

# Odzyskać Noc: Revisiting the 1990-2000s Anarcho-feminist Protests in Poland as a Strike against Gender-based Violence

## Odzyskać Noc : protestations féministes contre la violence sexospécifique en Pologne à la fin des années 1990 et au début des années 2000

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Formations of Feminist Strike

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Résumé de l'article

L'article analyse le concept anarcho-féministe polonais de la protestation contre la violence sexospécifique à la fin des années 1990 et au début des années 2000. Examinant des entrevues sur l'histoire orale avec des activistes et des productions culturelles communautaires datant de la période de transformation politique, comme des fanzines, des brochures et des représentations graphiques, l'article se penche sur divers concepts et stratégies d'une grève féministe. Ces différentes sources historiques mettent en relief de multiples inspirations pour les stratégies de protestation employées par les collectifs analysés, notamment la tradition des grèves de femmes durant l'époque socialiste, les manifestations de jeunes durant les années 1960 ainsi que le féminisme anglo-américain. Elles permettent également de réexaminer les dynamiques émotionnelles et les significations de la violence qui ont émergé de documents d'archives anarcho-féministes et de souvenirs d'activistes sur une base individuelle.

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# ***Odzyskać Noc: Revisiting the 1990-2000s Anarcho-feminist Protests in Poland as a Strike against Gender-based Violence***

by Barbara Dynda

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the Polish anarcho-feminist idea of protest against gender-based violence during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Examining the oral history interviews with activists and grassroots cultural productions dating from the period of political transformation, such as zines, leaflets, and graphic images, the article focuses on various strategies and concepts of a feminist strike. These different historical sources emphasize multiple inspirations for the protest strategies employed by the analyzed collectives, including the tradition of women's strikes during the socialist era, youth demonstrations of the 1960s, and Anglo-American feminism. They also enable revisiting the emotional dynamics and meanings of violence that emerged from the anarcho-feminist archival materials and memories of individual activists.

**Keywords:** anarcho-feminism; Poland; political transformation; protest; violence; zine

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The idea of a strike as the means of inaugurating social revolution has always been at the centre of anarcho-feminist thought and action. From the anarchist theory of the general strike developed by Rosa Luxemburg (1906 [2021]) and via the idea of direct action proclaimed by Emma Goldman (1917 [2019]), anarcho-feminism situates political resistance within participation in mass activism including strikes, protests, demonstrations, and marches.

By examining the local anarcho-feminist idea of protest in Poland during political transition and social change, I focus on resistance to gender-based violence and link this to concepts and practices of a feminist strike.<sup>1</sup> Through an overview and analysis of anarcho-feminist zines and other underground cultural productions, I argue that feminist protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s em-

ployed various strategies of striking in the Polish public and counterpublic spaces. In doing so, I emphasize that the tactics of these protests drew inspiration from the tradition of youth demonstrations of the 1960s, women's strikes during the socialist era, and, above all, Anglo-American feminism. The latter was made possible due to the increased flow of feminist knowledge and the possibility of direct participation in transnational anarcho-feminist activism after the collapse of the socialist system in Poland in 1989.

Rethinking the geo-temporal dimension of protests against gender-based violence allows me to demonstrate feminist strategies associated with the strike as tools for mass suspension and sabotage of the political order post-1989. As Verónica Gago notes, "the strike becomes a specific apparatus for politicizing violence against wo-

men and feminized bodies” (2020, 24). Hence, following Gago, I analyze moments of public articulation of resistance as a method to render visible—and oppose—violent forms of exploitation by the state and other actors, which systematically “attempt to reduce our pain to the position of a victim” (Gago 2020, 24).

## The Polish Anarcho-Feminist Movement<sup>2</sup>

The anarcho-feminist movement played a pivotal role in organizing demonstrations against gender-based violence during the Polish political transformation. The movement not only drew public attention to the problem of violence but also inspired, through the forms of happening that it used, later feminist demonstrations such as *Manifa*, organized annually since March 8, 2000, to mark International Women's Day (Ramme 2016). Unfortunately this history is often erased from both Polish feminist studies and research on anarchism, stemming from the complex relationship among anarcho-feminism, feminism, and anarchism in Poland. This problem is evident at the level of the divergent perspectives of researchers trying to situate anarcho-feminism in relation to these movements, for example, as separate to Polish anarchism and academic or non-governmental feminism (Ramme 2014, Ramme 2016), as part of anarchism (Trawińska 2013), or as post-anarchism (Majka 2012, Gąsiorowska 2012). For the purpose of this article, I follow Jennifer Ramme, who separates anarcho-feminist genealogy from the anarchist movement forming in the 1980s, and Polish institutionalized feminism (Ramme 2014). This is also the image of anarcho-feminism that emerges from oral history interviews conducted with feminist activists.<sup>3</sup> Alongside Ramme and other researchers (Fuszara 2005, Zawadzka 2012), my interviewees stressed the non-formalized structures of Polish anarcho-feminism and its roots in transnational anti-racist, anti-fascist, and punk movements, including, in particular, *Riot Grrrl* (Ramme 2014, Zwierkowska 2005, Chutnik 2013, Chutnik 2017).

