Kowzan, Piotr

The humiliated began to sing. How teachers on strike tried to teach society

European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults 14 (2023) 1, S. 125-143

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2023, pp. 125-143

The humiliated began to sing: How teachers on strike tried to teach society

Piotr Kowzan
University of Gdańsk, Poland (piotr.kowzan@ug.edu.pl)

Abstract

In this article, the protest songs of teachers on strike were analysed as a traditional pedagogical tool of popular education, social movements, and trade unions. An important context for this was the commodification of the entertainment market, expectations towards the teaching profession, and the state of musical competencies in the population. By identifying what the essence of teaching in the teachers' protest songs was, recommendations for making these activities more educational and politically more effective have been presented. The songs might have played a role in the demise of the strike, in the specific political context, described in the paper. Using the comparisons of teachers to animals by the teachers themselves was a common, but risky tactic.

Keywords: protest songs, teachers' strike, social media pedagogy, popular education, radical education

Introduction

Songs and the acts of singing together are a traditional part of the union movement's struggles and popular education. In 2019, teachers in Poland stopped working and began to sing, and the recordings were made available to the public.

The largest teachers' strike in Polish history took place on April 8-27, 2019, after which it was suspended. Out of 20,403 schools, kindergartens, and school complexes, 15,179 institutions, that is, 74.29% participated in the strike (ZNP, 2019, April 10). The aim of the strike was to increase teachers' salaries (Smolińska-Theiss, 2019). But there were many more reasons for teachers' frustration, including the chaos caused by school reforms (Wagner, 2020). In Poland, trade unions exist only in a rudimentary way and are so financially weak that the teachers' union could not provide strike pay. The most

ISSN 2000-7426

http://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4207
www.rela.ep.liu.se

vulnerable union members could count on some financial relief from their union, but the scale of the strikers' desperation is clear.

On April 6, just two days before the strike, the leader of the ruling party Law and Justice (PiS), Jarosław Kaczyński, announced that animal owners would get subsidies for their farm animals: 500 PLN for each cow and 100 PLN for each pig – which was arguably a part of the governmental strategy of playing teachers against farmers. The opposition quickly challenged this proposal, asking why the government wanted to give subsidies for animals, while they claim not to have money for teachers. The government's suggestion caused public outrage and started numerous critical memes, such as one where a teacher from a Polish comedy is asked by his son 'Dad, why the f... are you striking? Make a child, buy 10 pigs and a cow' – alluding also to the recently introduced social benefits for parents (Wprost.pl, 2019, April 9). The songs analysed here were influenced by this political context.

The protest songs came in the first few days of the strike. Not only could their songs not break through the media blockade to be broadcasted on the radio, but one could even get the impression that they had become counter-effective in making people feel solidarity with the strikers. Circulated on social media, the songs collected many negative comments. Therefore, some sites prohibited commenting. Teachers removed many videos from the internet after the strike.

In this paper, I broadly define the protest song as a song performed by protesters. I did not intend to reject any manifestation of a community's creativity, no matter if it related to the politics. Other researchers emphasized that protest songs must express objection or, at the very least, offer some debatable solutions if limited to bringing attention to social issues (Haynes, 2008).

This study aims at analysing the application of the 'tool' of the songs, in radical popular education. By radical I mean going to the roots, in terms of both fundamentals and essentials of education intertwined with socio-political struggles. I am interested in how and what the teachers tried to teach society and in the techniques and circumstances in which these acts took place. First, I will show how singing is rooted in radical popular education. Then I will show that the use of songs in the protests was a part of the realm of teaching. This is important because a more free use of the educators' competencies and the addition of instructions for the public were missing in this struggle. The analysis focuses on the lyrics of the songs, revealing the message of love and hate, and the details of an intense clash with power.

Teachers in Poland followed a pattern that had been used in social movements before: they used well-known melodies, changed the lyrics, sang together, and made public their common voice. Such creativity emerges spontaneously all over the world because it is intuitive and egalitarian - it uses basic skills. Understanding this case from Poland will reveal the limitations of the use of this traditional tool in the Polish context. It will also allow me to propose changes in the way such interventions are undertaken in the future.

Academics typically analyse protest songs that have already resonated effectively in society; that have become entrenched in social memory. The songs collected for this paper have not gained attention yet. Protesting teachers in Poland created many protest songs and performed some of them on the streets, without reaching the status of universal strike icon. The strike itself ended without achieving its goals.

