actual activity, Anarchist Federation (FA) and Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers’ Initiative) can be counted among the participants of the movement, even though many of their members would probably reject a label of “alter-globalists”. Alter-globalist ideas are shared by some members of Polska Partia Pracy (PPS, Polish Labour Party⁴), Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party⁵), a radical socialist political party Nowa Lewica (New Left) and Federacja Młodych Unii Pracy (FUMP, Youth Federation of the Labour Union⁶). FUMP practically ceased to exist in 2003-2005, when some of its members created a socialist organisation Young Socialist and some others an anarcho-syndicalist Lewicowa Alternatywa-Czerwony Kolektyw (LA-CK, Leftist Alternative – Red Collective, currently as Leftist Alternative). Alter-globalist inspirations can also be found among the youth organisations of two social-democratic parties, the Federation of Young Social Democrats (FMS) and the Association of Young Social Democrats (SMS), and All Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ), whose members participated in European Social Forum in Malmö in 2008.

Other groups, potentially sympathetic to alter-globalism, are small, radical left wing organisations, such as a Trotskyist Nurt Lewicy Rewolucyjnej (NLR, Revolutionary Left

³ A Trotskyist group affiliated to the International Socialist Tendency

⁴ A political party created by the activists of Wolny Związek Zawodowy Sierpień ’80, Free Trade Union August ’80, which is in turn a break-away from the trade union NSZZ Solidarność.

⁵ A small political party created in 1987, which seeks its roots in the tradition of pre-war Polish Socialist Party.

⁶ An independent, central left-wing association affiliated to the political party Labour Union.

Wing Organisation, which is a member of Nowa Lewica), an anarcho-syndicalist organisation Związek Syndykalistów Polski (ZSP, The Union of Syndicalists of Poland). Criticism of “imperialist globalisation” was also included in the programme of Komunistyczna Partia Polski (The Communist Party of Poland, a small political party created in 2002). The supporters of alter-globalist ideas can also be found among the members of the Poland’s Green Party, Zieloni 2004 and the members of NGOs involved in fair trade initiatives (for instance, the Association “Sprawiedliwy Handel”, Fair Trade). A Christian alter-globalist organisation is MAITRI, the Movement of Solidarity with the Poor in the Third World. Finally, the supporters of an anti-racist wing of the alter-globalist movement can be found among the activists of anti-fascist association “Nigdy Więcej” (Never Again).

The alter-globalist movement in Poland created their own media and communication centres. The most important are the Polish division of Indymedia (<http://pl.indymedia.org>) and the Polish edition of Le Monde Diplomatique. The alter-globalist milieus in some cities created well-edited magazines, such as Recykling Idei (The Recycling of Ideas) in Wrocław, Alterglobal in Poznań (edited by the Better World Association) and, much less explicitly related to alter-globalism, Przegląd Anarchistyczny (The Anarchist Review) in Poznań. There is also a weakly alter-globalist programme “Altergodzina” (Alternative Hour), which broadcasted in Academic Radio LUZ (in Wrocław) and in Internet. Finally, some alter-globalist ideas can be found in a magazine *Krytyka Polityczna* (The Political Critique) and internet news portals, such as *lewica.pl* (<http://www.lewica.pl>), *Centrum Informacji Anarchistycznej* (CIA, <http://cia.bzzz.net/>) and *internationalista.pl*.

Political agenda

The network structure of the movement is reflected in the diversity of its demands and ideological agendas. The only common ground is the opposition to neo-liberalism and corporate globalisation, which is related with the neo-liberal form of governance. The movement can be divided into its “radical” wing and a “reformist” wing”. In Poland, the radical option is represented by various anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist and Trotskyist organisations. The reformist wing is first and foremost connected with the activities of the Association “ATTAC”, the Poland’s Green Party Zieloni 2004 and various youth organisations of parliamentary and non-parliamentary left-wing parties.

The postulates of reformists are based on the criticism of neo-liberalism as a distorted form of capitalism. The reformist wing is usually in favour of the following postulates: (1) introducing the Tobin tax⁷ and closing tax paradises and off-shore financial centres, (2) remitting the debts of developing countries, (3) increasing social control over banks and stock markets, (4) stabilising the exchange rates among three main currencies – US dollar, euro and yen, (5) democratising international financial institutions, (6) increasing taxes on capital revenues and large property, (7) reforming an unjust global trade system. The “radical” wing, which is often inspired by the various forms of anarchist ideologies, has radically anti-capitalist character. It is engaged in praxis and discussions aimed at developing other forms of societal organisation. It is common to refer to direct or radical democracy based on the networks of self-governing communities and the non-capitalist forms of the economic system.

In the case of Poland, it is important to distinguish between “anti-globalism” and “alter-globalism”. This differentiation is also present at the level of self-consciousness of activists. “Alter-globalism” incorporates an idea of the global civil society, which would globalise social rights, human rights, and labour standards. “Anti-globalism” is synonymous with nationalism and protectionism, the discourse of cultural closure and neo-traditional communitarianism (Pankowski, 2004). In Poland, such understood “anti-globalist” vision can be found in the discourse of the milieus connected with a magazine *Obywatel* (The Citizen). It is also visible the ideologies of some right-wing conservative political parties, such as *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (the League of Polish Families). Finally, it was present in the activities of *Samoobrona* (Self-Defence), a political party originally connected with a radical farmers’ trade union of the same name. However, the political views of the majority of Polish alter-globalists represent a mixture of traditional left-wing ideologies (social democracy, Trotskyism, communism), the ideas promoted by the new left (identity politics and radical ecology) and an anarchist sensitivity to direct democracy and self-organisation.

Membership

Even a rough estimate of the size of the membership of milieus and organisations, which participate in the activities of alter-globalist movement in Poland, would be imprecise and tricky. The difficulty in assessing the number of participants results from a situational character of the activities of the movement and from the lack of formal membership in the

⁷ A tax on all trade currency across borders named after economist, James Tobin.

most of the organisations involved. In case of some formal organisations, membership data does not say too much, since many people, who are their formal members, do not participate actively in their activities. In other cases, it is difficult to get and verify the information about the number of participants. All numbers quoted below are estimates based on the direct contacts with the representatives of organisations or data cited on the Internet.

The Polish division ATTAC is active since autumn 2001. According to information provided by ATTAC itself (in 2009), it has around 100 members in Poland. The membership of the left-wing milieus, which have no parliamentary representation, encompasses around 200 members of Pracownicza Demokracja (Workers' Democracy, data from 2003, cf. Sokół, 2003: 70) and around 5000 members of the Polish Socialist Party (data from 2003, cf. Sokół, 2003: 72). At the peak of its existence, FUMP (Youth Federation of the Labour Union) had around 1000 formal members. The most important break-away from FUMP, Youth Socialist, has around 200 members. Each of smaller radical left-wing organisations, such as Lewicowa Alternatywa and NLR (see above), have some several dozen members.