Considering the time between 1995 and the mid-2000 as the most intensive period of the anarcho-feminist operation in the country, researchers and former activists agree that the first anarcho-feminist group established in Poland in 1995 was *Kobiety przeciwko Dyskryminacji i Przemocy* (Women Against Discrimination and Violence), transformed later into *Emancypunx* (Ramme 2014, Chutnik 2003). However, it is worth noting that

there had been anarcho-feminist initiatives before 1995, such as the crust punk group *Piekło Kobiet* (Women's Hell), founded around 1993 and associated with the anarcho-feminist group *Wiedźma* (Witch) that was established three years later (Ramme 2014). Alongside *Emancypunx* and *Wiedźma*, an important role was played by the anarcho-lesbian *Sister to Sister* group, some of whose members had previously formed an eco-feminist group, *Ekofemina*. In addition, *Radykalne Czirliderki* (Radical Cheerleaders) were active in several Polish cities, along with others, such as *Femina Front*, *Dziewczyny w Akcji* (Girls in Action), and *Liberta* and *Strzyga* (Strigoi). The areas of the groups' activities were Warsaw, Wrocław, Poznań, the region of Podlasie (Białystok, Łuków, Biała Podlaska, Siedlce), and the north of the country (Elbląg, Szczecin, Grudziądz). Pointing to the end of the first decade of the 2000s as the time when their operations closed down, researchers note that this was influenced by the large labour migration of people belonging to the movement, their transition to non-governmental organisations, as well as activist burnout associated with the rise of right-wing trends in the country (Ramme 2014). All of these reasons were confirmed during my interviews, highlighting the importance of personal biographies in the formation and decline of social movements.

Moreover, taking into account the distinctiveness of the anarcho-feminist genealogy, practice, and theory, in relation to feminism and anarchism, this article includes a perspective on the movement's margins while focusing on their protests against gender-based violence. This means that I follow not only the memories of the leaders of the underground feminist groups and the cultural productions they created (zines, leaflets, pamphlets), but also the actions of activists who supported them and whose voices are not present as much in the archival materials. In this way, the article gathers various viewpoints within anarcho-feminism itself and aims to identify the ideological divisions and differences in activist stances by comparing diverse historical sources (written and visual materials, oral histories). My methodological choice, therefore, realizes bell hooks' suggestion to extract marginal knowledge in the midst of which a critical view of the centre and of feminist social relations are born (hooks 2015).

## The Tradition of Women's Protests in Poland

Before discussing the anarcho-feminist protests of the 1990s and early 2000s, it is worth noting that the tradition of feminist and women's strikes in Poland dates back to earlier decades. For example, among the photographic archives of Polish street manifestations in the 1940s we can find a demonstration organized in 1947 by Związek Walki Zbrojnej (the Union of Armed Struggle) at which a women's bloc was present (Chutnik 2021). Regarding the same year, historians emphasize the importance of the strike by cotton mill workers from the I. K. Poznański factory in Łódź in September 1947 (Kenney 1993, Kenney 1999). Moreover, as Małgorzata Fidelis points out, the most important strike at the height of the Stalinist era was organized against meat and coal shortages by women's textile workers from Żyrardów in August 1951, including those from the Polish Socialist Party (Fidelis 2010). Women who worked in the textile factory in Łódź also protested against rising food price in the 1970s and 1980s, and in July 1981, they organized a hunger march in the main parts of the city which was echoed by smaller demonstrations across Poland (Chutnik 2021). These workers and other women in the Polish People's Republic protested against changes in the rationing system and shortages of food and other commodities, which contributed to the success of the *Solidarność* ("Solidarity") dissident movement and, as a consequence, to overthrowing the communist regime (Fidelis 2010).

Alongside the tradition of women workers' strikes in Poland, women's participation in Polish student and youth protests in the 1960s is also significant. This aspect is particularly underscored by Fidelis who emphasizes the non-violent tradition of youth rallies, marches, and sit-ins in March 1968 (Fidelis 2022). She describes how the singing, the writing of songs and satire, the recitation of poems, and the guitar playing were indispensable elements of these demonstrations, making them "more playful and informed by elements of global youth culture" (Fidelis 2022, 116). However, in contrast to the avoidance of violence in the case of the 1981 women workers' protest in Łódź, protestors at rallies in March 1968 were brutally beaten by a battalion of riot police and state militia. Female students became targets of physical attacks, which revealed "a strong antifeminist current in the conservative reactions to youth unrest" (Fidelis 2022, 114). Moreover, as Fidelis points out, male students exploited images of gender-based violence

to intensify gender stereotypes of women as subjects particularly vulnerable to violence, and, as a consequence, to deny their political subjectivity (Fidelis 2022).

Unfortunately, the practice of utilizing verbal and physical violence toward protesting women did not end after 1989. Gender-based violence has been present in public, private, and counterpublic spaces, and perpetrated by the police as well as relatives or friends. Women's organizations, together with feminist grassroots movements, reported it and made efforts to combat various forms of violence (Grabowska 2011, Majewska 2005).<sup>4</sup> Anarcho-feminist collectives played a pivotal role in this process, a fact that is often erased from the collective memory of the political transformation due to the ephemeral nature of these collectives and the difficulty of gaining access to the cultural sources made by the movement, such as zines, leaflets, or pamphlets (Darska 2008, Iwanczewska 2019). Even though anarcho-feminist protests in public spaces differed in many respects from earlier ones organized by women, they also built upon the tradition of the 1960s youth demonstrations and women's strikes during the socialist era, to which I will refer later in this piece.

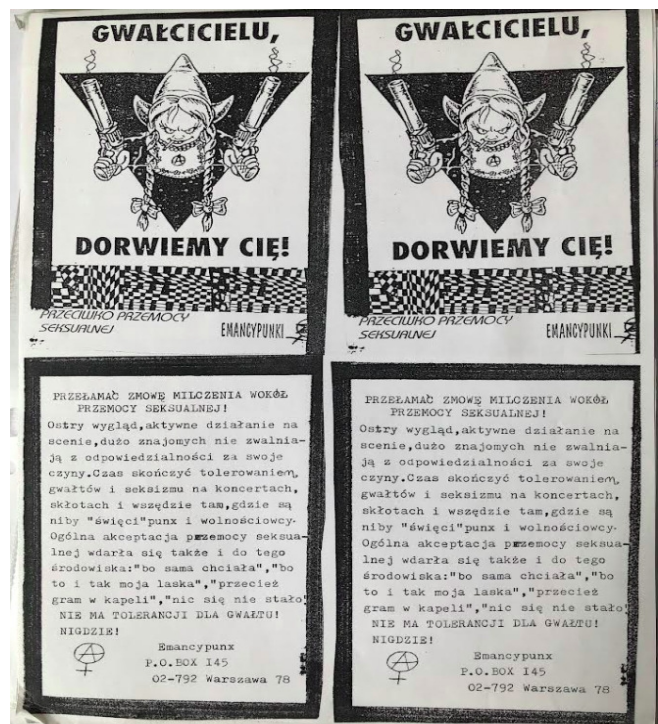
### "Tough and Difficult Times": Police and Anarchism

