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SELF-SILENCING STRATEGIES IN CASUAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT POLITICS IN RURAL POLAND

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Self-silencing can be a discursive strategy for presenting personal opinions in casual conversations about politics, especially when these take place in an unpredictable or hostile socio-political environment. In such situations, political identities may be performed through the use of inferred forms, such as allusion, irony or implicit suggestion. In this article, forms of muting one's voice by using indirect speech are tracked in interviews conducted among villagers in the mountainous Nowy Targ county in southern Poland at the beginning of the 21st century. The aim in presenting these examples is to show that sometimes self-silencing can serve to make an adversary's voice more audible, to help avoid definitive judgement and to create space for an exchange of opinions.

KEYWORDS: silencing, discursive strategies, indirect speech, political opinions, Podhale, Poland

Difficult, unspoken truths and the dark, hidden secrets of familial, local, regional and national histories frequently become a source of venom that can poison family, neighbourly, ethnic, national and inter-religious relations. Examples of the devastating effects of truths concealed down generations can be observed in various of the articles presented in this volume. However, I – somewhat perversely – ask a question about a constructive aspect of silencing. In this article, I will show that, in certain situations, muting one's voice becomes a positive action. In building this argument, I have looked for examples of an intentional muting of one's voice in casual conversations about politics. These types of discussion are usually loud and emotional: silences appear in them when the political identification of one's interlocutor is perceived as unrecognized, different or opposite to one's own. It is then that self-silencing strategies are introduced to soften the forms in which political views are expressed, so as not to emotionally inflame the discussion.

Casual talks about politics engage ordinary people uninvolved in shaping political life. Such discussions arise spontaneously in various public and private spaces: places as open to casual contacts as train compartments or the queues in front of a doctor's

cabinet, and as private as meetings with friends and family at home. In the Polish context, casual conversations about politics rarely have the character of a nice chat: they rather tend to quickly turn into more or less fierce disputes involving vivid emotions. The emotional involvement is so great because these are situations when individual identities are presented, or more precisely, when an essential aspect of one's identity is presented: that of one's political identification.

THEORETICAL APPROACH AND CONCEPTS

Political identifications are dynamic processes of creating and processing a narrative about individual or group political opinions constantly negotiated with the external environment. In an anthropological approach, the "emphasis falls on the dynamics of identification, framing, and alignment [processes] within limits that are cognitive or semantic, on the one hand, and social, economic, political, or legal, on the other" (Edison et al. 2017, 340). Furthermore, political identifications are produced in a process of continuous polarization through constant negotiation with the "constitutive outside" (Mouffe 1992, 30). As a result, they are relational and stem from various interactions in a game of a constant imposing and undermining, generated via a striving for consistency in the face of a simultaneous impact of complicating forces (Mouffe 2005).

Rhetorical aspects of casual conversations are objects of interest for "linguistic anthropology" (Hymes 1963), which explores the connection between speech and social relations. Using a method called the "ethnography of speaking" (Hymes 1962), linguistic anthropology focuses on the ways and forms of expressing content in various contexts. Social context was also very important in the interpretation method called "frame analysis" (Goffman 1974), as well as in "rhetorical anthropology" (Tyler 1978, 1987) which focused on the forms in which thoughts are verbalised. Rhetorical anthropology underlines the importance of rhetoric, revealing how culture shapes conceptualizations of reality. The alternative concept of "discourse strategies" (Gumperz 1982) focused attention on both verbal and non-verbal modes of expressing ideas and emotions. The popularization of Michel Foucault's ideas increased the interest in researching discourse, and subsequently provoked an the emergence of various trends in discourse analysis (listed in Van Dijk 1998). Thus, when using the concept of "discursive strategies", I refer to the "Discourse-Historical Approach" (Reisigl and Wodak 2016), located in the area of "Critical Discourse Analysis" (Fairclough 1995).