Protest songs as educational tool

Time for writing songs and singing as an activity may come in moments of boredom when people feel free, both from work and family obligations. During workplace strikes in the 1980's Poland, workers sung to 'pass the time' (Bohlman, 2016, p. 245) because the strikers were waiting for the results of the talks. The 1960s were the golden period of protest songs when creativity accompanied the anti-war movement and many counterculture movements. Great social movements and large-scale protests are often identified with one iconic song. The Solidarity movement in Poland had the song 'Mury' performed by Jacek Kaczmarski (Bohlman, 2016), and mass protests in Hong Kong in 2019 had 'May Glory Be to Hong Kong' (Choi, 2020). During protests of a smaller scale and intensity, protest songs used to be an in-group activity for the needs of already mobilized people (Hurner, 2006). This changed with the rise of social media, where singing can be easily documented, shared and it can resonate beyond group, place, and time-boundaries.

Protest songs are a form of intentional, multi-layered, and artistically sophisticated communication.

> [They] are also channels of communication for activists - within movements, but also between different movements, and, indeed, between movement generations. Music enters what we have called the collective memory, and songs can conjure up long-lost movements from extinction as well as reawakening forgotten structures of feeling. In this respect, the songs of social movements affect the dynamics of cultural transformations, the historical relations between dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formations. (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998, p. 161)

Protest songs perform basic functions such as maintaining commitment and giving a sense of pride to the performers. They also have the potential to provoke dialogue by using aesthetics evoking previous social mobilizations (Everhart, 2012). The protest songs can be considered art and because of their complexity, humour, disguised in well-known melodies, their inclusion in the public debate is often subversive rather than simply dialogical (Eyerman, 2019).

There is controversy in the literature as to whether protest songs can be considered educational at all. The findings differ due to the different corpora of the analysed songs. Knupp argued they could not (1981) but in his examples the lyrical layer of the message was not significant, while Haynes believed that they were educational because in her study 'lyrics […] are quite explicit in their description of relatively current history from their critical perspectives' (2008, p. 254). They did not consider singing as such to be educational.

In the influential residential adult learning project of folk high schools inspired by Grundtvig, songs were so important that the repeatedly republished songbooks have always been present in these schools, even when everything else has been changed (Westerman, 2005). In folk high schools, songs are pre-educational, because people sing together at the beginning of the day. It is therefore a prerequisite for education. It places people in the community, and assembles individuals into the social (Kipnis, 2015). The content and form of the song may determine whether it will be a community of brave, critical, or ironic people.

Scandrett (2014) noted that 'It is argued that popular education should be regarded as a methodology which cannot be reduced to particular pedagogical methods' (p. 328). With protest songs, you can risk treating them as a popular education method that can function separately. Protest songs remain after social movements and as separate,

autonomous entities, they are portals to the roots of social struggles. They inspire to act for social liberation because they expand people's awareness from individual to collective. Listening to a protest song gives the impression that you are not alone, even if at a given time and place, you remain lonely. A song, especially a protest song, can serve as a comrade. Just by repeating itself, it turns people on standby, increasing their capacity for indignation. Eyerman and Jamison directly pointed to Highlander Folk School and its songs as the root of North American social movements, including civil rights movement (Bodene-Yost, 2013; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). Protest songs mobilise traditions, they allow you to feel and understand the continuity of social struggles and – according to the authors – you can follow these stories by looking at overlapping modifications to the original text, sometimes also to the melody. Combining the past, present and future, protest songs become a manifestation of culture, politics, and education because all these spaces overlap at moments of collective care for the common good.

The possibility of harmful use is a burden carried by every song, even at the level of the music arrangement itself, as shown by the songs of hate created during the Balkan war (Johnson & Cloonan, 2009). Some of what a song does to the audience will take place before the audience reaches the lyrics.