The historical record of gender-based violence in the 1990s and early 2000s, especially sexual violence, can be found in the anarcho-feminist zines that consolidated the grassroots feminist movement in Poland after 1989. In addition to the topic of reproductive rights, sexual rights, and environmental issues, Polish anarcho-feminism focused, to a large extent, on fighting discrimination and gender-based violence at that time. Anarcho-feminist zines, as well as their more ephemeral extensions—posters, leaflets, or pamphlets—provided information about incidents of sexual violence that occurred in the country, about feminist anti-violence protests and marches, and about the possibility of getting help if one experienced sexual harassment or rape. The most prominent zines addressing these issues were *Wiedźma* (Witch) and *Emancypunx*, which, along with oral history interviews with activists who formed the *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx* collectives, serve as case studies for this article. These zines dealt with the subject of sexual violence perpetrated in the 1990s and early 2000s in public spaces, particularly by the Polish police. Moreover, they also reported on rape and sexual harassment taking place in the countercultural spaces of anarchist and punk communities.

*Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx* regularly informed readers about sexual violence perpetrated by the police during the Polish political transformation and protested against it in their publications. For example, in the late 1990s, the Emancypunx group reported through its zines and leaflets on rapes in police hotels in Warsaw, which officers committed with impunity against women suffering from addiction to psychoactive substances, as well as women who were illegally trading at the Central Station (for example, *Emancypunx* 1999, *Emancypunx* n.d.(a)). The *Wiedźma* collective acted similarly, informing readers about rapes taking place in the country in the early 2000s on the pages of zines and with the help of posters or flyers. For example, in the fifth issue of *Wiedźma* from 2004, the group wrote about “rapes committed in front of passersby” at railway stations in Lubuskie province, as well as about the repeated victimization of rape survivors (being taunted by police officers or interrogated while naked) at police stations in the Lower Silesia province (*Wiedźma* 2004, 36). Both zines also reported on protests organized by Emancypunx and *Wiedźma* in response to sexual violence, such as in April 1998, when, in a demonstration against police brutality, *Emancypunx* “manifested its opposition to the frequent sexual abuse and rape committed by officers” (*Emancypunx* 1999, 17). Moreover, both *Emancypunx* and *Wiedźma* mobilized for feminist marches as a response to incidents of gender-based violence, although it is worth mentioning that these groups did not organize strikes together and did not collaborate in zine publishing.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to providing information regarding the crimes committed by the police, both groups raised awareness about the fact that violence against women also affects the underground scene, primarily the anarchist and punk communities. This is evidenced by the historical materials that I found during my archival queries at anarchist libraries and squats, as well as in the private archives of anarcho-feminists who were active in the *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx* collectives.<sup>6</sup> For example, in a leaflet titled *RAPIST, WE GET YOU* (Figure 1), Emancypunx appealed to readers to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding sexual violence in the counterculture community. The group wrote that “[i]t is time to end [the] toleration of rape and sexism at concerts, squats, and wherever there are supposedly ‘holy’ punk[s] and libertarians. The general acceptance of violence has also broken into this environment (...).” (*Emancypunx* n.d.(b)) Emancypunx also manifested opposition in the fourth issue of its 1999 zine, on the last page of which it placed a graphic image with the title *Nothing justifies*

*rape! Never!* (Figure 2). The naked body of a woman trying to escape male hands was accompanied by the text emphasizing that “[m]ore and more we hear about sexual violence against girls stuck in the punk movement. [We hear about] group rapes at concerts, [about] rapes at ‘squats’ and parties.” (*Emancypunx* 1999, 24) Moreover, in the same issue of the zine, Alina Synakiewicz from the *Femina Front* group gave specific examples of such incidents, reporting in the text *GRUDZIĄDZ—REPORT* on rapes at punk concerts and underground pubs as well as sexual harassment at the feminist music festival *Noc Walpurgii* (Walpurgis Night) (*Emancypunx* 1999, 4). Although this festival was aimed at opposing gender-based violence and was part of feminist events associated with the *Odzyskać Noc* march, even there, punks and anarchists manifested male supremacy and perpetrated sexual violence.



**Figure 1:** A leaflet titled *RAPIST, WE GET YOU* distributed by Emancypunx. Below the graphic image is a text that criticizes the practice of accepting sexual violence among Polish punk and anarchist circles. Above the text is the slogan “BREAK THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE AROUND SEXUAL VIOLENCE!” and at the very bottom of the flyer: “NO TOLERANCE FOR RAPE! ANYWHERE!”





**Figure 2:** The graphic image with the slogan at the top “Nothing justifies rape! Never!” appeared in the fourth issue of the *Emancypunx* zine. On the right of the graphic is a text in which the authors criticize the sexual violence that takes place at punk concerts and in anarchist squats. They also assert that rape is “an act of domination and a tool of power” and “has nothing to do with sexuality.”

A broader dimension of the scale of violence of the 1990s and early 2000s reported in the aforementioned zines and pamphlets is revealed by oral history interviews with anarcho-feminists associated with *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx*. As mentioned by Zwiera, currently a social worker at an education centre for girls, “Those were the years [the 1990s and early 2000s] when we were young girls. I heard about sexist behaviour and sexual violence at every turn; about sexual jokes or touching without the other person’s consent, not to mention rape. After all, such situations occurred even at squats.” (Zwiera 2021 interview)

Also in the same interview, Zwiera, who cooperated with both groups, emphasizes that after 1989 anarcho-feminist zines reported on gender-based violence, including domestic, economic, and, above all, sexual violence. As she further emphasizes in the 2021 interview, “The punk scene was not at all different from the mainstream. Discrimination and chauvinism prevailed there as well.”

Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, who formed the *Strzyga* collective, collaborated with *Emancypunx* after 1989 and lived at the *Rozbrat* squat in Poznań in the 1990s,

makes a similar comment. Now working as a feminist academic, she emphasizes in retrospect that her time living at *Rozbrat* was during the period when the anarchist milieu in Poland was extremely misogynistic and sexist. In the interview, Claudia recalls that the 1990s represented “tough and difficult times” (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2021 interview). She adds that being a feminist at that time was not easy—it was associated with derision, jokes, and complete misunderstanding, especially in the anarchist milieu associated with *Federacja Anarchistyczna* (Anarchist Federation). Violence towards women and sexual, emotional, and psychological transgressions occurred at *Rozbrat*. Claudia recalls that she was the only person at that time who raised the issue of gender equality at *Rozbrat*, which was met with great incomprehension by anarchists.

Analyzing the oral history interviews with Claudia and Zwiera, and anarcho-feminist archival sources dating from the period of political transformation, we can observe that during the 1990s and early 2000s in Poland, gender-based violence was present both in public institutionalized sites (railway stations, hotels, and police stations) and counterpublic spaces (anarchist squats, punk pubs, and concert halls). In addition to organizing strictly anti-violence demonstrations, one of the pivotal forms of protest against sexual and psychological violence was anarcho-feminist cultural productions such as zines, pamphlets, and posters that consolidated the grassroots feminist milieu. These political artifacts served as crucial tools for sharing information and making a statement (Darska 2008, Buchanan 2018). They were created through the emotional labour of the anarcho-feminist community, which aimed to support women facing violence.

## What is Violence? Rape, Patriarchy, and Power in the Feminist Tradition

Reading zines, brochures, and posters made by *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx* groups, as well as interviewing their former members, it seems that anarcho-feminist anti-violence protests and marches in Poland in the late 1990s and early 2000s were a response not only to specific incidents of sexual abuse but also to systemic violence against women. *Emancypunx* and *Wiedźma* defined violence as rooted in social, economic, and political structures—as a social institution and acts of aggression that maintain patriarchal domination. Both groups recognized rape as an extreme expression of violence against

women, which, as described in the leaflet *RAPIST, WE GET YOU* (*Emancypunx* n.d. (b)) distributed by Emancypunx during feminist protests, marches, concerts, and zine distribution, reads, “Rape—an act of violence / a social institution that perpetuates patriarchal domination / a phenomenon based on violence / a logical consequence of sexism / violence of the most perfidious nature (...) psychological intimidation of a woman (...) Rape — another humiliation / another act of aggression.”

Although this leaflet was included as an opening text in the fourth issue of the *Emancypunx* zine from 1999, it brings to mind American feminist theories and manifestos of rape etiology from the 1970s, which assert that rape is used as a means of exerting physical, emotional, and psychological power (Brownmiller 1975, Connell & Wilson 1974, McPhail 2015). Both brochures and zines reframe rape as a political practice that aims to gain control over women. They recall Susan Brownmiller’s argument that rape, as the most extreme and conscious practice of gender-based violence, is intended to intimidate, terrorize, and frighten women (Brownmiller 1975, 15).

Similar to Emancypunx, Wiedźma claims that violence toward women constitutes a system of patriarchal power and defines rape in the framework of the American anti-rape tradition of 1970s’ feminism. This is possible to observe in the *Wiedźma* zine and in the more ephemeral materials, such as leaflets, labels, and brochures. For example, in the brochure *kwestie kobiece* (women’s issues) (Figure 3) published with the financial support of *Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego* (Stefan Batory Foundation), the authors write, “Violence against women is a widespread and very frequent phenomenon. This term refers to beatings, rapes, verbal abuse or even creating an anti-women climate in society. (...) Women are stuck in relationships where they experience pain, humiliation, suffering, and more bruises. And this is because they are taught to sacrifice, submit and obey since childhood. (...) Rape is one of the most brutal expressions of male domination” (*kwestie kobiece* n.d., 6).

Emphasizing physical and psychological abuse toward women as a crucial tool of patriarchal power, the authors claim that violence is related to gender stereotypes that determine social and emotional socialization (girls are socialized to be self-sacrificing, obedient, and submissive). In addition to the issue of rape, they address the problem of violence against women more broadly, while underlining it as a social problem for all genders. This is espe-

cially evident in the opening text of the pamphlet where the editors state that domestic violence and sexual abuse affect the entire society, and therefore concern everyone regardless of gender, age, or sexuality. In the brochure, which resembles a glossary of terms, the group defines sexual abuse as “undesirable conduct that undermines the dignity of women and men” and domestic violence as “any type of physical, sexual or psychological violence that threatens the safety or well-being of any family member” (*kwestie kobiece* n.d., 2). As the authors further summarize, violence rooted in gender stereotypes affects all individuals.



**Figure 3:** The cover of the brochure *kwestie kobiece* published by the Wiedźma group with the financial support of *Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego*. The publication date of the booklet is unknown.

## ***Odzyskać Noc: Feminist Inspirations to Occupy Polish Streets***

These perspectives on gender-based violence presented on the pages of zines and brochures by Emancypunx and Wiedźma found expression in their methods of feminist protesting in the public space, especially during the *Odzyskać Noc* march. The nighttime feminist protest in Poland in the 1990s and early 2000s was organized for the first time by Emancypunx on April 29, 1998, in Warsaw. Outside the capital, the marches were held in Wrocław, among others, on the initiative of the collective Liberta and Sister to Sister as part of Amnesty International's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Wiedźma first organized its march on October 4, 2002, in Siedlce with the financial support of the feminist foundation *Ośrodek Informacji Środowisk Kobietych OŚKa* (Women's Environment Information Centre *OŚKa*).

