

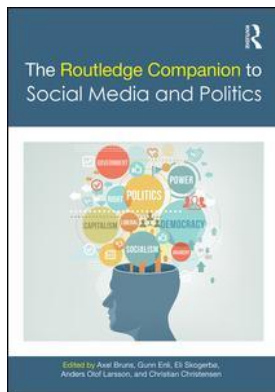
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21

NATIONALIST AND ANTI-FASCIST MOVEMENTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Christina Neumayer

Introduction

There is a rich body of research on the interaction of social media and political movements across the world—examples include student protests, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy movement (Bruns et al. 2013; Castells 2012; Dahlgren 2013). Most of these studies focus on the radical Left and popular movements, the emancipative potential of social media, and activists' social media strategies and tactics. However, nationalist and right-wing movements on social media are usually discussed as a separate entity or subcategory of alternative discourse on the Web (Atton 2006; Cammaerts 2009; Wojcieszak 2010), not taking into account the similarities of their tactics. Although some argue the necessity of including groups with nationalist and racist values in the study of alternative media and counterpublics (Atton 2004; Brouwer 2006; Warner 2002), there have been few attempts to understand how this might be done.

This chapter is based on an analysis of social media communication during nationalist and anti-fascist protests in Germany. It seeks to understand how the antagonistic relationship between fascist and anti-fascist movements is expressed in social media. The chapter outlines the case, introduces an analytical framework, highlights similarities between the social media tactics of the two oppositional political positions, and argues that these similarities are important for understanding the antagonism of nationalist and anti-fascist activists in social media.

Counterpublics, Antagonism, and Social Media

Conceptualising both nationalist and anti-fascist movements as counterpublics (Brouwer 2006; Fraser 1990; Negt and Kluge 1972; Warner 2002) has the advantage of reflecting the relational perspective present in social media use. This relational component is apparent not only in the self-representation and interaction of nationalist and anti-fascist activists in social media but also in the larger media ecology within which social media are embedded. The relationship to mass media is relevant for the marginalised, oppressed, and oppositional self-representation in social media experienced by both sides. Long before the age of social media, Habermas (1962) criticised commercial influence on media institutions, which prevents the public sphere from its ideal

realisation. One threat of commercialisation is that the media, which should inform citizens so that they can engage in informed discussion, focus on advertising and consumer values, privileging consumption over political action on the part of the citizen. Similar criticism of how commercialisation restricts political engagement is raised in relation to social media (Fuchs 2011; Scholz 2008).

The concept of ‘counterpublics’ is based on the idea of unbalanced power relations in mass culture (Warner 2002). Counterpublics challenge these power relations, making marginalised and critical voices heard. Conceptually speaking, a public becomes a counterpublic on account of its resistance to domination. The counterpublics in the present study are in line with ‘subaltern publics’ (Fraser 1990) or counterpublics (Brouwer 2006; Warner 2002) that emphasise oppositional interpretations of identities, interests, and needs among members of subordinated groups. The counterpublics dealt with in this chapter, then, include subaltern publics representing the interests of the political left as well as publics that are antidemocratic, anti-egalitarian, and exclusive but help “expand the discursive space” (Fraser 1990: 124). Oppositionality in a counterpublic is “a position of rejection, resistance, or dissent” and emerges when “social actors perceive themselves to be excluded from or marginalized within mainstream or dominant publics and communicate about that marginality or exclusion” (Brouwer 2006: 197). The identity construction of neo-fascist movements, skinheads, and other antidemocratic groups as marginalised and negatively presented takes place in a similar manner (Hunt et al. 1994: 185) as for anti-fascist and anarchist movements.

Relatively unregulated (apart from corporate players), social media offer a wide range of opportunities for activists to negotiate and maintain meaning by turning them into publics of produsage (Bruns 2007). Many activists today have their own arsenal of social media platforms, facilitating the possibility of engaging a wide range of heterogeneous networked individuals (Svensson et al. 2015). Using social media, different political positions and forms of communication are articulated simultaneously. Due to their relationality, the oppositional and marginalised nature of counterpublics is conditioned by the social media ecology, including relationships between various independent, commercial, and public media. Social media enable not only carefully planned self-representation through blogs, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, and Twitter feeds but also messy and unpredictable communication via Facebook comments, tweets, comment boards, and YouTube videos recorded on mobile phones during protests.