Teaching far afield with protest songs

The protest songs that I analyse in this paper can be educational not only because of the students (as the often addressed recipients of the message) but also simply because teachers performed them at school. Perhaps the students' absence made teaching even better. In an empty school, teaching is no longer related to having control over those who are taught. Physical distance does not rule out teaching, as evidenced by the popularity of unilaterally broadcasted online lectures. If there are people who are ready to listen, and they are in conditions that allow time to listen (Butterwick & Roy, 2020), the teachers' voices will be heard. To further think of protest songs as teaching, the intention behind the cry is important. No matter how far teachers wanted to reach and synchronise society around their 'love & hate' message, there is a general problem with teachers' activity in social movements. Knowledge diffusion and learning in social movements are often described in opposition to regular teachers' schoolwork. Popular education's radicalism comprises of these ideas: 1) learning from the world replaces curriculum; 2) the right of everyone to learn and the joy of learning replace compulsory schooling and subordination; 3) discovering tools of emancipation comes during social struggle instead of coming from knowledge transmission from those who are supposed to know (Hall, 2006). Thus, striking teachers who dream of a 'proper' school, and use revolutionary rhetoric are both the embodiment of a radical project and a threat which may limit radicalism to improving working conditions in an otherwise inadequate school institution. Knowing about the potential limitations of teachers' radicalism, in the text layer of their songs, I looked for fragments expressing love for specific topics and states of affairs as well as hatred, such as naming what they would like to remove from social life. I borrowed this idea from Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019).

Regardless of *ad hoc* intentions, people demanding social change transmit the content of their message to society. Eyerman and Jamison identified what social movements disseminate in society as new 'knowledge interests'. And they termed them as: 1) cosmological, or an idea of a good life; 2) technical, that is the skills required to join the movement; and 3) organisational, that is emergent types of relations within society (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, 1998). In practice, such a socio-cosmological upheaval means that, for example, Raging Grannies from Canada, with their cheeky

protest songs, show older women in a new, active role of unstoppable peace activists (Roy, 2002). The unique technical dimension can be seen in the school strike songs from the 'Fridays For Future' movement because they required high digital skills and the ability to maintain intergenerational dialogue (Buckley & Bowman, 2021). And organisational issues are sometimes the whole strategically prepared pedagogy, as in the case of women from Ada Songor Salt Movement in Ghana who, in their songs, deliberately coded instructions how to find knowledge, connect with others and mobilise to collective action (Langdon et al., 2020). It is hard to expect that the short-term teachers' creativity during the strike would be a carrier of knowledge with a potential similar to the many years of efforts of mass social movements. Hopefully, the multitude of texts collected for the analysis will allow us to see some patterns in the field of knowledge interests. We will learn how the teachers used the possibilities of protest songs in this area. After all, even if the tools used by teachers on a daily basis differ from what they used *en masse* during the strike, teaching is what we can consider them experts at in general.

Materials and methods

I collected video recordings of 78 songs, published on YouTube and Facebook, all sung in Polish. I will use the words 'video' and 'song' interchangeably – as all the songs I analysed have both a musical and visual part (song and video). For 56 of them, I have determined the release date of the musical layer of the piece. The teachers most often used works written in 1981. Half of the identified music was published no later than 1985. These years are characteristic because it was the declining and hardest economic period of the so-called communism in Poland. In the years 1981-1983, there was martial law in Poland, introduced in response to the 'carnival of solidarity' of 1980-1981. The other 22 songs were based on traditional, original or simply unidentifiable melodies.

For 21 songs, it was not possible to establish what location the songs came from. For others, the name of the place appeared in the title of the video, and its description or in the comments.

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of songs' origin (N = 78, unidentified = 21). From *Contour map of Poland* [Image], by Halibutt, 2006, Wikipedia, (https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Polska_kontur_bialy.png). CC BY-SA 3.0

The geographic distribution shows greater activity in those provinces with strong urban centres, where resistance to the current government is articulated on various occasions. Particularly little activity of teachers is visible in the east of the country. Teachers negotiate their salary with the government. Thus, the strike was not a dispute at all with the municipalities as employers. Local authorities often supported teachers, and the government was a party to the dispute. The reason for the distribution of singing activity, could be the distribution of support for the ruling party, which is much higher in the eastern regions.

I transcribed and coded the lyrics, and most of the codes were descriptive. Only a few songs had a distinctive title, so the songs will be presented here with numbers. The song fragments mentioned in the text are translations in which I focused on meaning, ignoring the poetic structure.

To show how teachers used songs as radical popular education, I used Critical Discourse Analysis [CDA]. CDA is a research approach designed to provide insight into how discourse works (here the focus was on resistance) in relation to inequality and social structures (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). The purpose of the CDA was to alter or obstruct the oppressive nature of discourse. This is an ambitious task for a scientific text, but possible because of the cyclical nature of social struggles for education. The subject of the CDA's research is statements, especially political ones, made to manipulate reality. Protest songs meet these criteria. As for the research method, it will be a thematic analysis with elements of rhetorical analysis.