While I find the above theoretical strands useful for the ways in which they focus attention on linguistic forms, I also make use of Michael Herzfeld's concept of "social poetics". I find the latter term more adequate than that of "rhetorics", because it places greater emphasis on the social conditions in which rhetoric emerges and indicates the entanglement of the way ideas are expressed in the process of shaping social relations. It

is also more appropriate than "ethnopoetics" proposed by Dell Hymes (2003), because the entanglements involved in expressing ideas are socially rather than ethnically generated. Social poetics include clever ways to amplify or silence one's voice in order to fit a developing discussion. Some discursive strategies clearly have a calming function, making controversial content easier to convey in ways that do not arouse overtly vivid emotions or cause unpleasant consequences. In some aspects, they resemble James Scott's notion of a "hidden transcript" (1990), but this term is more adequate to approaches that stress a performative character of social relations.

FIELDWORK

Location of Nowy Targ on the map of Poland

The source material used in this article was created as part of research projects aimed at achieving other goals. However, the in-depth interviews conducted during the ethnographic fieldwork were open enough to enable them to provide answers to new research questions. I decided to browse through them in search of examples of social poetics and self-silencing discursive strategies. The interviews recalled in this text were recorded as a part of a series of research projects coordinated by the Institute of Ethnology and

Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw: "Ethnographic Science On Politics: Conversations About Politics with Highlanders" (1999–2000), "Imaginaries of the State, Power, Politics and Democracy" (2001–2007) and "Ethnographies of Media Reception and Common Knowledge" (2012–2014). A research team, consisting of me as the project manager and subsequent groups of undergraduate and graduate students of the University of Warsaw, collected recordings of over 500 in-depth interviews accompanied by participant observations focused on the situational and emotional contexts in which the interviews took place. Our interlocutors were informed about the research aims and agreed to participate in the interviews and recordings.

The interviews were conducted according to the methodologies specified by Martin Hammersley, Paul Atkinson (1995) and Steinar Kvale (2007). The fieldwork was carried out in the villages of Nowy Targ county, an area encompassing the ethnographic regions of both Podhale and Polish Spiš located at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, the highest range within the long stretch of the Carpathian mountains. The interviews were recorded with randomly selected villagers, aged 35–80, who were mostly Catholic and mostly had received a vocational education or, less often, a secondary technical education. The interviews were conducted in village houses, village public places and at the town market (mainly at the section dealing in livestock). Conversations at the market often took the form of multi-vocal debates, which usually had a high emotional pitch. Both the village dialogues and the polyphonic market conversations displayed the specificity of local social poetics.

Panorama of the Tatra Mountains viewed from the Nowy Targ basin.
Photo by Jacek Mrugacz, published with the consent of the author.

During the interviews, our interlocutors were put in a situation that was not very comfortable. As a result of an accepted but quite random meeting, they were confronted with students and a tutor: i.e. with partners whom they perceived as better educated, and at the same time, as people whose intentions were not entirely clear. Of course, the researchers explained their goals and asked for permission to record the interview: however, this did not entirely clarify the possible hidden goals pursued by educated people from the capital who bother to go to the countryside and ask people with primary or secondary education about matters of which they must certainly have better knowledge. Our interlocutors saw in this unusual situation an opportunity to be ridiculed or condescendingly mentored. However, on the other hand, they also reported a certain kind of superiority with regard to the researchers, considering the inhabitants of big cities to be "indoctrinated". They were convinced that due to their education the newcomers were more susceptible to the propaganda and ideologies transmitted by the media. They told us directly on several occasions that the liberal media (they mentioned the television channel TVN and the newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza") that the students watched "had brainwashed" them. Following this line of thought, our interlocutors believed that local common-sense thinking, in their opinion undistorted by external ideas, is more effective in recognizing "real" political mechanisms and dependencies. Driven by two opposing lines of reasoning – one based on an awareness of their lower education and the other on a conviction of the superiority of local common-sense thinking – the interviewees often made use of a self-silencing strategy in expressing their views. These strategies included irony, relativization, suggestion, allusion, particular expressions and whispering.