Former anarcho-feminist activist and current worker of feminist and queer organizations Alina Synakiewicz points out regarding the *Odzyskać Noc* march organized by Emancypunx, "This was the first demonstration of its kind organized in Poland and was attended by several hundred men and women, who marched in the evening hours through the streets of Warsaw by the light of torches carried and to the accompaniment of whistles, rattles, and other instruments. The very idea of *Odzyskać Noc* march was started in the United States in the 1970s as a protest by women against rape and sexual violence on the streets" (Synakiewicz 2009, 82).

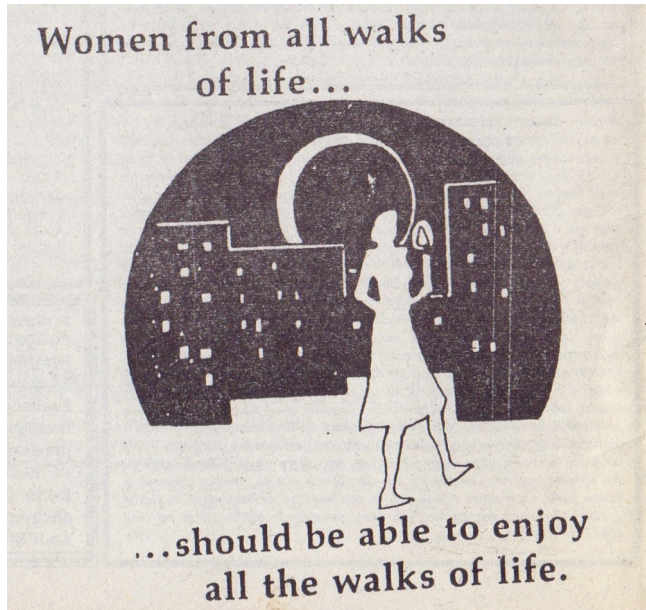
In the above quote from the chapter on violence against women in post-1989 Poland, Synakiewicz emphasizes the roots of the *Odzyskać Noc* march reaching back to the campaigns organized in the United States since the 1970s. Similar inspirations for the Siedlce protest are confirmed by Gosia Ławrynowicz, former member of Wiedźma. In her interview on the group's work of organizing anti-violence protests, including the *Odzyskać Noc* march, Gosia recounts both the US and Great Britain as the origins of the feminist tradition, in which women strike at night in response to sexual violence (Ławrynowicz 2022 interview).<sup>7</sup> Emphasizing the demand for women's rights to urban spaces, she notes that the march organized by Wiedźma constituted "a response to sexual violence and rape. [That was] a symbolic saying no [to gender-based violence] and showing that women need to feel safe on the streets" (Ławrynowicz 2022 interview).

Tying *Odzyskać Noc* into the broader transnational feminist tradition of anti-violence marches, it can be emphasized that the march insisted upon women's right "to access all city spaces, at any time, safely and confidently" (Kern 2020, 2054). This is evident in the note about the *Odzyskać Noc* march from April 29, 1998, made by the former member of Emancypunx's group, Sylwia Chutnik (known by the pseudonym Derwisz in anarcho-feminist circles), in *Ultrafiolet* (*Ultraviolet*). In this zine, published by the collective Strzyga from Poznań in which Claudia Snochowska-Gonzales was active, Sylwia summed up the protest by stating, "Finally, together we went out into the street and showed that we have the same right as men to walk around the city in the evening and not be afraid" (*Ultrafiolet* 1998, 3). This aspect was also emphasized in the text on the Anglo-American cultural context accompanying the *Odzyskać Noc* marches that was published in the fourth issue of *Emancypunx*. In "The History of Marches against Rape" (*Emancypunx* 1999, 22) describing the first protests organized in Austin, Texas, and Connecticut, as well as in Brighton, Manchester, and Leeds, authors emphasized the right of women to access city spaces at any time—both day and night. The graphic image below the article stressed that access to public spaces should be available without fear and with a sense of security. It depicted a woman carrying torches in the city centre at night with the caption in English "Women from all walks of life... should be able to enjoy all walks of life" (Figure 4). Thus, the texts and graphic images from anarcho-feminist zines suggest that Emancypunx and Wiedźma attempted to break with patriarchal domination in the form of the interlocking geographical and emotional network of social control in public spaces (Kern 2020). They did so through the *Odzyskać Noc* march's strategy of occupying streets and squares where gender-based violence took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Such an approach to protest, involving not only a refusal to act according to a social and legal contract, but also a foregrounding reclamation of public space, can be conceptualized as a strike-related strategy. As Gago points out, "The strike as a process weaves together the intensification of insubordination in multiple forms: different modes of protest and assembly; varying uses of the strike; occupations of diverse work and neighborhood spaces. [...] The key to the feminist strike is disobedience." (Gago 2020, 23-34) The insubordination of Emancypunx and Wiedźma in the form of occupying Polish streets and squares where women experienced sexual harassment revealed and sabotaged emotional and



physical forms of exploitation (Gago 2020, 23). In doing so, the anarcho-feminist groups endeavoured to achieve what Gago calls “crossing borders and exceeding the limits of the possible” (2020, 23). Indeed, anti-violence protests in Poland after 1989 took place in multiple conjunctures, spaces (Siedlce, Wrocław, Warsaw) and years (the late 1990s and early 2000s). These enabled the extension of the feminist strike “with heterogeneous realities, with geographies that, although distant from one another, are connected by overlapping zones, struggles, and realities” (Gago 2020, 41-42).



**Figure 4:** The graphic image appeared at the end of the article titled “The History of Marches against Rape,” published in *Emancypunx* from 1999. Surrounding the graphic is the text, “Women from all walks of life... should be able to enjoy all walks of life.”

