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Radosław Kawalek

Book Review: Agnieszka Pasieka (2024) *Living Right. Far-Right Youth Activists in Contemporary Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Radosław Kawalek 

University of Hamburg 

[radoslaw.kawalek@studium.uni-hamburg.de](mailto:radoslaw.kawalek@studium.uni-hamburg.de)

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**Book Review:**

**Agnieszka Pasieka (2024) *Living Right. Far-Right Youth Activists in Contemporary Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press**

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*Living Right: Far-Right Youth Activists in Contemporary Europe* was released just a few months before the 2025 parliamentary elections in Germany and the presidential elections in Poland, which witnessed a significant increase in the number of far-right voters. The growing popularity of the far-right and the dichotomisation of European and American society has already caught the attention of social scientists, who delivered books such as the well-read *Strangers in Their Own Land* (Hochschild 2016) or the already widely discussed *Something Between Us* (Pandian 2025) just recently published. Pasieka's book fits into the ongoing discussion surrounding the attempts to understand people on the 'other' side of the barricade, by exploring why they are drawn to radical nationalist communities and where anthropology fits into this endeavour. The monograph is the result of a multi-year project and fieldwork which consisted of attending events and meetings and 'hanging out' with radical nationalist groups in Italy (mainly with the Lealtà Azione), Poland (Obóz Narodowo Radykalny), and Slovakia and Hungary (Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement).

Each chapter of the book begins with an introductory vignette, rendering the mood and the theme and bringing to the reader's attention the important phenomena. In the introduction and Chapter 1, Pasieka sets the scene of the book by emphasising the international aspect of the national movements and explaining the concept of far-right activism. From the initial pages, the author is open about the moral, practical, and scientific dilemmas she faced during her fieldwork; in a sense, this also makes her book one about fieldwork itself. Chapters 2 and 3 concentrate on the history and political implications of fascism, which both play a crucial role for each community as a source for values and a foundation for identity building. This is also where the author explains the concept of 'vicarious resentment' (p.102), through which the activists perceive themselves as working and acting on behalf of others. Chapter 4 might be of a particular interest to anthropologists. Here Pasieka discusses how radical nationalists use culture and anthropology to repeat and prove racist ideas about differences and capabilities of peoples and races. The activists set against the idea of the liberal 'lost Western man' (p. 143), believing that to be a good citizen is to have the courage to be politically incorrect (thus

not fit into the mainstream liberal politics) and live life in accordance with national culture and religion. In Chapter 5 and 6, Pasieka showcases the diversity and heterogeneity of the right-wing communities and their members. This is where her quest for breaking open certain assumptions and commonsensical understandings (Pasieka 2019) is most evident in the way she demonstrates the group dynamics and the female engagement, together with the activists' perception of their communities. In these passages, the reader learns that far-right spaces are perceived as places where one can develop, find community, and discover a sense of purpose. In the conclusion, the author looks back at her research while recounting her last days in the field and her reflections about the overarching questions she raised in her work. She closes with an exploration of the relationship between liberalism and fascism and delves deep into the role that anthropology and ethnographic fieldwork play in those debates.

*Living Right* is a captivating ethnography which delivers on what it promises. Through the author's compelling storytelling, vivid descriptions, and self-reflection, the reader gets a glimpse into the life of far-right activist groups and their activities. But Pasieka manages to achieve more than an intriguing piece of literature. Her book stands out from others in the way she approaches the people she studied in terms of activism and humanity, without reducing them to their political views. Throughout the monograph, readers face and engage with individuals, their respective histories, motivations, and opinions, which challenge the homogenous perspective on the European far-right. Many readers could be appalled by some statements, quotes, or actions of the people described, but Pasieka's quest was not to convince people to side with the far-right activists but to show their humanity and diversity, as well as their virtues and blemishes.

That said, I feel the book fails to address one important element, namely proper contextualisation and consideration of the impact activist groups have on society. At many points in the book, readers are presented with blatant anti-Semitism (p. 135), the glorification of Nazis (p. 53), and racism (p. 129), to which the attendees of events and the activists are often exposed. Through *Living Right*, one comes to discover that what draws people to the Obóz Narodowo Radykalny, the Lealtà Azione, or the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement is sometimes a search for community or a project to engage with, which is why it is imperative to properly understand the implications of becoming a member of such groups. The common strategy of radical-populist movements (Kallis 2013) entails breaking taboos, expressing sentiments that may generally be deemed politically incorrect, and moving certain narratives into the mainstream and public discourse, which has a real-life impact on politics and political debate. Although the Obóz Narodowo Radykalny has not grown in the past years and is not a new creation as such (p. 6), its work and that of other similar groups has a troubling impact on politics and social

life (Mazurczak 2020). For instance, on 19 July 2025, demonstrations against immigration took place throughout major Polish cities, marked by fearmongering and xenophobic slogans. The Obóz Narodowo Radykalny proudly claimed that it initiated this movement (Biuro prasowe ONR 2025). It is fundamental for the anthropological researchers to stay faithful to the aims of the research project and fair towards their informants, which is expressed in striving to paint an unbiased picture. This may be especially challenging in this context because of the common perception of far-right activists as violent and evil, however, it is equally important to present the bigger context and overarching stories.

My critique notwithstanding, Pasięka stayed true to her research participants and to herself as an anthropologist and as a person. *Living Right* is a book that will appeal to anyone striving to understand fascism, international movements, the concept of a 'good life', and what the attraction of the far-right in Europe might be. Moreover, her exploration of the topic of fieldwork and studying the 'people we don't like' opens up the discussion for questions worth confronting.

#### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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Radosław Kawałek is a Polish master's student in anthropology at the University of Hamburg, having obtained a bachelor's degree at the University of Bayreuth in Social and Cultural Anthropology and Language Studies. His research interests centre on politics, democracy, bodily practices, and lived bodily experiences, investigating how individuals shape and embody their sociopolitical environments.