SELF-SILENCING STRATEGIES

Irony

Irony, a rhetorical technique which "conveys meaning by indirect reference rather than by direct statement" (Osterreich 2001, 405), was one of the self-silencing strategies most frequently encountered in the interviews. One of the reasons why it was willingly employed was as a result of discomfort stemming from the fact that a large part of the research group was comprised of young women (female students), whereas talks about politics in these rural environments are usually conducted in male groups. If female voices appear in such conversations, they tend to belong to mature women (therefore, the person leading the research group did not provoke such concerns). Our interlocutors used irony to "save face" in this unusual situation. Irony also served to build a distance into a conversation which would certainly not have been conducted were it not for the desire to appear polite and open-minded, and finally also for the undoubted pleasure of talking to young women from a big city.

Irony, a trope which "makes something understood by expressing the opposite" (Osterreich 2001, 404), is seen as a legitimate strategy for the presentation of political views à *rebours.* The sentences spoken by our interlocutors sounded as if they were a presentation of views opposite to those held by the speaker. Only the speaker's intonation, gestures and facial expressions indicated to the researcher that the statements should be understood inversely. It is worth emphasizing that irony and sarcasm are extremely difficult to convey when transcribing interviews. If the person transcribing the recording does not indicate that the reader is dealing with an ironic or sarcastic utterance, the written sentence conveys a meaning that is completely inconsistent with the speaker's intention. Such situations can happen when the transcription is conducted by a non-researcher outsider (or now also by technology). The irony is only noticeable in direct contact.

Irony was particularly notable in judgments of politicians, in which it took the form of declarations of emotions that were precisely the opposite of those experienced. Our interlocutors made such comments as: "We like it very much when politicians say one thing and do quite another", or "We, here in Podhale, love politics."[1] The use of irony changed the verbs "we like" or "we love" into their opposites, making it possible to avoid the use of the words "we hate" which would directly denote the vivid emotions evoked by the actions of the politicians.

Sometimes, irony turned into bitter sarcasm. Memories from the early nineties, i.e. a period of economic transformation and high unemployment, were often conveyed using this convention. During this process of transformation, an enormous (employing up to 7000 workers), state-owned shoe factory in the Podhale region was liquidated. Our interlocutors described the transformation processes as "selling off the national wealth, the toil of the entire nation", usually ending their statements with a sarcastic assessment of the ruling parties: "The state was so well managed then!" The expression "so well", full of sarcasm, was supposed to convey the enormity of the hatred aimed at the managers/decision-makers of the time. Even two decades later, the experience of economic transformation continued to evoke emotions that were so hot that our interviewees found it difficult to talk about them. In such cases, irony and sarcasm emerged as strategies of silencing one's expression not only with a view to the audience, but above all because of the speaker's own emotional state. Our interlocutors often said that talking about these matters irritated them so much that it "raised their blood pressure" and was "harmful to their hearts".

Irony reveals its greatest potential in the form of ironic jokes. During the research, we encountered a revealing situation during interviews about electoral preferences in the presidential election in 2005. Our interlocutors quite consistently declared support for one of the candidates: the representative of the Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej

1 All the translated quotes in this text are deprived of dialect words and local syntax.

Polskiej (Farmers' Party, an alternative to the main Peasants' Party – Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe). After a few days, we realized that this was an ironic joke, despite it surprisingly being used by interlocutors who did not know each other. When we cottoned on to the situation, we asked interlocutors with whom we had friendly relations about the reason for such a collective joking with researchers. We learned then that the joke resulted from a locally-shared belief that newcomers from the city would expect that villagers would vote for a representative of this Farmers' Party (which did not enjoy local support), and therefore perversely gave a false answer to the question about voting preferences. It was amazing that this activity was uncoordinated and yet quite widespread.

Irony was also used when talking about matters from which our interlocutors distanced themselves. In 2012–2014, they spoke ironically about ecology, climate change, vegetarianism, equality parades and LGBT+ issues. They would sneer phrases such as: "It's cold today, eh? That's your global warming!", or "What, you don't eat meat, eh?", or "You lot probably go to these parades [gay pride] and those other quirks, eh?" The interviewees, assuming that the researchers disagreed on these issues, rarely made a frontal attack on these "quirks", as they called them. In their conversations with us, they mitigated themselves by ironically adding "Well, it's normal now", and commenting among themselves "I can't get my head round what is happening these days." The ironic statement "this is normal now" constituted a very strong, though a very muted way of building a distance to the new phenomenon under discussion.