Methodological Approaches and Empirical Material

This study draws on a data set composed by online communication concerning three interrelated events: (1) Two nationalist demonstrations in Dresden on 13 and 19 February 2011, accompanied by large counter-protests, with around 20,000 participating anti-fascists, members of NGOs and civil society, who sought to block the neo-Nazi march, and (2) a nationalist demonstration carried out in Leipzig in preparation for the above events, accompanied by blockades and counter-protests organised by a civil society network and anti-fascist activists. Since 2009, Dresden, the capital of Saxony, has become important to the political, legal, and social discussion surrounding neo-Nazi marches. The nationalist demonstration took place for the third time on 13 February, a memorial day for the World War II bombing of Dresden, used by nationalist groups for historical revisionism and victimisation of Germany. The events received attention from the news media and alternative media and were a trending topic on Twitter.

Table 21.1 Fascists and Anti-Fascists' Marginalisation and Oppositionality

	<i>Oppositional to</i>	<i>Dominated by</i>	<i>Addressee</i>	<i>Form of communication</i>	<i>Platforms</i>
Nationalists	Democrats, anti-fascists, Left	Democracy, anti-fascists, mass media, police	Public, other nationalists, anti-fascists, mass media	Self-representation, confrontation, discussion, comment	YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, blog
Anti-fascists	Nationalists, fascists, state	Fascists, mass media, police	Public, other anti-fascists, nationalists, mass media	Self-representation, confrontation, discussion, comment	YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, blog

The data set used in this study includes various online communication forms retrieved before, during, and after the anti-fascist protests against the nationalist demonstration. The data set is a selected part of a larger empirical material of communication concerning anti-fascist protests in Leipzig in 2010 and Dresden in 2011, composed of the following: Twitter (6,262 tweets), Facebook (7 groups/events), YouTube (45 videos, 9,820 comments), online news articles (1,140 articles, 4,121 comments), and 14 blogs and websites. The data were exported into a spreadsheet separating the units of text by variables such as date, author, comment, and addressee (if applicable), supported by a script developed for this purpose. Video data were imported into the qualitative analysis software TAMS analyser (see Neumayer 2013: 45–56). Additionally, analysis was informed by memos written by the author concerning informal interviews and observations during the events. Speech acts on various online media platforms served as an archive from which the author sampled and analysed until the point of saturation (Charmaz 2006) to identify similarities and patterns. The author translated speech acts into English from their German originals. To protect the original authors' comments, posts, and tweets, we do not provide further details on user accounts, and their texts are made untraceable by translating them. The analysis is structured in accordance with various expressions of oppositionality and marginalisation, as shown in Table 21.1.

The dominators can be summarised as the antagonistic other (fascists vs. anti-fascists), authority and the state (police, justice, state), and the mainstream media. In the following, I discuss how oppositionality to each of these dominators is expressed in social media.

Resisting the Antagonistic Other

The antagonistic relationship between the nationalist groups and anti-fascists is historically grounded. This constellation is unlikely to ever turn into agonism (Mouffe 2005), where different political positions are respectfully discussed with the other side. The antagonistic other is often portrayed as a dominant oppressor that must be resisted.

According to both sides in the conflict, social media (in contrast to mass media) provide an apparently open space in which these marginalised positions can be openly expressed. Similarly, Cammaerts (2009) in a study of Belgian extreme-right discourse identifies a double standard: hate speech and expression of extreme political opinion in blogs and forums claiming freedom of speech as well as demanding censorship of mainstream media and journalists who do not share their opinion. Although we usually discuss these attributes in relation to freedom of expression for the political Left, this idea is evident in the self-representation of oppositional groups on both ends of the political spectrum.