Besides radical left-wing milieus and the non-parliamentary left, the movement is made up of around 1 000 participants of Anarchist Federation (data from 2003, Sokół, 2003: 73), about 700 members of Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers' Initiative, data from 2009) and some several dozen members of ZSP (The Union of Polish Syndicalists). In addition, there are around 200-300 members of the Poland's Green Party Zieloni 2004 (according to Party's internal data from 2009) and a number of sympathizers in non-governmental organisations.

The Alter-globalist Milieus in Wrocław

The alter-globalist movement in Wrocław was clearly rooted in the local traditions of political counter-culture of the 1990s. Initially, its participants were mostly squatters and their sympathizers in left-wing and anarchist students' circles. In the 1990s, the most important organisations of the anti-authoritarian left in Wrocław were the local section of Anarchist Federation and anti-fascist Anti-Nazi Front (ANF). By the end of the same decade, two "Centres for Alternative Culture" emerged, Kromera squat and the Centre for the Reanimation of Alternative Culture. They continued the activities of the evicted squat Rejon 69, including anti-militaristic actions, such as Food Not Bombs (sharing food and helping the poor in local communities), protests against evictions, support actions for striking nurses and medical personnel, ecological actions (e.g. initially illegal "reclaim the streets"), and the organisation

of concerts, street theatres and festivals (“Punks’ Picnics”). The first alter-globalist news portal in Poland, *poprostu.pl*, was also created in Wrocław. While counter-cultural milieus were consolidated much earlier, the alter-globalists identities in Wrocław began to emerge in the wake of the preparation and participation of squatters, anarchists and left-wing activists to the “anti-summit” in Prague in 2000. The main place, in which organisational meetings took place, was the Centre for the Reanimation of Alternative Culture.

The initial impetus for the creation of a coherent identity of the movement slowed down soon after the events in Prague. It emerged again in the wake of protests against the war in Iraq in spring 2003 and the preparation to anti-summit in Warsaw in 2004 against the European Economic Forum. In 2003, Wrocław’s Antiwar Coalition was created. It included anarchists, communists (the Communist Party of Poland, KPP) and the representatives of two political parties, the New Left and Poland’s Green Party, Zieloni 2004. A regional division of ATTAC existed between 2004 and 2007. In January 2003, an informal group “Społeczeństwo Aktywne” (Active Society) was created, which was transformed in 2006 into a formal association. The members of Active Society were involved in a campaign for the Act on Minimal Guaranteed Income organised by the non-parliamentary party, New Left in 2004.

People, who constituted Wrocław’s Antiwar Coalition, participated jointly in the anti-summit in Warsaw in April 2004. Wrocław’s group managed to avoid its division along party and organisational lines and took part in this demonstration as a coherent milieu. As a part of the preparation for anti-summit, educational campaign on “Globalisation and Alternatives” was launched in 2004. In 2005, activists in Wrocław organised a week of actions under the name “Stop the War! Start the Dialogue of Civilisations” and in 2006, a painting contest for children “The World for Everyone, without War, Hate, and Intolerance”. Cyclic anti-war actions were organised until 2007.

In the recent years, some elements of alter-globalist ideologies started also to emerge among radical feminists, as well as the members and supporters of the anarcho-sindicalist trade union OZZ Inicjatywa Pracownicza (The All Poland’s Trade Union Workers’ Initiative). The milieus in Wrocław publish twice a year their own magazine, “The Recycling of Ideas”. The magazine’s mission is to “trace back the relationships and crossing points of different fields of social conflicts”, including economy, globalisation, employees’ rights, civil society, social movements, human rights, gender issues, sexuality, art and literature

(http://recyklingidei.pl/o_nas). A broadcast *Altergodzina* (Alternative Hour), which covers similar issues, is aired in the academic radio LUZ.

In Search for a New Universalism - The Case of Jakub

Jakub is left-wing sociologist, academic teacher, translator and journalist. He represents the intellectual wing of the nascent alter-globalist movement in Poland. His pathway to the movement is certainly unique. However, it also reveals the interesting general features of Polish alter-globalism, which rely on the combination of exogenous and indigenous cultural ideas. Jakub represents his biography as a dialectical process of becoming a left-wing intellectual and activist. As a skilled sociologist, he fully controls the flow of biographical narration. Becoming an activist consists of several distinctive phases:

- (1) an early socialisation in a family of the first generation of “socialist intelligentsia”, which results in an overarching feeling of otherness both in religious terms (family atheism versus Polish mass religiosity) and political terms (the involvement of Jakub’s parents in communist organisations versus the nascent anti-communist movement),
- (2) the reflexive search for spirituality, which involves the rejection of his parents’ “materialism” and results in Jakub’s conversion to Catholicism at the age of 19,
- (3) the reflexive “re-conversion” to atheism as the consequence of sociological studies, the discovery of neo-liberal pragmatism and membership in a liberal party,
- (4) the discovery of the “critical potential of sociology” and the rejection of neoliberal dogmatism initiated by the experiences during the exchange programme in the United States of America
- (5) the emergence of an activist’s identity in the wake of protests against the war in Iraq in 2003-2004 and its consolidation into an alter-globalist worldview.

From the biographical perspective, the search for “new universalism”, which lies at the core of Jakub’s political attitudes, can be interpreted as a higher-level synthesis of left-wing family traditions (indigenous sources) and exogenous intellectual influences (left-wing alter-globalist ideologies).

The Context of the Interview

I got to know Jakub through our joint experience of participation in the intellectual milieu of left-wing activists in Wrocław at the beginning of 2000. In 2003 and 2004, we were both involved in the protests against the war in Iraq. When I contacted him in early summer 2009 and told him about the project, he readily agreed to be interviewed. We met twice in cafes in a former Jewish quarter of Wrocław to carry out interviews, in June 2009 and in September 2009. Jakub arrived at our meeting in September on a bike. He was dressed in a dark green jacket and dark long trousers. During both interviews he had no problems in talking about himself except for very intimate issues which he openly decided to veil. He had rich experience of being interviewed for other sociological studies and very clear conception of his own self-identity and intellectual development. Two interviews lasted more than 4 hours and were transcribed next into 50 standard pages of text (Adam Mrozowicki).

Growing up in a Family of “PRL⁸ Working Intelligentsia ”

Jakub was born in 1974 in Wrocław. His father worked as an engineer in a large state-owned company providing heating services for the city. His mother was employed in a state-owned depot in the sector of apparel trade. Jakub was a single child. During the interview, he very often emphasised the importance of his family background. His parents represented the first generation of “working intelligentsia” (*inteligencja pracująca*) who advanced through university education in the period of real socialism⁹. His father completed his diploma in engineering whereas his mother holds MA in economics. The family of Jakub’s mother was strongly left-wing and atheist. His great-grandfather belonged to the pre-war communist movement (probably the Communist Party of Poland). During World War II, he was active in Gwardia Ludowa, People's Guard, in the region of Great Poland¹⁰ and he was involved in setting up a local section of the Polish Workers’ Party. His son, Jakub’s grandfather, became an army officer in 1950’s. By contrast, the family of Jakub’s father was Catholic. The only person in his close family, who had ever taken him to the Church, was his grandmother on his father’s side. Jakub remembers his early Church experiences as “scary”: “I totally didn’t

⁸ PRL = the Polish People’s Republic

⁹ An exception to the notion the “first generation of working intelligentsia” is Jakub’s maternal grandfather, who socially advanced as an army officer in the 1950s and 1960s and graduated in economics. Nevertheless, his social mobility was a part of a broader structural mobility of the post-WWII Polish society. Since a long-lasting ethos of intelligentsia was not present in Jakub’s family, the notion of the “first generation” seems adequate.