## The Geo-Temporality and Emotions of Feminist Protest

As mentioned above, activist, academic, poet and writer Sylwia Chutnik recounts in an interview about the *Emancypunx* group that during the *Odzyskać Noc* march in 1998, songs were sung, slogans chanted, and various performances were organized to emphasize how much the city’s public space is permeated with the history of sexual abuse and fear of future possible rape (Chutnik 2021 interview). In the activist’s private archive, I found historical materials about the protest, including song lyrics that were sung at Trzech Krzyży Square in Warsaw at

that time, as well as on other squares and streets through which the march passed. The rhyming lyrics of the songs mainly emphasized male violence on the streets of Warsaw, and encouraged women to overcome fear while being in public spaces. For example, during the *Odzyskać Noc* march in 1998, the following lyrics were sung (Sylwia Chutnik’s personal archive):

Guys on the streets we do not want to be afraid

The night belongs to us yes yes yes!! (...)

We want to be free day and night

We have had enough of male violence!!!

Hey girl do not worry

The street is not scary at night or day

So go ahead without a shadow of fear

Conquer the night and destroy duifers

Apart from asserting the desire to reclaim public spaces through the march, the lyrics pay attention to the importance of the temporal dimension of occupying the street. Their purpose was to manifest that women should not be subjected to social control governed by geo-temporal restrictions. Moreover, we could claim that the collective singing during the protest created an alternative feminist dimension of spatiality and temporality in the city (Butler 2015). By constructing “anarchist moments, or anarchist passages, when the legitimacy of a regime is called into question, but when no new regime has yet come to take its place” (Butler 2015, 75), the *Odzyskać Noc* march produced a new, non-violent and non-patriarchal spatial and temporal order. These moments negate the architecture of existing power manifested in domination and violence in the form of rape and sexual harassment in the city centre, railway stations and residential areas. The *Odzyskać Noc* protests articulated statements on who women are disobeying (rapists, sexual offenders), what they are striking against (gender-based violence), and how they imagine a different life (safe access to public space), which for Gago, demonstrates the radical dimension of the feminist strike (Gago 2020, 34).

The interview with Sylwia echoes Gago and Butler's thoughts on the geo-temporality generated during a feminist protest. As she notes, the lyrics of the song, such as those quoted above, were an important tool during the demonstration accompanied by happenings, torches, and live music (Chutnik 2021 interview). It built a sense of community, solidarity, and safety, based, as Sylwia emphasized, on positive emotions, standing in opposition to the militarized form of protesting practiced by the Polish *Federacja Anarchistyczna* at that time. She notes, in the context of the 1998 *Odzyskać Noc* march, "[This protest was] breaking the heavy and crude way of thinking about demonstrating as a macho-warfare and as a close order with serious slogans accompanying it. It was an attempt to break conventional thinking about political struggle and the fact that a protest must be serious and sad. For us, [a feminist demonstration] should have an element of fun and some humour. This convention was preserved" (Chutnik 2021 interview).

Archival zine materials also prove that such humorous and playful protesting was practised by members of *Emancypunx* during the *Odzyskać Noc* march in 1998. In the aforementioned zine *Ultrafiolet*, Sylwia emphasizes that this political event had an artistic and carnivalesque form. She writes, "[b]urning torches in the hands of the participants and music made the march a colourful carnival against sexual violence toward women" (*Ultrafiolet* 1998, 3). She says that live music (songs, drums, rattles) underscored the critical meaning of feminist protest that resisted patriarchal ways of demonstrating, which are characterized by Sylwia in terms of seriousness, sadness, crudity and heaviness. Moreover, this kind of approach to anti-violence demonstrations tended to rely on light and positive emotions reminiscent of joy and fun, although it also assumed the possibility of expressing emotions of rage and anger. The article entitled "The History of Marches against Rape" published in *Emancypunx* states, "[Anti-violence] marches are expected to bring together many women wanting to show their anger, express support, wanting to meet like-minded women. (...) the silence around rape is over. Its place is taken by rage when women demand, loudly and publicly, that something must be done about violence against women" (*Emancypunx* 1999, 22).

The above excerpt emphasizes that the task of feminist marches such as *Odzyskać Noc* was to build solidarity and community for women willing to overcome fear and silence. By analyzing the lyrics of the songs sung at anti-violence demonstrations, it can be argued that the protests

mobilized women to replace internalized and individualized tools of social control—the emotions of fear and silence—with public, collective anger and rage. This is confirmed by Zwiera who states that at the time the *Odzyskać Noc* march was organized (1998 in Warsaw and 2002 in Siedlce), anger and rage dominated anarcho-feminist actions (Zwiera 2021 interview). Recalling her own activism and the activities of her colleagues from *Emancypunx* and *Wiedźma*, she emphasizes, "We were controversial and loud on the street at that time [during the *Odzyskać Noc* protests] (...) We were angry at the reality and, above all, at the fact that this [gender-based] violence is still happening; that so many years after regaining basic civil rights there is actually violence and inequality at every turn" (Zwiera 2021 interview).

As Zwiera states, observing gender-based violence and social inequality in a new democratic and independent Poland aroused anger in anarcho-feminist circles, the public and widespread expression of which was given by the *Odzyskać Noc* marches. She notes that anger mobilized political and community action, and served to demystify gender stereotypes attributed to this emotion. Stressing that anger and rage were treated by anarcho-feminists as correct and even desirable emotions during anti-violence protests, Zwiera says, "The anarcho-feminist milieu was demystifying rage. Rage was something desirable and a correct response to the unequal reality that was all around us. We wanted to be angry. We wanted to unmask the stereotype of the good girl who cannot get mad and cannot possibly get upset. We were rebelling against the stereotype that rage is reserved only for strong men. (...) In this sense, rage and anger were feminist to us" (2021 interview).