The nationalist groups in particular ground their marginalisation historically by using a rhetoric of victimisation, including elements of nationalist propaganda from World War II Germany (Braunthal 2009). This idea of victimisation is expressed in different forms in publicly available social media. The threshold of acceptability in public discourse decreases in circumstances that suggest intimacy and security. Facebook groups, for example, provide a feeling of intimacy and privacy in their apparently closed space. Although any Facebook user can view the comments in a public Facebook group or event, it is considered a place for the like-minded. The language used varies from formal to extremely informal, reflecting the counter-mainstream idea and allowing the expression of marginalised political opinion. Comments in the Facebook event page for the nationalist demonstration in Dresden range from ‘despite all those blockades and the agitation against us, we’ll show that we can remember the victims of the bomb terror with dignity and respect!’ to ‘Damn allies! The war is lost, and those swine bomb us! And we’re the war criminals?!? Fuck you! It’s a pity we didn’t bomb the USA’ [Facebook, event page]. The tone clearly indicates a feeling of intimacy and expected support from like-minded Facebook group members. This behaviour supports the idea of echo chambers (Sunstein 2009) and polarisation of similar political opinion. This becomes even more evident in the antagonism carried out in the nationalist and anti-fascist protests as the two ends of the political spectrum collide. Confrontation with the opposing political perspective radicalises one’s own political perspective (Wojcieszak 2010).

Despite the apparently unregulated space created by social media, corporate owners do enforce a certain degree of regulation. The nationalist Facebook page concerning the 13 February demonstration had already been removed due to its violation of Facebook’s terms of service. Similarly, the blog for the nationalist Right to a Future (*Recht auf Zukunft*) mobilisation was shut down by the authorities due to its violation of German law. In the reactions on other social media platforms, it is clear that the shutting down of the blogs and Facebook pages reinforces the perception that the opposing other has sought to suppress the voice of the nationalist activists, and that the activists must resist domination by ‘the democrats’. The effortlessness of creating a new Facebook group nevertheless reinforces the liberating idea of social media. This liberating idea is especially used in the nationalists’ representation in opposition to the democrats and the system in general. The nationalist groups claim to represent the opinion of ‘the people’ rather than the intellectual elite dominated by the ‘democrats’. Their enemy is an entire system of oppression, one that produces problems for nationalist Germans, such as immigration—or in their own words, “cultural annihilation by multiculturalism and mass immigration” (Altermedia, 17/10/2010: <http://altermedia-deutschland.info/content.php>). Despite these anti-democratic values, they argue that social media can allow them to overcome the lack of freedom of speech caused by the mass media and its allies, the anti-fascists.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the radical anti-fascist group Red October (*Roter Oktober*, 17/10/2010: <http://1610.blogspot.de/>) uses its mobilisation blog not only to attack the neo-Nazis: “The intellectual arsonist is the lovely Christian Democratic Union,” a political grouping that includes the German conservative party. The blogs are mainly used for self-representation of the group’s actions and ideology. In the mobilisation for the anti-fascist counter-protests, the diversity of groups and political positions becomes clear, with each mobilising on their own blog or website. Nazi-Free Dresden (*Dresden Nazifrei*), for example, addresses a large group across the political spectrum, but there are calls for more radical actions on anti-fascist websites and blogs. Whereas Leipzig Takes a Seat (*Leipzig nimmt Platz*) mobilises for non-violent civil disobedience, Red October calls for radicalised forms of action. Actors include the Church, which calls for symbolic action such as silent vigils against the neo-Nazis. Each of these actors address very different audiences that could not be mobilised with the same arguments or calls for similar actions (e.g. anti-fascist activists versus the Church). In social media, however, they can create their own spaces for addressing certain audiences to mobilise against the neo-Nazis. Due to the common enemy (interview with Mouffe, in Cammaerts and Carpentier 2006), they coalesce into apparent unity in the protest events yet diversify again after the events, creating a variety of blogs and websites.