¹⁰ Armed anti-Nazi guerrilla organised by Soviet-controlled Polish Workers’ Party (PPR).

understand what was going on there!”. Once his parents met, Jakub’s father “left spiritual Catholicism”. As a result, Jakub was brought up in a fully atheistic environment.

Jakub started primary school in 1981. He was given careful music education by his mother, who herself wanted to study at the Musical Academy, but could not fulfil her aspirations. Recalling his experiences at the primary school, Jakub emphasises the deep-seated feeling of alienation, which resulted from two main factors. First, he lacked religious background typical of the most of his peers. Second, his parents were involved in the activities of communist-controlled organisations:

“In a primary school , I felt a bit of a misfit in this respect and I even felt kind of stigma because of this, a stigma of godless person. My parents were in the Party. There weren’t very high in its hierarchy (...). My mum was active in trade unions, which later became OPZZ¹¹ (...) My dad was, (...) active in the Union of Socialist Polish Youth (ZSMP), but he was a social activist. And because of this, he was also active in my school in the Parents’ Committee”

Jakub discussed the role of the social origins and political involvement of his parents in many places in the interview. They seem to be relevant for three biographical reasons: (1) the need to clarify the actual scope of political involvement of his parents in communist organisations and to anticipate the criticism of “serving the system”, (2) the need to emphasise an authenticity of political involvement, which is partially related to the present activism of Jakub; (3) the need to emphasise “otherness” of Jakub as an important component of his activist’s identity. Jakub feels that thanks to his early experience of “being a bit of a misfit” he can nowadays “understand better people who are in minority, who experienced some kind of stigma and alienation because of their otherness”.

The time of Jakub’s primary school coincided with political changes in Poland and the emergence of the anti-communist movement. Jakub’s mother joined Solidarność for a short while. His father, who described himself as “an authentic communist”, felt threatened. (“he was afraid of what people screamed on the streets, that they will ‘hang communists on trees

¹¹ OPZZ = All Poland Alliance of Trade Unions, a confederation created in 1984 on the basis of autonomous trade unions that emerged on the basis of former members of state- and party-controlled Union of Trade Unions (ZZZ) led by the Central Trade Union Council (CRZZ).

instead of leaves”). Jakub emphasised that he had been fully aware of the differences between him and some of his friends and neighbours: “You know, in the 1980s, we lived in a housing estate, in a block of flats, and I remember I admired that somebody got some parcels from the West, some gifts from the Church. We have never had it (...) I remember that my mum used to say: “Ah, well, our neighbours have video-recorder, but the most important thing is that we are healthy, that we are happy in our family and so on”.

Having finished primary school, Jakub continued education at a technical secondary school. He explains this decision as the consequence of socialisation and expectations of his parents: “There was still a conviction in the 1980s that a boy should go to a technical school, because of occupation. It’s an occupation, isn’t it?”. Jakub soon regretted his - or rather his parents’ - “choice” as it appeared that he had more “humanistic orientation”. He played guitar in blues bands; he wrote poetry and soon became a “tolerated misfit” at school. In the 5th grade of the school, he received a prize for his activity in “the field of poetry and music”.

Jakub’s family experienced the end of state socialism in terms of rapid changes in their occupational status and economic standing. By the end of 1980s, his father was sent to Czechoslovakia for an economically advantageous foreign contract. Even though he was employed as a shift foreman, which was a much lower post than that he had held in Poland, he earned relatively good money paid in vouchers of the state-owned bank (PKO). The latter were equivalents of dollars. Jakub visited his father two times. Back in Poland, he could buy his first cassette recorder in a shop with rationed foreign products (PEWEX). A year after his father came back from the contract, political changes in Poland accelerated. He was demoted from a managerial post in his firm and shifted to another department. Jakub interprets this event as a consequence of his fathers’ political activity.

Despite the demotion of Jakub’s father, the economic status of his family did not decline. His mother, whose state-owned company began to collapse, started a limited liability company. It was a wholesale firm selling cheap apparel products, mostly underclothes, supplied by street traders. The firm perfectly fitted into social demand at the beginning of systemic transformation. It expanded into 3 “small shops” in different parts of the same neighbourhood. A good economic climate lasted for couple of years until the first hypermarkets conquered the Polish market pushing out small traders out of competition. The family experiences of early capitalism had a direct influence on Jakub’s secondary socialisation which largely relied on the rejection of parents’ “new materialism”.

In Search for a New Spirituality

When Jakub's mum transformed herself from a state-owned employee into a private entrepreneur, Jakub was in the second grade of a secondary school. At this time, in 1990, the first biographical turning point took place. Jakub described it as a rebellion against the emerging "materialism" of his parents¹². Thanks to the economic activity of his mother, the economic situation of the family significantly improved after 1989. His parents bought a new car and they started to go for holidays abroad, among others, to Portugal and Cyprus. Even though they still lived in a block of flats, they were able to hire an immigrant from Ukraine to clean their apartment. Jakub, fascinated and influenced by the music and literature associated with the Western counter-culture of the late 1960s, perceived the change in the lifestyle of his parents very critically.

"Just recall what I've just said. In the 1980s, my mum said that the most important thing was that we were healthy. And already in 1991, 1992, I remember that after a party at my grandma's place, we went to a taxi stand and my parents did not want to the Polonez [a Polish car], but they went for the Mercedes, because they wanted to be driven home comfortably. Such small things were for me the signs of their materialism, an early capitalist Polish materialism. And I rebelled against it, this made me very uneasy".

In consequence of his anti-materialistic attitude, Jakub became involved in different countercultural circles, mostly related to "post-hippie" milieus. At this time, he began to read Polish poets and writers, who were known for their criticism of consumerist lifestyles, such as Edward Stachura and Marek Hłasko. He started playing in a blues band, co-organised jam sessions, and went for different concerts in other parts of Poland. At the climax of his rebellion, he escaped from home together with his friend for one week. Inspired by the poems of Stachura, they planned to start working in the mountains as woodcutters. However, they both came back home after one week. The consequence of the escape was a "terrible conflict

¹² Jakub develops an argumentative background construction which serves as an explanation of the relationship between political involvement of his parents in state socialism and their position after 1989. He emphasises, among others, that his mother represented "an ethos of private initiative" and did not benefit from her previous position in a state-owned firm and the political involvement of her family.

with parents”, who were advised by a psychologist to take away all poetry books from Jakub: “I kept one volume of Stachura hidden in my sofa”.