As Zwiera points out in our conversation, both anger and rage were important tools of resistance used by *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx*. Mobilizing in public spaces during anti-violence strikes, they helped to protest against gender stereotypes and social inequality. Thus, based on feminist theories analyzing these emotions for activism, politics, and everyday actions (Lorde 1984 [2007], Ngai 2007), we can claim that the emotional intensity and communal energy associated with the *Odzyskać Noc* protests, as well as the broader dimension of *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx* activities, helped build feminist solidarity and community. Moreover, these collectives channelled rage and anger into specific forms of political labour. These included not only activities related to organizing street protests but also those aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence and provid-

ing information about legal aid through feminist pamphlets, zines, and flyers. And while all of these practices were described by archival sources and my interviewees as having Anglo-American origins, they can also be viewed through the perspective of the Polish tradition of feminist and youth strikes.

## The Tradition of Aesthetics in *Odzyskać Noc*

As pointed out at the beginning of this article, women in Poland have been protesting against violence and unfavourable living and working conditions at least since the mid-twentieth century. Fighting for their concept of equal rights, they not only resisted the dominant narrative of gender equality imposed by socialist politics, but also subversively utilized this rhetoric, while, for example, protesting the loss of their jobs during the destalinization period of 1955-56 (Fidelis 2010). As Padraic Kenney points out, striking women during communist Poland were “fully aware of the power their protest as women might have” (Kenney 1999, 415). They utilized various structured and unstructured scenarios, including singing songs, pushing strollers, or even performing mass fainting. The new form of non-violent protest with the participation of women and children in Łódź in 1981 used the image of motherhood to express fundamental social demands and politicize them. This form of strike, unexpected by the communist regime, accompanied by other protests since the 1940s, exploited the figures perceived by the state as politically helpless (the mother and family) in order to magnify the violence of the state and undermine its masculinity (Kenney 1999).

A parallel idea of non-violent strike based on the unexpected, “unconventional, visual and theatrical forms of protests” (Ramme 2016, 259) accompanied anarcho-feminist street performances during *Odzyskać Noc*. This is evident when analyzing the private archives of Sylwia Chutnik which include her notes entitled “happenings.” Considering the Warsaw march, among others, this document describes four happenings organized on April 29, 1998, which “happened by surprise for the people taking part in the demonstration” (Sylwia Chutnik’s personal archive). The fourth happening, as Sylwia describes in the notes, “was actually a performance prepared by a theatre group. It was based on a true story of the rape and killing of a young girl in a military unit.” Although more meticulously and artistically planned (through the inclusion of a theatre group, for example), in a similar

way to the formula of women workers’ strikes from the socialist period, the *Odzyskać Noc* march incorporated elements of audience surprise, used various props (here belonging more to the artistic rather than the everyday sphere), and subversively exploited the dominant narrative regarding gender stereotypes. Moreover, similar to the tradition of youth protests during the 1960s “Thaw” period in Poland associated with youth carnival and rebellion (Fidelis 2010, Fidelis 2014), it involved singing songs, playing instruments and acting out theatrical scenes. It introduced elements of theatre and carnival into politics as a way to “consciously diversify the ideological message” (Chutnik 2013, 9) and reach out to people from different social groups. As Emancypunx’s activists explain in an interview with Anna Nacher for the Polish feminist newspaper *Zadra*, “... We can’t chant demands with a stone face, we want to reach different people. We often use well-known cultural codes, reworking them, ridiculing them, and appropriating them for ourselves (...) we draw from the avant-garde theater, street theater, also carnivals, and festivals. Laughter and joy are an important component of our activity” (Nacher 2001, 17-18).

In addition to aspects of carnival, theatrics and laughter, the anti-violence protests of that period also included anger and rage. These emotions are especially brought out by anarcho-feminists who supported and co-worked with the movement. For example, Zwiera’s memoirs highlight that feelings of anger and rage were prevalent as she fought against the unsafe urban landscapes of Polish cities during the marches. And although these emotions were also mentioned by Sylwia in our conversations, and, moreover, appear in other archival sources (zines, newspaper interviews, flyers), she stressed that the happenings of Emancypunx during *Odzyskać Noc* aesthetically referred to theatrical fun and humor. This kind of performative strike allowed the movement to achieve a strong media and public response to the problem of violence against women. In fact, as *Zadra* points out, “the action [*Odzyskać Noc*] resonated with the media, and excerpts of it were shown on the main edition of *Wiadomości* (News), among others” (Nacher 2001, 18). This harmonizes with the activists who, after describing the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of the march in the interview, state that the group’s particular achievement “is the *Odzyskać Noc* march that leads the way [in their successful actions]” (Nacher 2001, 18).

## The Feminist Legacy of Emancypunx and Wiedźma's Protests

The anarcho-feminists who were active in Wiedźma and Emancypunx emphasized the social, political, and economic roots of systemic gender-based violence. Through brochures, zine articles, and graphic images in the zines, such as “The rapist must face the consequences of his act!, Nothing justifies rape! Never!” or “RAPIST, WE GET YOU” (*Emancypunx* n.d. (a) (b)), among others, both collectives protested against the unsafe topography of Polish cities and attempts to restrict women's rights to public space during the political transformation. Through anti-violence demonstrations such as *Odzyskać Noc* marches, Wiedźma and Emancypunx thus reclaimed public spatiality and temporality, and reconstituted it into a feminist one for the duration of the protest.