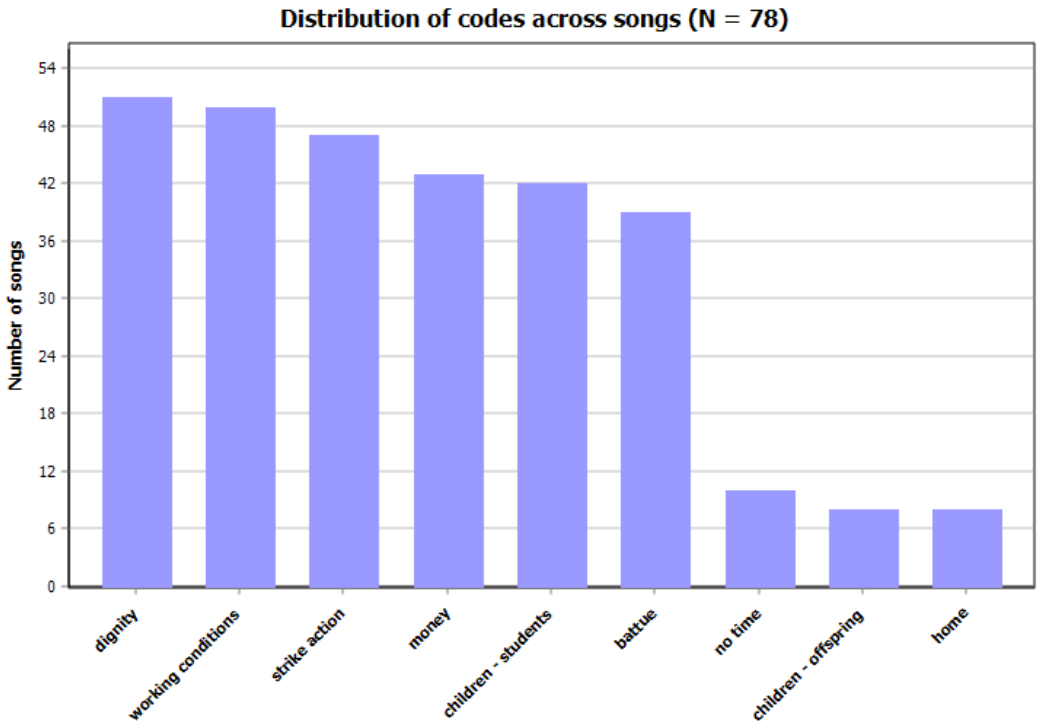
Fairclough's approach had already been used in the analysis of protest songs (Haynes, 2008). In this study, however, I do not compare the collected material with other historical examples. The previous long teacher strike in Poland took place on May 4-24, 1993, and no similar works have survived. Instead, I will devote more attention to the three levels of interpretation that Fairclough distinguished, and which, in his view, constitute the CDA (Fairclough, 2006). These levels are:

- Textual: analysis of the text itself
  After listening to songs several times, I looked for one-word descriptions for the parts of their lyrics, then I combined similar codes into more general ones. Also, I was deliberately looking for passages expressing love for people and specific issues, and those passages that would describe the future after the strike.
- Operational: analysis of various aspects of the production, distribution, and consumption of the text (for Fairclough this would be socio-cognitive, and all practical issues related to the fact that the broadly understood text becomes meaningful for discourse).
  I analysed what remains from videos when the sound is turned off. I started with video descriptions, such as hashtags and keywords; the number of views and likes, the content of the comments. Then I looked at scenography, which was often needed to identify the location of schools and also the video quality. Lastly, I checked where those videos were republished.
- Social: analysis of the role of the text in the social environment at a given historical time as an event.
  Gaining information for this part of the work was essentially a by-product of a song search using various Boolean search strings, using hashtags associated with teachers' strike and their protest songs.

Textual analysis

The most common codes in Figure 2 give an insight into the topics teachers presented to their audience.