Despite harsh measures adopted by his parents, Jakub rebellion did not stop. Instead it changed its character into a “search for spirituality”. Jakub was introduced into religious circles by his girlfriend, who gave him the New Testament. He saw its main character - Jesus as “a cool hippie, who said that you had to renounce all these [material] goods”. Another significant other, who supported Jakub’s conversion, was his aunt (father’s sister), a Polish language teacher and quite religious. Trying to reconcile him with his family, she explained to him that Christianity meant humility rather than rebellion. All this brought Jakub closer to religion: “Spirituality was for me a form of escape from growing materialism, which surrounded me (...) And at a certain moment I considered myself a person who believed in God”. He befriended members of the local Community of Revival in the Holy Spirit. The climax of his spiritual involvement was the decision to get baptised in early 1994. He recalls his conversion in terms of social rather than religious phenomenon: “Until the first year of my studies, I tried to find myself in Catholicism. But I didn’t fully manage. Well, I really tried. (..) People were impressed that I did it consciously, that everybody was baptised unconsciously, and I did it consciously at the age of 19. That was cool.”

Meanwhile, in the autumn 1994, Jakub finished secondary school and began studying sociology at the University of Wrocław. This was the beginning of the next turning point in his secondary socialisation. Studying sociology meant the relativisation of his religious experiences. Discouraged by “one failed confession”, he decided to avoid going to church. However, he did not immediately give up his “search for spirituality”. Through his contacts in blues bands, he came closer to Baptists’ circles in Wrocław. He attended their meetings for two years, in 1995-1997. Paradoxically, he reinterprets his Protestant experiences in terms of rediscovery of atheism:

“I was always offended by ostentatious faith and by the politicisation of Catholicism in Poland (...) Perhaps this is why I found myself so quickly among Protestants (...) It was a kind of an acquisition of a more and more conscious, rationalistic stance, and the challenging of dogmas. At a certain point I started to disagree also with Protestants (...) All of sudden, I began to identify myself as agnostic (...) I also started reading Bez

Dogmatu [Without Dogma]¹³ at this time and I read there that agnosticism was just a fake pseudo-atheism and that it was better to say nothing. And I would say it today (...) I would say that religion as spiritual experience is something I can understand today, but for me personally it is just totally irrelevant [experience]”

Jakub explains his growing detachment from Christianity as the result of several turning points and experiences. The most important was his participation in the exchange programme with the university in the United States during his MA studies, his international contacts in multicultural environment, and the decision to write his PhD thesis about Jewish migrants. The biographical process of “rediscovery of atheism” can be interpreted as an important marker of his biographical identity. First, it enables him to reconstruct the intergenerational continuity of his political convictions. Second, it makes it possible to emphasise the early sources of his cultural otherness as a “marginal person” in all relevant milieus in which he was involved. Finally, and much less openly, it allows him to distinguish himself from his parents in terms of a distinctive intellectual lifestyle of a critical left-wing “humanist”, who reflexively and creatively transcends a technical-instrumental habitus of his parents shaped by the experiences of advancement in real socialism.

From Market Dogmatism to Sociological Imagination

The second important biographical process related to Jakub’s secondary socialisation is labelled by him as “the colonisation by neo-liberalism”. At the beginning of his university studies in 1994, he adopted a very pragmatic understanding of the meaning of his education: “We accustomed ourselves to this reality of capitalism, in which you had to be useful.” Influenced by his very good friend, a “hard core liberal”, during the fourth year of university studies Jakub joined the university circle of Unia Wolności (the Freedom Union), a liberal party of intelligentsia originating from anti-communist movement of Solidarność. Joining the Freedom Union can be interpreted as a further critical elaboration of his family background: “My parents were terribly unhappy, because, you know, they became the SLD electorate of postcommunist party after 1990.” At the same time, it can be understood in terms of searching for “an ethos of intelligentsia”, which might have been lacking in his own family (“There was an ethos of intelligentsia in it [the Freedom Union]. And all the promises of transformation”).

¹³ A left-wing, anticlerical magazine.

Influenced by a right-centrist ideology, Jakub developed strongly liberal views on economy and politics. He described himself as a conservative liberal, but he emphasised that he was never involved in nationalist actions. He explains this lack of interest in and dislike of nationalist agenda by the influence of his family background.

At this time, Jakub was also very active at the Institute of Sociology. He became the leader of Student's Scientific Circle and organised a Polish – Czech – German conference. Due to his academic achievements, he was granted a chance to participate in student exchange programme with the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, in the USA, 1998. Unexpectedly, it marked the next biographical turning point and the beginning of a biographical and political metamorphosis, this time to leftist political views:

“It's 1998. I've this right-centrist political views, I'm an ambitious student, I believe in my future within capitalism. (...) And, what? I'm going for this scholarship in the US, I mean for this yearly exchange, in Greensboro. And I meet with these people from this university, with the sociologist M.E. (...). I enrolled for her classes about “Ethnic and Racial Relations in the US”. And, obviously, she told us much more during these classes than about ethnic and racial relations (...) It appeared that the issues of racism cannot be understood without the reference to class analysis, that you can talk normally about Marx during seminars”.

For Jakub, conversations with his American professor were revealing in many ways. They met frequently in formal and informal ways. Among others, Jakub taught her Polish. Prof. M.E., in turn, assisted him in developing his MA research and introduced him into less visible side of the US reality connected with poverty and racism. Inspired by these discussions, Jakub conducted empirical research to his master thesis on “Symbolic ethnicity and structural racial formation of middle-class white Americans”. During his one year stay in the US, he also met his future girlfriend, K., who was also an exchange student. They travelled together a lot on cheap buses discovering the poor parts of the North America. Everyday life and studies in Greensboro shook Jakub's liberal identifications. Leaning on these experiences, he wrote his first academic article. He describes these biographical changes as “an absolute revolution”: “From the angle of

racism, I started to understand that in order to know it, to explore it, I have to look more broadly at it. Well, a broad systemic analysis is necessary”.

In 1999, Jakub came back to Poland as a changed person. He felt uneasy in his old political milieu. With a limited success, he tried to introduce cultural issues, mostly related to the situation of minorities, into the party’s discourse: “In the Freedom Union, I started to tell these guys: ‘You know, I am probably a social-liberal...’ , ‘Did you lose your mind because of these United States? What are you talking about?!’, ‘You know, some minorities, perhaps we should...could we perhaps temper this economic discourse?’”. He also kept on writing academic articles emphasising the need to broaden the definition of liberalism.