Relativization

The local social poetics also included the tactic of answering the researcher's question with another of one's own. For example, after the question "Who will you vote for in the presidential election and why?", an interviewee might reply "What do you think? I suppose it would be good to vote for politician X?" By observing the reaction to such a question, the interlocutor would gauge whether his favourite was an acceptable option for the researcher. A lack of a negative reaction expressed through facial expressions or gestures encouraged the speaker to develop his statements and describe the qualities of the presidential candidate who had earned his trust. The tactic of presenting opinions in an interrogative form was also used to raise particularly sensitive topics. In 2001, we recorded a very controversial opinion expressed in the form of a question. Our interlocutor said "I guess it's good that Adolf Hitler exterminated some of these Jews, right?" This opinion shocked the researcher recording the interview to such an extent that he expressed his strongly different views on the Holocaust in a very emotional way.[2] Seeing the irritation and unambiguousness of the researcher's response, the

2 During the fieldwork with the student group, we carefully analyzed this situation by continuing to reflect on it during a university seminar. All the participants of the seminar agreed that certain

interlocutor withdrew from his controversial statement, saying "Well, if that's what you think." The use of the question form when presenting his own opinion allowed the interlocutor to "save face" (at least in his opinion) in this verbal confrontation by relativizing the positions expressed. The questioning form opened up the possibility of various answers, allowing as a possible option the decidedly different view put forward by the researcher.

Suggestion

Another self-silencing strategy was concstituted by suggestion. In a situation where our interlocutors were not sure about our attitude to media news, they gently suggested their interpretation with phrases such as "You might think that..." A characteristic example of this is provided by conversations about the plane crash on April 10, 2010, in which the President of Poland, his wife and 94 other people died. This event, and especially its causes, were topics for political discussions and aroused great emotions. Not knowing whether we thought the catastrophe was the result of intentional acts or an accident, our interviewees suggested their interpretation by saying "you might think it was an attack". Proposing this idea in the form of a suggestion made it possible to reveal one's views, while also leaving open the possibility of withdrawing from them if the adversary found them wrong, absurd or ridiculous. However, if the researcher remained neutral, the statement was usually continued, with the speaker arguing in favour of the thesis about the planned attempt on the president's life, and presenting various arguments previously discussed with neighbours and friends. Of course, we also encountered interlocutors convinced that the plane catastrophe was an accident or a result of negligence. And they, on observing the researcher's neutrality, also developed arguments in favour of the suggested beliefs. Suggestions usually constituted an introduction to a topic that strongly polarized its audience.

Allusion

The social poetics of local conversations about politics also included allusions. In an attempt to discover the views of the researchers, interviewees alluded to issues discussed in the region. Introducing allusions into an ongoing discussion was accompanied by a careful observation of the researchers' reactions. An expression of understanding on their faces, supplemented by statements proving that they understood the allusion, reassured the speaker that they shared specific local common knowledge to a sufficient level to comprehend meaning conveyed in a veiled manner. Guesswork and allusions

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opinions expressed by an interviewee may be so oppressive for a researcher that he or she has the right and social responsibility to an emotional response. Currently, the most interesting reflections on the difficulties of conducting research in an environment of people with political views different from the views of the researcher are published by Agnieszka Pasieka (2017).

acted as an act of casting a fishing line, in the hope that the conversation partner would take the bait. If the adversary seemed to understand, then the conversation could be continued. The study of whether we "understand each other" without an explicit elucidation of views was aimed at checking to what extent the researcher knows and can decode content appertaining to locally shared common-sense knowledge. Common sense is what appears to users as "obvious" and "natural", although its obviousness and naturalness are culturally generated features (Geertz 1983). Grasping an allusion, and understanding the unspoken meaning that was suggested through it, acted as proof of belonging to a group of people who understand locally shared interpretations, evaluations and opinions. This type of testing allowed the interlocutor to be considered a person with whom one could speak more openly.