Figure 2. Themes identified in the songs (author's own figure)



The most frequently identified topic concerned dignity. Teachers saw a threat to their dignity both in their low salaries and in the fact that politicians manifested contempt for them as people:

> We want the truth, respect, recognition from this authority for our efforts
> Each of us in school is by vocation, we will be hungry without pay increases. [68]

> I am what I want to be, I will not let you offend me,
> I want to teach, that's how I [want] to show the world to children… [70]

Dignity also relates to the working conditions:

> There is much traffic in a small room - crowded, loud,
> different actions here every day, kids crowd,
> time to compete, there's no photocopying paper
> and paints brought from home.
> We give our hearts, our time
> what do we get in exchange?
> Strike! [11]

The strike took place before the final primary school exams, so there was a threat of postponing them. But the government changed the regulations, allowing non-teachers to

conduct external examinations. These substitute workers were paid, while the actual teachers were supposed to conduct the exams without extra payments.

> Difficult exams, students are happy,
> maybe they will not suspend the strike for the moment.
> Your thoughts are vain, my beloved students,
> priests and firefighters will be examining today. [58]

The teachers also showed the insecurity of working conditions. The changing guidelines have become the education system's permanent feature. They strongly interfere with what teachers do in the class, yet they are created without the knowledge and opinion of teachers:

> They keep changing programs, they treat us like nothing. [23]

> Every day I visit all the countries, though on the map,
> I will only go when the strike is over,
> I don't want adventures; I have a program and I have tests.
> The minister creates my craziest adventures himself. [8]

The teachers had common complaints. The topics shown in Figure 2 were predictable, and strike-related, except for the one related to battue.

Animals and the hunt

The code that I called 'battue' refers to a technique used in hunting, aimed at scaring animals by beating sticks, and leading them into a killing zone or ambush. It is an *in vivo* code; i.e., the exact wording derived from the text, and teachers used it to comment on the government propaganda: 'no matter how hard you try, you will not avoid the social battue' [2]. I used it because the hunting motif is in harmony with the animals numerous in the texts. Teachers complained it was easier to take part in a battue than to flee or defend yourself:

> I'll fold all the hate into one warm scream
> To regain our prestige, restore beautiful dreams [15]

The teachers listed complaints about the minister of education and her role in the battue:

> You think, Anka [the minister], you won because you are humiliating us!
> Dirty lies are your weapon and your cheeky game. [30]

> Instead of nonsense, say that we earn 5,000 and more
> Look where you've already gone. Why are you lying?
> Where did you get the data from? [46]

They had been addressing parents of their students directly, seeing the results of the hate campaign in advance:

> The public can be brainwashed, persuaded into a powerful nonsense
> They can cheat and play on emotions to fuel anger
> Hey parents of our students, can't you see that
> you are also just a part of the game that goes on. [30]

The teachers identified themselves as being stigmatised in the media. The teachers devoted much of the text to the reconstruction of hatred, trying to ridicule the accusations by simply recalling them. They could also break away from this humiliating content. They argued that, in the event of a battue, their joint struggle and individual optimism can be a source of dignity:

> Get up, wake up, take a strike,
> be an optimist every day.
> We can do it, all of us together
> although the hate on the Internet is still going on,
> go on strike, fight for dignity,
> be an optimist every day.
> We have had enough of this battue on us that still lasts [8]

From the battue as an element of animal hunting, we turn to the most peculiar feature of the teacher's protest songs. In more than half of the songs, teachers compared themselves to animals. The many appearances of animals in the lyrics were a response to the government's actions, such as the aforementioned proposal of subsidies for farm animals. Animals appear in the songs as a reference group for teachers, as comparisons (to teachers), epithets towards politicians (e.g., a ram) and onomatopoeias, e.g., moo.

> One of them finished studies, and after graduation, as it happens, moo
> There are diagnoses, observations on the development, and discussions, moo
> Why and for what [are we] writing reports at night? [53]

> Woof, woof, woof, woof, meow,
> oink, oink, oink, oink, moo
> quack, quack, quack, quack, honk
> On the farm we will meet anyway [66]

This last one is a complete song. It refers to 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell. The animals portrayed the degradation of teachers:

> The teacher is not a pig. The teacher is a zero today,
> and although he is trying as he can,
> today, a cow is a more important thing. [1]

> We like working at school, but we are advised to go to the field
> to breed cows with patches and be entitled to a subsidy [4]

> There are those for whom you are worth less than a cow [20]

> You said on Monday, cows are important, it's not a sham
> We wait all the time. You decoyed us; you cheated us
> It's you who cheated us, you lied to us again [59]

The animals were used to describe politicians, as in the example below:

> What am I doing here? What are you doing here?
> Yellow badge is already decorating my black blouse for the fourth day
> There are so many different ways... What are you doing here?
> Another day, and the government stands still like a calf. [37]

> Say yes to this rise,
> Like an eel,

stop wriggle in front of it [46]

Don't give up, teacher
Let the donkeys understand,
that you are not worse than a cow [52]

There are also references to those in power who were teachers and ought to speak for them, but instead sold their souls for cat fur. Animals acted as a lever to fight, allowing teachers to articulate who they did not want to be, i.e., through the act of de-identification with them.