The antagonistic relationship and the unity formed against the enemy during the events become particularly evident on Twitter. “Anti-fascists Twitter with #L1610! Nazis Twitter with #RaZ10!” (Twitter, 15/10/2010) was announced on Twitter before the day of demonstrations in Leipzig to clearly separate the opposing groups using different hashtags. In all of the demonstrations, the unity formed against the neo-Nazis was channelled into one hashtag representing opposition to the common enemy. This also included people who did not physically participate in the events but who offered tweets of solidarity: “I can’t be there today but I’m thinking of you #L1610 please take a seat!” (Twitter, 16/10/2010). Similar posts were present on the Facebook event page of Nazi-Free Dresden. The solidarity tweets can be described using the concept of ‘mundane citizenship’ (Bakardjieva 2012). Although not physically present, citizens of Dresden/Leipzig could follow the events from a distance by using the Twitter stream, sometimes expressing solidarity with the cause by engaging in the conversation. They consequently expressed their political opinions and sought to be part of the event by supporting the cause in their everyday interactions. Through these interactions they became part of the social media representation of the anti-fascist protests.

Twitter and other social media platforms, such as blogs and Facebook groups, were used not only to follow actions within the groups but also to observe actions of the conflicting party, to monitor its behaviour. The anti-fascists and political Left hold a clear advantage inasmuch as they are usually considered to be early adopters of technology (Croeser 2015: 36) compared to their opponents. The representation of the events on Twitter made the sovereignty of the anti-fascist activists apparent: “#RaZ10 #L1610 they probably need all 35 people in the streets, nobody left for tweeting” (Twitter, 16/10/2010) or “What? A Spelling mistake? [. . .] If Der Führer gets to know . . . LOL #L1610 #RaZ10” (Twitter, 16/10/2010). These tweets make the playful character of Twitter and social media use in general evident. Although clearly conflict-oriented, the tweets use humorous language to create comic relief in the demonstrations.

Awareness of being identified with a certain hashtag and profile and consequently of being observed was used tactically: “Nazis still hallucinating. There has never been a Nazi-rally in [name of location]. Who still believes these idiots?” (Twitter, 16/10/2010).

Compared to Facebook groups, Twitter is sometimes regarded as public, and tweets are usually carefully phrased—often humorous, which is also an attempt to gain publicity. Nevertheless, the publicity of Twitter and the possibility of following and interfering with the hashtag was used tactically to confuse and to plant incorrect information, which raised questions about the credibility of social media. Despite the possibility of everyone contributing to a Twitter hashtag stream, credible and trustworthy information was restricted to certain profiles, such as that of the organiser of the counter-protests: “Please do not believe Nazi-infos. We check all information and publish reliable information here #L1610” (Twitter, 16/10/2010).

The question of credibility becomes even more obvious on platforms that allow for direct interaction between the antagonistic groups. A video taken on a mobile camera displaying a violent attack by nationalist protesters on the Praxis alternative living project during the events in Dresden was published on YouTube. The various political positions represented in the comments are reflected in the users’ opinions concerning the video: “What happened before? I read that someone threw firecrackers out of the house” and “Have you seen that a Nazi reposted your video and said that it was leftist anarchists who attacked the Praxis? Can you do something about that?” (comments on YouTube). Although video is one of the most persuasive methods of documenting activities, the credibility of what it documents and what information it deliberately omits is open to question. Questioning authorship and the particular timeframe that was recorded represents one tactic for questioning the credibility of user-generated content. These tactics for changing the facts by altering a video’s meaning in accordance to one’s political position suggest that user-generated ‘news’ and ‘truth’ are not necessarily the same thing—even if such users often claim to be counterparts to the supposedly corrupted mass mediated content.