Jakub’s left-wing views emerged gradually as the consequence of biographical experiences, lectures and meetings with new significant others. Having defended his MA thesis in 1999, he was granted a doctoral scholarship at the Institute of Sociology in Wrocław. He decided to write on the biographical experiences and identities of Jewish migrants from Poland expelled by the communist authorities in 1968. In 2000, he was granted a scholarship of the Soros Foundation (Open Society Institute) to enrol for one-year post-graduate Jewish Studies program at the University of Oxford. He made use of the grant to write the diploma dissertation at the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. During his stay in the UK, Jakub became involved in the circles of left-wing intellectuals from different countries, which further solidified his own political attitudes. Indirectly, his left-wing thinking was also the consequence of academic interests in the cosmopolitan identities of Jewish émigrés..

In summer 2001, when Jakub returned to Poland, he moved out from his parents place to live with his close friend, B. The relationship with K. developed, but they did not live together. Limited money, which Jakub acquired as a PhD student (around EUR 200), were insufficient to survive and he started working as a translator. He dealt mostly with the translations of research tools for market research. Retrospectively, he describes it as an irritating experience, marked by irregular payment of wages and the necessity to deal with orders which he both politically and personally did not particularly like.

“It All Comes Together”

In 2002, Jakub was already strongly embedded in his sociological milieu in Wrocław. His circle of friends included a future activist of the Polish Labour Party, E., some activists of the Anarchists Federation, and left-wing intellectuals. At the turn of 2001 and 2002, Jakub got

involved in a research project on anti-Semitism in Poland for the Jewish Institute in London. Searching for informants in Poland, he contacted the anti-fascist association Nigdy Więcej (Never Again), with which he soon started to closely cooperate. It brought him the first experiences of practical activism in his life. He prepared and read a leaflet during a small anti-fascist demonstration in Wrocław, on the anniversary of Crystal Night in November 2002. An excerpt of his speech was transmitted by Polish Radio.

The intellectual development of Jakub was strongly connected with his relationship with K. Jakub and K. started to live together by the end of 2002. At this time, K. got involved in the field of gender studies. In 2001-2002, she finished an MA in this field at the Central European University in Budapest. Describing their relationship, Jakub says:

“It was a mutual theoretical maturing, we supplemented each other. I remember that we wrote together an article, and earlier a paper, on the rights of gays and lesbians in Poland, in which a discussion appeared, which concerned the liberal discourse of human rights and minority rights. So, at the beginning of 21st century, we began to catch up with ideas, which the vestiges of the American New Left probably went through by the end of the 1980s. It was like a belated elaboration of a classical intersectional analysis at this time (...) And we were coming to this together.”

Inspirations for the development of an intersectional, holistic approach to the analysis of contemporary capitalist societies came from the European Social Forum in Florence, which K. attended in November 2002. She came back truly impressed and inspired by an attempt to “integrate emancipatory struggles”. This was the first time that both Jakub and K. came across a broadly understood alter-globalist movement. Jakub remembers the emotional report of K. about the discussions during the ESF: “They talk not only about racism, they talk about war. And, listen, they talk about capitalism as well! So it all comes together”. Jakub describes the process of becoming an activist as mostly an intellectual process. Unlike many leftists and anarchists in Wrocław, he was not involved in the squatters’ movement or punk’s counter-culture. Jakub remarks openly: “My coming to activism was not related to an activist identity. It was through lectures“. At this time, his most important lectures were the books of sociological modern classics, Pierre Bourdieu and Peter Berger.

Meanwhile, Jakub's disappointment with Polish liberalism changed into its definite rejection. In 2001, he voted for the first time for the post-communist party, the Alliance of Polish Left (SLD). In October 2002, he attended a lecture of the former anti-communist dissident at the University of Wrocław, an informal leader of Polish liberals and the chief editor of post-Solidarity newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Election Gazette), Adam Michnik: "I remember, one of his statements was that the biggest threat to the world is Saddam Hussein. What bullshit does this guy talk about? How did he find this out? What kind of analysis is this?". Michnik's talk was the bitter end of Jakub's liberal sympathies. His activism against the war in Iraq was a natural result of his earlier intellectual trajectory.

Biographical Metamorphosis: Anti-war Protests

In early 2003, Jakub and other leftist sociologists in Wrocław began to discuss the need to get involved in political actions beyond the gates of the university. They formed a new informal group and called themselves The Active Society. Their first actions were provoked by the attack of the US-dominated troops on Iraq on March 20th 2003. Jakub and his colleagues joined a broad anti-war coalition (Wrocław's Anti-War Coalition), which consisted of anarchists, communists, squatters and pro-Palestine activists. For Jakub, taking to the streets meant the beginning of a biographical metamorphosis, in which he transformed himself from a left-wing intellectual into a left-wing activist:

"This was a true revelation for me, a discovery. Because I knew that there were some actions in Wrocław in the defence of squats, I knew that there were some actions, when anarchists supported nurses¹⁴, but it was 2002 and I still sat at home (...) And when this issue of the war in Iraq emerged, it was imperative. Well, it was the ethical, it was a very moral issue for me, which day by day became a political issue. It became political because we took to the streets. (...) I was 28 years old and suddenly I became radical. Suddenly, activism becomes more important than anything else. It becomes more important than my PhD thesis, than my interest in Jewish issues (...) Political subjectivity was the realised rage. I felt it this way, a lot of us felt it this way "

¹⁴ Jakub refers to anarchist solidarity actions with medical staff who went on strike in 2001 against the plans of the closure of their hospital in Wrocław.

Jakub quickly became one of informal leaders of the protests. Anti-war activism integrated many threads of his life: his relationship with K. (who also was involved), his US experiences, his criticism of racism and capitalism. He kept on reading and writing a lot to make sense of these new experiences. He encountered the writings of C.W. Mills, who in the 1960s suggested that anti-war movement was the most important of global social movements. He felt exactly this way: “It was a meta-issue”. Meanwhile, the dynamics of the protests increased. In March and April 2003, anti-war demonstrations, sit-ins and street blockades were organised every week, grouping around 300-400 people. The demonstrations were systematically blocked by the police and some of its participants, Jakub including, were arrested. Activism began to affect Jakub’s private life. Jakub’s mother claimed that she got an anonymous call from the police warning her about the negative consequences of political involvement of her son. The story of police invigilation was published by a local newspaper. At the same time, an undercover police agent visited the Institute of Sociology. As the consequence of the police invigilation, Jakub went through a short “breakdown”. However, he did not give up his activism. Thanks to interviews, seminars and newspaper articles, he became recognizable figure in Wrocław’s anti-war movement:

“I think that for many activists it is a very cool moment of a deeper initiation when, as an advocate of the movement, as an advocate of an issue, you speak to the media (...) And also that in the sense that, you know, you feel a confrontation and in the tide of this confrontation the feeling emerges that you cannot move back. I can get down and I can skip one action, but, it has started....and you cannot turn it back”

Jakub, together with other people from the Active Society, successfully defended himself from the accusation of leading the anti-war protests during several court trials in 2004 and 2005. However, the dynamics of the anti-war movement slowed down. After the spring wave in 2003, manifestations were organised irregularly besides yearly demonstrations in the anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war. The movement began to change its form, too. From the streets it went to seminar rooms. Jakub, together with the activists of Active Society, organised seminars in 2005 (“Stop the war, let’s start a dialogue of civilisations”) and in 2006 (“The world for all, without war, hate and intolerance”). Both events were accompanied by an

art contest for children. With other activists he also organised a stand about anti-militarism and alter-globalisation during the rock festival “Woodstock” (in 2005 and 2006).