In this way, interviewees checked whether we shared local conceptions about the past, and thus whether they could afford allusive references to the stereotypes that informed them. An example of this can be found in the discussions about Polish foreign policy commenting on the more severe course in relations with Russia after the Law and Justice Party took power in 2005. Statements of the type "Well, it is known from history that it is better not to tease the bear" alluded to the stereotype of Russia being as dangerous and unpredictable as a bear. This belief was supported by ideas about centuries-old Polish-Russian relations and summarized in the comparison of Russia to a dangerous beast. When talking about Polish-German relations, the phrase "You know, Germans are Germans" was often the only summary and explanation of the whole argument. Such an expression synthesized all the richness of ideas about the history of Polish-German contacts, combining pieces of common-sense knowledge about numerous wars – from the Battle of Grunwald to the events of World War II – into a strongly mythicized whole. The whole notion was inextricably intertwined with the idea of the "national character" of the Germans. The phrase "Germans are Germans" encapsulated this stereotype.

Allusive strategies were also used in discussions about various players in the political arena. When our interlocutors wanted to outline the profile of a politician, "who he really is", i.e. his local image, one could frequently hear veiled references to his origins. In the case of local politicians, allusions were made to their private lives and the situation of family and neighbours; in the case of politicians connected with central government, the allusions most often referred to their alleged Jewish roots. Our interviewees realized that locally popular conspiracy theories (Pipes 1997) tend to be references that researchers do not know or share. One of the popular theories was a belief that people of Jewish origin dominate Polish and world politics. Our interlocutors especially suspected politicians of liberal parties of having such origins. Assuming that researchers would keep their distance or criticize these kinds of phantasms, they referred to them by way of allusions and suggestions ("You might know who politician X is") or questions ("Don't you know who politician X is?"). Our interlocutors

considered the "Jews-in-politics" conspiracy theory to be a common-sense, obvious truth. The researchers' failure to accept these local conceptions was proof of the indoctrination of the newcomers from the big city by the liberal media. When they observed the disapproval of researchers towards such beliefs, however, they used various forms of indirect speech to talk about conspiracy theories that served to make the problem blurred and indistinct.

In casual talks about politics, participants risked joking only when they were sure that communication was good enough to laugh or even smile. Highlanders like to joke; many of their jokes make an accurate point, although they often have a vulgar form. They predominantly allowed themselves to joke in polyphonic conversations, in which the position of the researcher with the voice recorder was relegated to the background. Due to the annoyance generated by talking about politicians, most of the jokes were sarcastic. The bitterness with which people talked about the irregularities of political life, about the unpopular decisions of the central authorities and about fiscal policy was expressed in the form of sarcastic jokes so that the conversation would not take on a too melancholy tone and in order to build distance from these irritating and depressing matters.

Particular Expressions

It is also worth emphasizing a further strategy involving a precise choice of words in talks with researchers. When talking about politicians, instead of resorting to common profanity, our interlocutors applied mocking terms, sometimes taking the form of quite amusing word games. For example, members of parliament were referred to with the rhyme, "posły – osły" ("MPs = donkeys", these words rhyme in Polish). This word play when talking about parliamentarians who were the object of vivid aversion made it possible to avoid the vulgar terms that would more probably be used. Mitigation of the use of heavy invectives and vulgarisms can be understood as a kind of courtesy towards the researchers (who were mostly women). On the other hand, they also functioned as a means to lower the emotional level of the conversation and soothe irritation. Interpreting the local social poetics therefore involved paying close attention to the types of expressions used by discussants. Identifying the particular phrases and words used to construct statements enabled a quick and accurate diagnosis of the speaker's political preferences. Such expressions frequently clearly indicate the ideological and political profile of the media from which they were taken. Terms such as "cursed soldiers" and "unborn children" used in statements indicated that more right-wing media had a significant role in building a speaker's worldview . Referring to the same issues using the terms "forest gangs" and "fetuses" suggested that a speaker was more influenced by liberal media. The use of words taken from the media coverage of a specific radio or TV station, or internet portal quite clearly defined the political identification of the speaker. Attention to specific turns of phrase thus proved an

effective way of classifying views without obtaining a clear declaration of political identification. This mode of self-presentation was not always an intentional act: on the contrary, it constituted a kind of denunciation that made it possible to decode the political identification of someone who otherwise might have been trying to conceal it.