Many of these tactics can, however, only be identified when taking the larger media ecology into account. The YouTube video about the attack was also discussed on the alternative media platform IndyMedia as a way to identify neo-Nazis involved in the attack: “[User 5]: Minute 2:30 with “Good Night Left Side”-jacket. He also showed up at the gathering at the central station. [photos]” (comment on IndyMedia). This article received the most comments of those published on IndyMedia concerning the events. The aim of the comments is clearly to collectively identify the neo-Nazis who were involved in the attack on the house. As a result, video can be a powerful tool of contestation. This becomes particularly clear in this constellation in which two counterpublics with opposite political positions are in conflict with each other, with each using social media to produce its own interpretation of the same events.

Opposition to Authority and the State

Despite the apparent conflict of neo-Nazis against anti-fascists, both ends of the political spectrum are also in opposition to authority and the state. In social media, this struggle against authority gains expression in the creation of space for alternative political perspectives, open criticism against both the antagonistic other and authority, particularly the police. In relation to this, we can look at the Facebook group with the most members—Nazi-Free Dresden. Some users regard the Facebook page as a less censored alternative to the mobilisation website, which authorities can shut down in response to the anti-fascists’ acts of civil disobedience. One of the most-liked comments states: “Are we all criminals? [. . .] Shutting down our website didn’t help last year either.

[. . .] Help us prevent this: Civil disobedience is legitimate and not criminal!" [Facebook group, Nazi-Free-Dresden]. The Nazi-Free Dresden website was unavailable on several occasions, prompting numerous comments on the Facebook page, the place where supporters could express their otherwise marginalised opinions and mobilise for civil disobedience.

Nevertheless, core activists from the more radical end of the spectrum are critical of Facebook and Twitter due to their commercial foundations: "#Twitter seems to have disabled many Twitter-clients. Just in time for #19februar. Is this what capitalist democracy looks like? #linke" [Twitter, 19/02/2011]. Consequently, despite the possibility of mobilising a broad alliance against the neo-Nazis, social media also carries disadvantages for groups that radicalise their actions with a further anti-capitalist ideology (Neumayer and Svensson 2014).

The police were also identified as an ally of the opponent, especially by activists whose repertoire includes property damage and violence. Activists are aware of being monitored by the antagonistic other as well as by the police. Consequently, surveillance of anti-fascists who act in civil disobedience is a clear expression of power relations between the legal forces and the political activist groups that wish to express disagreement with the Nazi marches. The publicity produced in social media at once supports the political claims through mobilisation and increases the level of insecurity when acting in civil disobedience. In high-risk situations such as blockades, activists explicitly asked people not to tweet information, but to instead use less traceable communication technologies. Social media are thus suitable for mobilising supporters and showing solidarity, yet their public nature can be counterproductive in acts of civil disobedience (see Mercea 2011; Neumayer and Stald 2014). Power relations between the police and activists are presented as stable and dominating activists' behaviour. Authority and police are thus presented as part of the power that the groups seek to resist, as expressed in social media comments: "German police help fascists" (YouTube, comments section) and "Not unusual alliance: neo-Nazis and police unite to fight democracy #19februar #polizeigewalt" (Twitter, 19/02/2011).

Similar claims are made on the other end of the political spectrum: "Egyptian situations in Dresden—political power and police reach out to criminals" (Fight for an Alley of Truth mobilisation blog; JLO Sachsen 2011). Slogans such as 'Don't leave 13 February to the democrats' appear on the nationalist groups' mobilisation blogs, travel through the social media ecology, and appear in highly symbolic and professional mobilisation videos on YouTube. Although the nationalists call for the use of social media, they claim that the Internet in general is owned by the political Left. They use the term *Weltnetz* instead of 'Internet' to highlight their distance from the ideology of the Internet and their focus on German national identity.

The nationalist mobilisation blog Right to a Future claims that "on 16 October: Demonstrate with us against arbitrary police action and public force!" The crimes of the 'democrats' and the police as well as Right to a Future's own marginalisation due to the dominance of democracy must be resisted to permit a more prosperous future for Germans. The apparent openness of social media nevertheless has its limits: The blog was shut down due to its violation of German law, though only after the events took place. Similarly, other users mark as spam comments with nationalist and racist undertones or that glorify the National Socialist regime. Moderating by peers often has a time delay, and as such is not always carried out immediately. The different forms of censorship and moderation, however, feed the nationalist groups' arguments concerning their

marginalised position in relation to authorities that prevent them from their right to free expression.