Jakub involvement in anti-war actions contributed to broadening his political views. At the beginning, he developed moral and “liberal-democratic” criticism of war based on the questioning the legality of war in the context of Polish Constitution, Penal Code and the Chart of United Nations. Soon after, he took a more holistic view, which defined the war in Iraq as a part of US imperialism. The transformation of his political views was accompanied by an increasing political involvement and the emergence of alter-globalist identity.

The Construction of Alter-globalist Identity as an Open-Ended Biographical Project

Jakub started to lead anti-war protests in 2004. This coincided with the emergence of alter-globalist identity, which soon became his main political identification:

“I acted as if I was high. My PhD thesis was put aside, I was active in many initiatives. I was in Attac, in this Active Society. (...) Then I had a broadcast in the radio, meanwhile I became involved in the Recycling of Ideas [a magazine]. So it was multi-track activity, which had a common denominator. But around 2004, perhaps the anti-summit [in Warsaw, against the European Economic Forum] was decisive, I started to call myself alter-globalist. And this also was a step further (...) This alter-globalism popped up because [I thought]: ‘I am not “anti”, after all I am still cosmopolitan (...) So I am a globalist, sure, but I am ‘alter’ in the sense that it would be great to globalise all these human rights, employees’ rights, minorities’ rights, this democracy, all our ideals”

In November 2003, Jakub together with K. and two sociologists from the Active Society attended the European Social Forum in Paris. This brought about the next biographically significant experience: “I saw these several dozen thousands people, a lot of seminars on different subjects, in which you searched for common denominators (...) There were different attempts to write a declaration for Social Europe or Europe against neo-liberalism. And, precisely, [there was] this combination of perspectives.” The activists of the Active Society developed close contacts with other alter-globalists, including the feminist movement Global Women Strike. As the result of international connections, they decided to

join the Polish division of Attac in January 2004. This new organisational affiliation marked the growing importance of socio-economic issues in Jakub's biographical identity.

In March 2004, left-wing students, squatters and activists of Active Society supported the sit-in strike of construction workers in a local firm. They collected money and prepared food for the strikers within the Food Not Bombs initiative. Jakub participated in a spontaneously organised and short-lived Students' Committee for the Defence of Workers. Together with other activists, he visited strikers in their firm. The confrontation of workers and left-wing activists was an uneasy, but biographically relevant experience: "We came on this strike and we saw the Mass. And we had to stand it (...) There was a clash. I'm not sure how all of these workers looked at all these pierced squatters, with dreadlocks (...) But, still, it gave me an impression that something is possible". In the same month, the Active Society co-organised feminist demonstration, Manifa, which combined economic demands with gender-related postulates. Meanwhile, Jakub got also involved in the circle of editors of Wrocław's anarchist and alter-globalist magazine, the Recycling of Ideas. He also joined for a short time *Nowa Lewica* (the New Left), an anti-capitalist and socialist political party. Together with Wrocław's division of the New Left, he co-organised campaign for the minimal guaranteed income and distributed leaflets in the front of job centres.

The symbolic moment for the development of Jakub's alter-globalist identity was the anti-summit against the European Economic Forum in Warsaw, in April 2004. The anti-summit, which was organised in Poland for the first time, had very bad press. It was presented by the mainstream media in terms of expected riots which would destroy the image of Poland just before its official joining of the EU. Jakub, together with the editors of the Recycling of Ideas and other Wrocław's activists, attempted to change this public perception. They organised an informational campaign about the alter-globalist postulates at the University and at the market square and published a special issue of their magazine to be distributed in the streets. A part of the campaign was Jakub's article "Who are alter-globalists?", which was published in the local edition of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. In spite of media fears, the anti-summit went very peacefully. According to Jakub, it had a crucial influence on the movement in Poland:

"First, the climate of talking about the alter-globalist movement before and after the anti-summit was radically different (...) Some strongholds appeared even in the

mainstream media, which we identified with neoliberal hegemony. They could be used in the future (...) Second issue connected with the anti-summit was, to put it figuratively, that we counted each other for the first time. We saw, how many we are, more or less. It was about 5000 people, not more. We saw, who we are.“

By the end of 2004, Jakub and his friends from the Recycling of Ideas initiated the discussion on the identity of alter-globalist movement, which was next published in this magazine. It was the first ever attempt to summarise alter-globalist experiences in Poland. In October 2004, Jakub attended the next European Social Forum held in London. At the turn of 2005 and 2006, he started preparing a broadcast in one of academic radio stations. From his subjective perspective, the radio became another tool for the “empowerment of activists” and the “integration” of the milieu.

Meanwhile, the economic issues became more and more important both for the alter-globalist movement in Poland and for Jakub himself. His economic situation at this time was relatively unstable. He worked as a contractual academic teacher at one of private universities in Wrocław. Only in autumn 2006, he acquired a permanent contract. He was still very active as a contractual researcher in various projects and as a translator. However, teaching activities, translations and social activism have put him off from working on his PhD thesis. Jakub’s personal life began to destabilise, too. In 2006, his girlfriend, K., acquired a flat from her parents and moved out from a flat they rented. This meant the beginning of the end of a long-term relationship. Both the unfinished PhD thesis and unstable personal life became soon “two major meta-problems” for Jakub.

Since 2006, Jakub’s involvement in alter-globalist movement was dominated by the participation in anti-capitalist, labour-related initiatives. At the beginning of 2006, he joined the Committee for the Defence and Help of Repressed Workers (KPiORP). For a short time, Jakub became a contact person in Wrocław of the charismatic leader of the Free Trade Union August ’80, WZZ Sierpień ’80, a radical break-away from NSZZ Solidarność being one of the main forces within KPiORP. In 2006 he was offered to run for local parliament as a candidate of a political party related to Sierpień ’80, Polska Partia Pracy (PPP, Polish Labour Party). Yet, he rejected this proposal explaining that “he was not ready”.

In the first half of 2006, together with the Active Society, which meanwhile transformed into an association, Jakub got involved in different labour protests at the local

level. He also co-organised support of WZZ Sierpień '80 for the secondary school students, who protested against the conservative minister of education. One of the local achievements of integrating very different milieus was the organisation of a temporary office of the LGTB movement (Campaign Against Homophobia - Kampania Przeciw Homofobii) at a place rented by WZZ Sierpień '80. In July 2007, Jakub resigned from his function as a board member of Attac Poland (which he held from February the same year) as the result of the withdrawal of ATTAC from the KPiORP¹⁵. By the end of the same year, he co-organised support actions for a sit-in strike of miners in one of the coal mines led by WZZ Sierpień '80, in which, among others, the Global Women Strike was involved.