Another component of the local social poetics was explanation by comparison. Such comparisons conveyed complicated content by referring to a well-known, and therefore understandable and tame situation. By dint of comparison, speakers sought to mitigate the anxiety-provoking feeling of alienation. From a vast pool of examples, I here choose a comparison intended to reflect a certain political strategy. During the interviews held in 2012, references were made to the Katyń massacre, the 60th anniversary of which was celebrated in 2010. One of the interviewees sought to explain to students the political strategy of Joseph Stalin, in ordering the murder of Polish officer prisoners of war at Katyń. In explaining Stalin's political intention, he compared his action to that of King Herod in ordering the slaughter of the innocents (the murder of all boys younger than 2 years old in Bethlehem in the year of Christ's birth, described in the Gospel of Matthew). The assumption of shared knowledge of this popular evangelical narrative provided the interlocutor with an interpretative key to explain Stalin's strategy, which, as he put it, "was to protect Stalin by preventing a new Józef Piłsudski from growing up and liberating Poland from Soviet dependence." This comparison had great explanatory power, and at the same time enabled the speaker to somewhat mute the indignation provoked by the Katyń massacre.

An additional interesting linguistic feature that often appeared in conversations about politics was the use of the category "normal". The word "normal" was a key term to describe proper patterns of social, economic and political relations. If these patterns had been realized "things would have been normal", but currently "the situation is not normal." The word normal established a certain ideal as obligatory, natural, and obvious, and thus imbued the views of the speaker with great force. The muting tactic, in this case, is to render uneccessary long, expressive arguments, since the word "normal" establishes an individual's belief as universally valid. The normative power of the word is hard to challenge, while its form in itself seems neither aggressive nor offensive.

Aside from a quiet way of asserting one's worldview as a universal norm, another feature of the local social poetics was constituted by ways of gently distancing oneself from views that are difficult to accept. An example of the tactic of softly expressing disapproval is the use of the phrase "it seems excessive to me". The use of the verb "seems to me" emphasized that what was being expressed was an individual and uncertain opinion, and the adjective "exaggerated" was a mild form of conveying a personal judgment that in fact might be interpreted as tantamount to the word "unacceptable". Our interviewees used this tactic when commenting, for example, on news about the special treatment of African-Americans in the U.S. or about more open attitudes towards people who are gender non-normative. Assuming that the researchers might have

a different opinion on this subject, the interviewees, wishing to avoid confrontation, used such phrases as: “It seems excessive to me that the Americans get all so delicate with black people”, or “These parades [Gay pride], I think they are an exaggeration.” The use of such turns of expression served to lower the emotional temperature of the discussion, and at the same time to check the interlocutor’s reaction and diagnose the level of convergence of opinions.

Whispering

In accordance with the main interests of the research projects in the frames of which they were undertaken, the interviews were generally focused on current political affairs. However, the interviewees themselves included numerous other threads that they associated with the main topic. It was in such an unexpected or grassroots way that the figure of Major Józef Kuraś, nicknamed “Ogień” [“Fire”], appeared in the conversations. In 1939, Józef Kuraś was a soldier of the Polish army who fought against the German army. From 1941, the group of resistance fighers led by “Fire” was subordinated to the Tatra Confederation, a part of the resistance movement which constituted a great challenge for the occupying German authorities. After the end of the war, Kuraś briefly cooperated with the new communist authorities. Later, he abandoned this function and, together with his group, continued illegal, secret, “forest” partisan activities until his death from wounds in February 1947. The character of Major Józef Kuraś, who provokes controversy among historians, also aroused various reactions from our interlocutors. In interviews, speakers expressed both their fascination with this historical figure and critical attitudes towards him. The latter were noted especially in conversations with inhabitants of villages in the Polish Spisz region.