Feminist protests opposing gender-based violence, as well as the social and cultural activities of Wiedźma, Emancypunx, and other anarcho-feminist collectives from the late 1990s and early 2000s, have constituted a feminist legacy that influences contemporary Polish feminist culture. Although both groups ended their operations sometime between 2000 and 2010,<sup>8</sup> I would like to speculate on a certain inheritance that remains today, in both institutional and grassroots feminism. From my perspective, the formula of the feminist strike developed by the movement—manifesting itself in disobedience, occupation of public spaces, and collective expression of emotions—continues to be used in contemporary feminist demonstrations. An example is *Czarne Protesty* (Black Protests) and related strikes—the protests opposing state restrictions on reproductive rights in Poland since 2016. Feminist collectives and social movements such as *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* (Girls for Girls) and *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* (All-Poland Women's Strike) among others, continued the anarcho-feminist tradition of protesting characterized by strong emotional overtones and occupation of streets in Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław, Białystok, and the Tri-City.<sup>9</sup> By organizing a general pro-choice strike using anarcho-feminist direct action, similar to Wiedźma and Emancypunx, since 2016 feminist collectives have demonstrated that there is no consensus in Poland on emotional and physical violence against women and feminized bodies. Recalling Gago once again, I would like to emphasize that Polish contemporary feminism can be analyzed in continuity with the anarcho-feminist activism of the past, in which strikes served as a feminist tool to politicize gender-based viol-

ence, massively suspending and thus sabotaging the violence of the state, the police, and the law.

## Endnotes

1. In this article, I use the term “gender-based violence” more often than the term “violence against women” in order to avoid a binary—often transphobic—understanding of gender categories. This perspective is also related to the fact that my interviewees refer more frequently to “sexual violence,” “domestic violence,” or violence related to gender stereotypes, rather than explicitly to “violence against women.” The article, hence, endeavours to reflect the perspective of my interlocutors and contemporary, intersectional recognition of the relationships between violence, sexuality, and race, also concerning trans and queer experiences (Loken & Hagen 2022). I understand gender-based violence as violence rooted in structural gender inequalities, of which sexual and domestic violence is a form (Kościńska 2014, Piotrowska & Synakiewicz 2011, Majewska 2005). However, I use the term “violence against women” more often when referencing feminist written discourse of the 1990s and early 2000s to maintain historical accuracy.

2. I also write about the origins of anarcho-feminism in Poland in my article on the visibility of reproductive rights (see Dynda 2022). In describing them, however, I focus on the production and distribution of Polish feminist zines. Similarly, in that text, I emphasize, following Ramme, the genealogy of anarcho-feminist activity in Poland, which is distinct from anarchism and institutional feminism.

3. For the purpose of my research on the anarcho-feminist and feminist movement in post-1989 Poland, since November 2020 I have conducted interviews with members of the following collectives, among others: *Kobiety przeciwko Dyskryminacji i Przemocy* (Women against Discrimination and Violence); Emancypunx; Sister to Sister; Wiedźma (Witch), Strzyga (Strigoi); Podżegaczki (Instigators); Wydawnictwo Bomba (Bomba Publishing House); Girls to the Front. I have also interviewed many individual librarians, activists, publishers, and artists who formed an underground feminist milieu in Poland both during the political transition period and today. I conduct the interviews based on the oral history method (Brown & Beam 2022, Bruner 1995, Thompson & Bornat 2021) and follow feminist research ethics developed by Elspeth Brown (2020), Ann Cvetkovich

(2003), Julieta Singh (2017) and bell hooks (2015), among others. Before each interview, I obtain my interviewees' informed and voluntary consent. I also authorize each of the published quotes and each piece of biographical information that could identify the interviewee. Of course, it is up to my interviewees to decide how they would like to be included in the article, whether under a name or pseudonym or not appearing at all.

4. Joanna Piotrowska and Alina Synakiewicz, editors of the report *Dość milczenia. Przemoc seksualna wobec kobiet i problem gwałtu w Polsce* (2011), cite the following organizations as key in countering gender-based violence in post-1989 Poland: Fundacja Feminoteka, Fundacja „Pomoc Kobietom i Dzieciom, Towarzystwo Interwencji Kryzysowej, Fundacja Autonomia, Fundacja Miejsce Kobiet, Stowarzyszenie „W Stronę Dziewcząt. They also list support telephones for people who have experienced violence (primarily the National Emergency Service for Victims of Family Violence „Niebieska Linia”). It is worth mentioning that the feminist movement in Poland during this period also engaged in many anti-violence campaigns (e.g., the 16 Days Against Gender Violence Campaign), cooperated with local governments, politicians, and lawyers (e.g., cooperation with municipal social welfare centres), and entered into coalitions at both the national (e.g., CEDAW) and international levels (e.g., WAVE).

5. Although *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx* were active at similar times and highlighted the issue of sexual violence, these groups often came into conflict. On the other hand, some anarcho-feminists cooperated with both *Wiedźma* and *Emancypunx*. The history of the two groups is, therefore, nuanced and is a subject for a separate article addressing activist emotions, conflicts, and relationships.

6. Since November 2020, I have conducted archive queries at ADA Puławska Active Alternative House in Warsaw, Rozbrat Anarchist Library in Poznań, Autonomous Space for Initiatives in Warsaw, Women's Foundation eFKa in Krakow, the Lambda Archive in Warsaw, and personal archives of activists.

7. Both sources in the form of zines and oral history interviews point to Anglo-American inspiration for the *Odzyskać Noc* marches organized in Poland. In North America and the UK, the marches were initiated, for example, by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group as

part of Women's Liberation Movement in England (Mackay 2021) or by the Feminist Studio Workshop and the WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) Rape Crisis Centre in North America (Kern 2020). However, as Finn Mackay points out, the roots of the protest seem to be European and connected to an international conference on male violence against women in Brussels in March 1976 (Mackay 2014).

8. Gosia Ławrynowicz indicates in the interview that *Wiedźma* ended its activities around 2003 (2022 interview). This coincides with my archival research according to which the last issue of *Wiedźma* zine was published in the summer of 2004. As for *Emancypunx*, source materials such as the group's archived website, zines, and flyers mention the mid-2000s' decade as the collective's last activity.

9. For the emotional overtones of these strikes, see, for example, an article by Elżbieta Korolczyk (2019) or Monika Frąckowiak-Sochańska and Marta Zawodna-Stephan (2022).

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