At the present moment, Jakub's activity is most related to the editorial work in the Recycling of Ideas and the alter-globalist broadcast in radio LUZ. Despite his strong involvement in academic milieu and activists' environment, Jakub himself feels "alienated" in both circles: "[An academic milieu] is my natural milieu, but on other hand, it is the milieu, in which I permanently feel estranged. So it's a kind of a marginal position, isn't it? But for the same reasons I feel estranged among activists. Because there is a kind of anti-intellectualism among activists and I do not fit very well there either". The sense of otherness, deeply embedded in his early biographical experiences, remains, thus, the central part of his biographical identity. Jakub rejects to answer a question to summarise his life story. Instead, he emphasises his open-ended, future-oriented attitude:

"I would imagine such a coda, as you called it, in terms of what I'd like to fulfil (...). I'd like to write couple of things, I'd like to do some innovative research, I've got some ideas about it. I'd like to educate perhaps 2 generations of students as a person, whom they trust (...), who would inspire them for some kind of activity, not necessary political activity, but perhaps civic activity (...) I'd like to have a feeling that I lived this life creatively and for the benefit of others (...) I'm not able to give you a summary ((laughing)). I don't like to examine my life in this way for myself!"

¹⁵ The official reasons of the resignation of ATTAC from its participation in KPiORP were related to the alleged dominance of the Free Trade Union August '80 over this initiative. The Free Trade Union August '80 was in turn accused of supporting nationalistic movements in the past.

Private Life and Work: Coping with “Meta-problems”

Jakub’s life story is predominantly focused on his intellectual trajectory. His private life is present as far as it is interconnected with this major thread. In a part of his life story, which concerns his childhood and adolescence, Jakub narrates a lot about his family of origins. Next, there is a thread of his relationship with K. The definite end of relationship in 2007-08 was a painful biographical experience, about which Jakub does not want to talk in detail: “She got a flat from her parents in spring 2006, and I somehow decided, you know, that no,[I won’t move with her]....And it began to fall apart. It wasn’t clear back then, but last year she told me that she met somebody. Ok, then it’s finished”. Jakub and K. keep in touch both at the academic level and at the level of personal contacts. Yet, both of them settled their private affairs. Recently, Jakub began to meet with a new girlfriend: “Let’s say, if I had two meta-problems one year ago, the first one being my PhD thesis and the second one my private life, I have only one at this moment ((laughing)).” His new girlfriend, who has just finished her studies, was not involved in the left-wing movements in the past. Yet, she became more and more radical as she got involved in some initiatives, in which Jakub participates.

Today, Jakub’s contacts with his parents are overall positive. As their only child, he even feels a bit spoiled. His parents sometimes support him financially. Regarding political views, they remained devoted left-wing voters. Jakub’s father attended two anti-war demonstrations. However, his mum was afraid of the consequences of his political involvement: “She told me that I should have not got involved because it blocked time-wise the issue of my PhD thesis. And, on the other hand, as I’ve prepared this broadcast for the last 3 years, my mum has been a faithful listener. And somehow, she is always proud and tells other people: listen to him, listen! ((laughing))”.

Most of Jakub’s friends are directly or indirectly connected with an alternative milieu and left-wing political scene. The only exception is his closest friend, B., who is a member of a liberal party. Jakub has known him for 17 years. Due to divergences in political views, they went through harsh discussions, yet they maintained their intimate relationship. Except for B., his social network consists of other activists, with whom he meets both after discussion meetings and during parties. Most of his friends are from Wrocław, but he also stays in touch with activists from Poznań and Warsaw and people who live abroad.

Jakub’s professional career relies on an upward, partially blocked and non-linear mobility in academic milieu. So far, he has written about 30 academic texts and book chapters

in Polish and English, including articles in peer reviewed foreign academic journals. In 2000-2007, he taught various sociological courses at the University of Wrocław. In 2006, he acquired a permanent teaching post at one of the private universities, at which he worked in 2005 and 2006 on a contractual basis. Jakub thinks about teaching students as not just a job, but also a kind of political activity:

“Preparing classes in a certain way, organising discussion in a certain way, provoking people to ask critical questions, provoking them to think about some issues (...) [it’s] an element, I would not call it political, perhaps it would be an overstatement, but for sure work, which... There is certainly much more in it than just coming to the university and reproducing knowledge”.

Despite an impressive academic track record, Jakub has not finished his PhD thesis yet. He considers it as his main “meta-problem” at the present moment: “I call it my meta-problem that somehow I was not able, for different reasons, [finish it]. You know, at certain moment, it was my socio-political involvement and the necessity to support myself from different sources”. Even though he admits that some people treat him as if he had done his PhD thesis, he still feels both external pressure and internal constraint to finish it as soon as possible. Firstly, he thinks that an academic job suits him best. Secondly, he feels that earning the PhD degree would enable him to increase his position as an advocate and speaker of the movement: “You know, I think that it would be cool to speak in the public having this title of doctor, because it increases the symbolic capital of not even me, but a given initiative”. Finally, he admits that finishing the PhD thesis will stabilise his work situation, giving him credentials which would protect him against potential lay off or demotion.

The second track of Jakub’s occupational activity is related to English-Polish translations. Until now, he translated and published 4 books of authors related to the current debates on globalisation. He also translated around 20 articles. For Jakub, the translation work strictly refers to his self-identity within the alter-globalist movement: “I can see my role in the movement as a translator, not only as the translator of texts, but also as somebody, who looks at ideas elsewhere tries to translate them into Polish reality”.

Describing his living standard, Jakub says that his income is sufficient to support himself, but he has “no big needs” at this stage of his life. His earnings at the university are

limited. If there are no additional research projects and translations, he has no additional incomes. When money appears, he spends it mostly on books and trips, including self-financing of a part of academic conferences. He rents a small flat, but at the moment of the second interview, he was moving to a new place. A new flat is a kind of a tenement house in which life-long shares are bought by tenants (Towarzystwo Budownictwa Społecznego, The Association of Social Housing). Jakub took an advantageous loan from the university and participated in a city programme for young academic staff to support them in buying their first apartment. He was also partially financially supported by his parents to contribute some additional expenses related to it.

Cultural Consumption and Lifestyle: the Reinvention of the Left-wing Intelligentsia

Jakub's cultural consumption and lifestyle are strongly connected with his left-wing political attitudes and academic interests. He admits that he likes to approach culture "holistically" combining lectures and cultural participation. He reads mostly sociological authors, the most important of them being Pierre Bourdieu, Peter Berger, Immanuel Wallerstein, Zygmunt Bauman, and C. Wright Mills. Asked about persons he admires, he mentions Pierre Bourdieu. He considers Bourdieu "a critical intellectual who went far and who was simultaneously able to objectify his own position and position of his colleagues (...) [and who] was able by the end of his life to stand on a concrete side of a political struggle and, you can say, class struggle". Jakub also mentions other critical intellectuals, who are biographically relevant for him: Immanuel Wallerstein, Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein. Asked about his favourite prose writings, Jakub admits that he does not "have too much time and drive for it". He mentions Elfride Jelinek, who represented a clear, left-wing stance in her novels.