The figure of “Fire” was an important thread in conversations about the historical policy of the Law and Justice Party, in office in Poland in 2005–2007 (as a minority government) and from 2015 to the present (2021). This historical policy prioritized publicizing knowledge about the post-war activities of partisan groups which had been silenced during the five decades of communism and the years following transformation. As a part of the implementation of this policy, the term “cursed soldiers” was introduced and popularized in the media; in addition, historical research conducted by the Institute of National Remembrance was intensified[3], and numerous commemorative projects, including unveiling monuments and commemorative plaques, celebrating anniversaries, organizing historically themed runs and field games, were promoted. These actions met with mixed reactions from interviewees. Despite differences in views,

3 The Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation was established by the Polish Parlament in 1998. The mission of this institution, as described on its webpage, is “to research and popularize the modern history of Poland and to investigate crimes committed from 8 November 1917, throughout the Second World War and the communist period, to 31 July 1990”; https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-institute (accessed 20.06.2021).

most of them agreed that such popularization was not favourable to the heroes of times as difficult and ambiguous as the first post-war years in Poland, which found itself under the Soviet sphere of influence as a result of the international agreements of 1945.

The stories about the partisan groups led by "Fire" and their daring actions during German occupation and the first post-war years were passed on in Podhale for decades in the form of whispered stories shared in a trusted circle. They were discussed with strangers only reluctantly, as a result of recollections of the fear that accompanied these topics in the 1950s when the threat of arrest was still real. Silenced narratives circulating in trusted circles created, conveyed and strengthened the legend of the forest partisan units. It is worth noting that in the villages of the Polish Spisz region, such stories also circulated in a silenced form; however, in this case their meaning was the opposite. As a result of the implementation of the commemoration policy of the Law and Justice Party, the activities of "Fire" and his group were made public. As expected, coming out of the sphere of whispered stories into the public sphere also laid bare differences in positions towards this legendary character. The muted form of the narrative protected the legend, preventing it from colliding with alternative stories that illuminate and evaluate the same historical figure in a different light. Therefore, in commenting on the implementation of the historical policy of the Law and Justice Party, some of the interviewees suggested that there are topics that do not benefit from publicity and popularization, and as such should be conveyed in a whispered form, in limited circles. Many people argued in favour of silencing issues as difficult, ambiguous and controversial, and as emotionally charged as the post-war activities of "Fire". In their opinion, silencing serves to neutralize judgments which out in the open become too explicit and definitive.

CONCLUSIONS

The self-silencing strategies diagnosed as a result of interviews in Nowy Targ aimed primarily at lowering the emotional intensity of the discussion and exploring the views of partners. They are therefore, I argue, best understood as an expression of a certain openness to other political identifications. The use of irony, allusion, suggestion, questioning and doubting all constitute indirect forms of admitting different perspectives. Using them mollifies the categorical nature of an individual's own opinions, reduces the indisputability of the views expressed and softens the unambiguity of assessments. This openness, however, should not be overestimated as the applied strategies more often serve to mask one's convictions than to question them. Nevertheless, the social poetics described above undoubtedly deepen the dynamic game of negotiating political identifications and make it less aggressive. An unrecognized or unfavourable audience forces discussants to attempt a more balanced way of articulating their views,

and often requires in-depth explanations to make a position more understandable. Whereas conversations among like-minded people restrict worldview echo chambers, conversations between people of different views increase an openness to different political identifications. The various strategies of muting one's voice make it possible to avoid a stiffening and subsequent sharp polarization of positions. Thus, a conscious and intentional silencing of one's voice makes an adversary's voice more audible. In such a way, self-silencing plays an important role in making different voices audible to each other, not only in everyday conversations about politics, but also in the wider public debate.

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