Countering Mainstream Media

The way the media portray radical groups on both ends of the political spectrum nurtures the groups' portrayals of being marginalised and oppositional. By using the frame of violence to describe the nationalist demonstrations and counter-protests, mainstream media present the alliance of New Right and neo-Nazis as a relatively homogenous group of radicals, extremists, and troublemakers, with little information concerning their actual political cause. Newspaper headlines read as "This Saturday: Are Riots and Chaos Threatening Dresden?" (Fleischer 2011) and "Leipzig's Most Dangerous Demonstration Weekend" (Wittig 2011). Nevertheless, violence and property damage become forms of radicalised action to gain visibility in mass media. This tactic represents an "extreme speech act—a crying out for visibility" (Cammaerts 2012: 112) in the media-saturated environments of the digital age, a reaction to the decreasing newsworthiness of regular protest. For some activist groups, these tactics serve to radicalise their political positions and generate radical identities in their struggles (Juris 2005).

In contrast, making visible the violent actions of the opponent through social media has become a powerful form of resistance for oppositional groups. Mass media often focus on violence and 'dramatize' it to increase newsworthiness (Gusfield 1994: 71; Juris 2005). Similarly, uses of frames of violence to present events triggers the use of social media as a space in which alternative perspectives can be constructed, in particular at the less radical end of the political spectrum, where visibility and traceability in social media platforms does not imply exposure to police surveillance. In contrast, symbolic acts are represented as successful resistance if they reach an adequately high number of participants to support newsworthiness. Emphasis is placed on changing the mainstream news media discourse, especially in relationship to violence: "RT @name: Video about Nazis raid against Praxis [link to YouTube] police only watching #19februar #dresden #nazis" (Twitter, 19/02/2011). The main criticism is that police are observing the events without helping the people who are being attacked. Counterpublics create these alternatives to mass media in order to contest the mainstream discourse. This user-generated video was indeed subsequently taken up by many mainstream media to report on the events, though often in the general context of violent clashes between neo-Nazis and anti-fascist activists.

Social media are used both to correct and to criticise mass media: "Dear Aljazeera, please send us reporters, our media are either censored by the state or pimp their ratings #19februar #policeviolence" (Twitter, 19/02/2011). The marginalised position of the anti-fascist actions is expressed with reference to the powerful mass media's production of a mainstream that is not in the protesters' interests. Social media practices should thus not only be understood with reference to the mobilisation of action frames but also with reference to the production and maintenance of meaning (Benford and Snow 2000: 613), not the least through representation and visibility. Social media—in these events often connected to alternative online media—played a role in providing alternative stories and images to those that emerged in traditional mass media. Examples include YouTube videos documenting police violence or violent action initiated by the neo-Nazis to produce a counter narrative to the violent image of the anti-fascist activists presented by the mainstream media. The main critique is that 'left extremists' are

blamed for all violence (even though police use tear gas, pepper spray, and water guns) and that no distinction is made between the two antagonistic groups: “Over 200 participants in the demonstrations injured by the police; neo-Nazi attacks are not prosecuted, and the police only say in their press releases (which are uncritically accepted by the media), that there were 80 injured police officers” (Facebook, Nazi-Free Dresden).

On the other end of the political spectrum, the mass media are presented as powerful actors and allies of the opponents, in this case the anti-fascists. An article on the nationalist alternative media platform *Altermedia* claims to provide a different perspective on the events and includes accounts of “violent activists breaking through police barricades” to “disturb the stationary demonstration by the political right” (*Altermedia*, 17/10/2010: <http://altermedia-deutschland.info/>), burning rubbish bins, and throwing bricks at police. Social media are seen as a space in which to address these issues and to produce an apparently uncensored alternative. Comments to the call for action claim that Twitter, Facebook, and other places for sharing images and videos should be used to give a ‘true’ impression of the events from the otherwise-marginalised nationalist perspective.