Jakub developed diverse interests in music, which are mostly connected with his intellectual quests. His mother, who had attended a music school, attempted to accustom him to classical music since his early childhood. However, Jakub admits that "his cultural competences in classical music are very weak". Much more relevant genres for him are blues and jazz. He played in different blues and folk-rock bands during his secondary school and university studies, but he stopped this activity due to lack of time and other obligations. His current musical interests are connected with his broadcasts and social activism. He thinks about creating a band which would combine left-wing lyrics with cabaret music and accompany demonstrations: "It's about showing people that these are not just pissed-off

people with clenched fists, but these are also people, who carry on a different vision of more joyful, democratic world.” In a similar way he justifies his interest in reggae and hip-hop. He refers to the research of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, which “explores these paths and points of resistance in popular culture”.

Jakub admits that he has no competences in visual arts, such as painting and sculpture: “I visited couple of galleries in different European and non-European cities, but, well, it doesn’t give me a thrill.”. He is much keener on movies. For a long time, the most important film for Jakub has been “The Wall”, and during his university studies he was “positively bitten by Woody Allen”. Recently, he discovered Ken Loach as a director who openly deals with social and political struggles. He is very critical of post-modern cinematography. For instance, talking about Lars Van Trier, he makes the distinction between “Idiots”, which he dislikes, and more socially involved movies, such as “Dancer in the Dark” or “Dogville”. He also admires critical documentaries.

Despite its highly individualised form, Jakub’s life story is also a collective story of a part of the nascent Polish left-wing, humanist intelligentsia. This new critical intelligentsia is different from both the technical intelligentsia of PRL, represented by Jakub’s parents, and from multigenerational cultural elites incorporated figuratively by “Warsaw circles”. Jakub is not only fully aware of this fact, but also presents it as a part of his distinctive identity: “I’m a kind of lumpen-intelligentsia, I have no super-intellectual traditions, it’s all about an advancement in PRL (...) I can’t say like one of the leftist leaders that we’re this intelligentsia from Warsaw families, who has always had a lot of books. Well, I had some books but probably these were other books than in the case of these leaders. But, on the other hand, my mum and this classical music, you know, [it was] a kind of mix of PRL.” As documented in the last section, the reinvention of left-wing intelligentsia, represented in Jakub’s story, combines some aspects of local cultural sensitivity with ideas borrowed from left-wing intellectual circles in the Western Europe and the USA.

Political Views: Alter-globalism as the Radicalisation of Democracy

Jakub developed a very intellectual approach to alter-globalism, which is rooted in the variety of sociological and socialist ideas. In his interpretation, the sources of alter-globalist ideologies in Poland are twofold. On the one hand, they come from North American experiences and Western European inspirations. On the other hand, there are important local

sources of alter-globalist views, which are connected with the experiences of state socialism and anti-communist resistance. Jakub refers to the tradition of the first Solidarność as the “pre-figuration of anti-systemic alliances transcending class divisions”. At the same time, he recognises the need to reclaim a part of positive experiences of PRL, which in his case were related to the social advancement of his parents. The juxtaposition of family experiences with competing historical discourses contributes to a highly ambivalent approach to the past:

“On the one hand, I really consider PRL as a promise of socialism and the old left. And I can see some strands of PRL, which deserve to be reclaimed at the level of an honest discussion, even if they don’t require to defend them (...) As I told you at the beginning of this interview, I come from family of intelligentsia that socially advanced in PRL (...) So if you look at the history of my family, PRL wouldn’t be irrelevant. On the other hand, I am absolutely aware of what it was at the level of not only political authoritarianism (...) but also concerning the issues, in which socialism promised a lot, but there were deficiencies. First of all the issues of workers’ empowerment. Because most likely without them Solidarność would never emerge. But perhaps this workers’ empowerment was so strong in PRL that something like Solidarność was possible back then and that it’s impossible today. So it is a multi-layered dialectic”

The search for a new universalism, which lies at the core of Jakub’s political attitudes, can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome historical discourse which constrained the development of the left in post-socialist Poland. Jakub considers alter-globalism as an attempt to integrate various emancipatory struggles: “Regardless if I am an Arab, Jew, gay or straight, we are all employees, victims of capitalism and we all live on the same planet. It is the search for a new universalism”. This new universalism should also transcend the postmodern discussion of the dispersed politics of identity, rooted in the rhetoric of the New Left. Quoting Naomi Klein, Jakub says that the New Left ideas, including the politics of identity and anti-etatism, were appropriated by the neoliberal policies of the 1980s. Nowadays, the core of alter-globalism relies on protecting the rights threatened by neo-liberalisation. In this sense, the movement is again predominantly anti-capitalist and employee-oriented. At the local level, new universalism is an attempt to reclaim some traditional left-wing ideas, which were excluded from the public discourse in Poland as a part

of the state socialist legacy. For Jakub, this attempt has also a personal dimension related to reclaiming his family history as a part of his own intellectual trajectory. A quest for new universalism can be considered a biographical figure which enables him to construct his life in terms of biographical continuity despite the radical transformations of his identity.

The second keyword in Jakub's political vocabulary is democracy. He is fully aware that this term can be considered an "empty signifier" and yet he makes use of it to denote the feature of an ideal world, which he would like to live in. He constructs three analytical levels, at which the ideal of democratisation should be put into action. At the global level, he refers to the idea of transnational "community of communities", which would enact some formally guaranteed rights, including those assumed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Jakub, democracy is not just about procedures, but also about the social and material empowerment of people to act as citizens: "This democratic order can be guaranteed not by only creating formal laws, but also by creating a material basis for people that (...) [they] can develop citizenship, participation in culture and self-governance at different levels.". At the local level, Jakub refers to the alter-globalist idea of "participatory democracy". It assumes, among others, "the participation of citizens or inhabitants in shaping the budget and consulting laws." Finally, at the micro-level of everyday life interactions, his vision of democracy relies on creating and enacting an "ideal of communicative space", which would enable people to express their views regardless of their social position and personal characteristics. This latter proposition, which, as noted by Jakub, assumes "the ethics of small things", should particularly apply to groups of activists.

The identification of alter-globalism with the radicalisation of democratic ideas can be considered another example of the combination of exogenous and indigenous cultural resources. On the one hand, the notion of grass-roots democracy lies at the core of the vision of localisation and power dispersal, which is promoted, among others, by such alter-globalist ideologues as Naomi Klein (2002). On the other hand, the idea of democracy has an additional meaning in the local, Polish context. It reflects attempts of the new Polish left-wing milieus to reclaim the idea of democratisation from its appropriation by market discourse. The synthesis of these two sources seems to represent an important feature of alter-globalist movement in Poland. In this respect, Jakub's biography can be considered a rich sociological document of not just his own intellectual trajectory, but also of collective attempts to reinvent an authentic left-wing ideology and sensitivity in a post-socialist context.

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