Social media also influence on mass media. This was particularly true for Twitter during these events, as the service offered new ways of organising, coordinating, informing, and producing counter-publicity that subsequently became part of mass media headlines. The mainstream media discourse described use of Twitter in a playful, humorous, and performative manner, excluding actual political statements, which is counterproductive to the activists’ aim of producing publicity for a political cause: “February 19 on Twitter: Discontent, a little bit of international standing and Justin Bieber” (DNN online 2011). Journalists also used Twitter as a source concerning the protest events: “RT @name: Was anyone hit by a pepperball? #19februar (I am writing an article about it right now)” (Twitter, 19/02/2011). As a result, social media cannot be considered platforms for either the mainstream or counterpublics but rather serve both—thereby maintaining and disseminating mass-mediated discourse, at the same time providing a platform for the production of alternative, radical discourse.

Conclusion

The idea that social media provide room for counterpublics to express their political opinions, create alternatives, contest the mainstream, and assist in protest events is present at both ends of the political spectrum. The underlying liberating and subversive idea of social media (see Curran et al. 2012; Turner 2006) is also used in the representation of the nationalist groups with reference to the right of free speech for otherwise-marginalised positions. Consequently, nationalist rhetoric and discourse in social media shows similarities to that of their anti-fascist counterparts. Social media used in resistance is thus only partially dependent on a group’s political ideology in any absolute sense and has more to do with a group’s role as a counterpublic. In other words, an essential factor is a group’s political position vis-à-vis other political players, other social and ideological formations, and the mainstream discourse.

The tone used to express oppositionality and the awareness of the publicity and traceability of social media differs according to the level of intimacy social media suggest. Facebook groups suggest a high level of intimacy with like-minded peers to support one’s own political position (Wojcieszak 2010). Informal and radicalised comments are openly posted within this apparently like-minded group. Similarly, informal comments

can be found in the YouTube comments sections, often as ongoing discussions between two or more participants, again highlighting their intimate character. In comments sections, however, antagonistic political positions collide so that peer censorship, by marking comments as spam, occurs. The YouTube videos themselves range from user-generated documentation of police violence to professionally produced and highly symbolic mobilisation videos that become part of the public representation of the groups, linked to their blogs. Like the blogs, the mobilisation videos address different actors across the political spectrum, calling for different actions—something that becomes particularly clear during the counter protests. Different social media call for actions against the neo-Nazis using different levels of radicalisation, creating a mosaic of mobilisation calls against the common enemy.

Social media can potentially facilitate the production of visibility, which can be counterproductive. For example, the traceability and publicity of in-group discussion means that various speech acts become a visible part of the counterpublics' appearance. This traceability can be used strategically for counter-publicity but can also be counterproductive due to the risk of surveillance by potentially hostile authorities. Activists who use radicalised forms of expression are aware of these risks and are sometimes also critical of the commercial ownership of social media. Social media can thus be appropriated by activists at either end of the political spectrum yet simultaneously support existing power relations and hierarchies (see Feenberg 2010).

To understand the social media practices of groups that identify themselves as oppositional and marginalised, one must consider the media ecology that activists navigate and their power relations with other political players and the mass media. Although there are many differences between groups at the two ends of the political spectrum on account of their divergent values, they nevertheless use similar tactics and media practices on account of their common position as counterpublics and their resultant oppositionality to the prevailing system. The two radical ends of the political spectrum do not, however, agree as to the identity of the mainstream itself. Their subordinate status relative to the dominant public is, according to Warner, expressed through a "hierarchy of the media," including "speech genres" (Warner 2002: 119).

The counterpublics focused on in this study not only transcend rational-critical debate but also are also publics of conflict and confrontation, forming alliances and contesting the mainstream in a dialectical relationship. To a degree, the radical counterpublics adapt due to their contrasting political values, yet their social media practices are highly dependent on their positions as counterpublics, i.e. as marginalised, excluded, and underrepresented—as oppositional to the mainstream.

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