Cows, porkers, and other ducks are worth more than education
We will not allow for that, so we are fighting bravely for our honour.[18]

We are waiting for changes because it's high time.
We are not cows, and where is our money? [11]

If I must teach young people, give us a dignified life
A pig cannot be more expensive than one who teaches children to live. [1]

You don't want education, the ignorant mob [is what] you need.
You do not listen to our arguments; I know your lies well.
Hey teacher, don't give up!
They will want to sweep you away like a worm or a louse. [69]

And finally, the animals were also accepted for self-identification, after changing their species.

The assumption of the role of animals was a form of linguistic reappropriation. This change of meaning took place simultaneously with the substitution of the animal species.

We run around like a scalded cat today, struggling to save a leaky budget. Is this how a teacher should live? Who will answer me? I'm curious. [50]

A new talent in me lies dormant, next to the cow a deer will stand
Such a democracy with you as a minister on vacation [42]

You may think that someone will understand that without knowledge,
nothing will be possible!
And for that, you need teachers who fight like lions every day! [66]

The wealth of cultural references to animals is so abundant that they felt at home in taking advantage of it. Using rhyming messages and animals is a classic way of conducting popular moral education in society. An example of the persistence of such references in culture is Aesop's Fables.

The teachers, however, felt uncomfortable with the fact that they had become the object of comparison to farm animals. The songs use these animals as the antithesis of educated people. In biopolitical terms, teachers felt treated not as political animals (*zoon politicon*), but as farm animals, tools, and consequently as slaves. The ease with which the authorities cut themselves off from teachers, let teachers think that their exclusion from a democratic community comes from their own inability to use violence during a strike:

The teachers aren't miners, they don't burn tires in the street.
The state supports human and animal reproduction, not teaching [54]

Oral communication and folklore have historically been important tools for popular education (Westerman, 2005). The consolidation of knowledge generated together in songs belongs to the radical tradition of education and has repeatedly proved its usefulness in the social struggle. Thanks to comparisons with animals, the teachers spoke in simple, picturesque language.

The effect of exposing the paradox that people educated to educate children were treated like livestock should cause a cognitive shock to the public. The provoked teachers could count on the fact that, after the battue, everyone in any social position would perceive the contempt for teachers and their social degradation as a threat to themselves. However, it seems that when some strikers focused on de-identification and others self-identified as animals or even pretended to be animals, mixing the descriptions of the tragedy of teachers' own fate with the comedy of comparisons with animals led to an overall grotesque.

Teachers may have unintentionally channelled themselves, or have been channelled by the politicians, to the unfavourable comparisons with farm animals, which might have ridiculed their case. The announcement of the subsidies for farm animals at the time when teachers demanded higher salaries, may indeed have been a battue, and led the teachers into a trap.

Teaching out of love

In the post-critical perspective of education that emphasises the need to build, if not to save the world, teaching is defined as an act of love:

> Teaching is in itself staying true to the love one has for a particular subject matter. Or more exactly: that this love, as well as the relentless effort to put this love to public display for the new generation, and to make them attentive to what is good in the world, so that they can begin anew with it. (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019, p. 3)

To find out what teachers would like to keep in the world, and not just change, you need to look beyond their reluctance to fragments of reality. For this purpose, I searched for parts of the text that showed the temporal orientation of the message. It turned out that in line with psychological research in this area (Stolarski et al., 2015), the temporal orientation was not always clear in the songs. Teachers described the present as a decisive moment, and a moment of absolute frustration. After the frustration has passed, there can only be hope:

> It's time to speak openly where you have all of us:
> In deep despise and that's all about this. [22]

> All this time, it is giving us a tough time
> But today we all say enough!
> We just want these dreams to end,
> Let's make good days come. [27]

But the positive future was denied as well:

> Do not ask me about tomorrow. How long will the strike last?
> We are sailing on a miserable raft of the 'good change' time [15]

This is a reference to the governmental programme of 'good change' in the society. But the meanings of the words have been reversed. There is no future because a simulacrum

of 'good change' has emerged. And the teachers turned out to be those who do not see any good in this. Therefore, the future appeared in songs with a direct relationship to the past. The future is the return and reconstruction of the idea based on Bauman's retrotopia, a projection of an idealised past:

> I am waiting for an open school, still worth more and more.
> In which there will reside the spirit of Enlightenment. [47]

Pastoral conceptions of the past are akin to a fairy tale world - you cannot get there, but the values remain alive there and, from there, teachers recall them:

> I will exchange my low salary for a dream yacht,
> to take me back to before-the-reform time. [15]

> But something from those years remains in me:
> My little missionary, pedagogical world.
> When I remember this bygone time
> I know one thing - it didn't go to waste.
> I would give a lot to experience it again. [51]

If one adopts the post-critical perspective of understanding teaching as giving done out of love, protest songs are gifts, apart from being vehicle for political claims. Based on these passages, we can assume that teaching through these particular protest songs offers a time travel to see the present world from the perspective of past expectations. And teachers offered us a travel to the past, because from there they could see something worthwhile in their profession. During the struggle the logic of politics as based on anger and obstacles to remove prevails, and teachers try both to emancipate from the oppressive circumstances and to find some refuge in the past.

Teachers directly sang about their like or love for something. This declared affective attachment concerned mainly their students, people, and the next generations entering the world:

> We are waiting... We will persevere for the idea because we love the students. [78]

This love also applies to the school:

> They say we’re lazy. That we do nothing at work.
> And we love school. We just want to live with dignity. [34]

> Thanks to all of you, I know, I know I can do it,
> Our plan will finally come true.
> I look at you school, I love you.
> I’ll stand on my head, and nothing can break me. [35]

Teachers find it difficult to explain their ‘crazy love’ for school in the text, especially in the context of the fact that they have described the various torments associated with the work. This teaching passion for school and people is on the verge of madness because it also seems to be outside the logic of a wage strike. This logic of struggle assumes that without adequate wages, there is no work. And teachers were tired of not doing this job. This explains why, in one passage, teachers reject the idea of freedom (implicitly: freedom to choose another job) when they sing:

> I don’t want freedom, I already have a job,
> and I have a passion, and I don’t want to change it,

although I hear it every day. [8]

As with freedom, they also do not really care about being political animals all the time. Although, as noted earlier, they felt that being equated with animals means being excluded from public life:

We don't want to live in politics.
We want to teach kids because that's our passion.
We don't have to do anything, but we fight.
We fight for ourselves, for you, for our common fate! [17]

Perhaps they did not need the current politics, if they had the impression that they were changing the world for the better with their work, anyway.

Many young people were educated by a person who thought:
this is how I will serve the world! [2]

In these fragments there is a love for the world, for school, for what you do every day and for young people. This love of the world is not the essence of the content of protest songs until we accept that they are all songs of dignity. Then the love for students turns into an internal drive to show themselves to society in their humiliation.

The teachers thought of the strike as an educational situation for students, despite their absence from school. One of the songs resonates directly:

Hey students at our school, listen
always choose well in your life
although you will face many more difficulties
break every barrier you meet
Take our example. We are a model for you today
It is a lesson in loyalty and persistence, too. [9]

It is them, the teachers, who serve both as a didactic aid and as an example for students.

Operational analysis

The teachers did not share information on the process of creating these pieces. There were no videos showing them creating texts, discussing and making decisions, so we do not know how dynamic, structured and pedagogically thoughtful the process was. We can assume that these were group processes because the teachers spent their time together in empty schools. Sometimes, videos included information about the authors of the text in the piece's description. Both the creative process and the joy of listening to colleagues' performances had to satisfy the needs of the striking communities. Also, the recordings show that people often enjoyed the performance. Similar to the workers waiting for the results of negotiators' talks during the carnival of solidarity in the 1980s, teachers in empty schools experienced alternative forms of sociality in their workplace while singing together. Their ordinary work is usually individual and physically separated in classes. It is visible that teachers enjoyed the synchronisation of voices and bodies while singing, because they moved to the melody, sometimes unknowingly. This joy of singing together sometimes introduced a certain dissonance, when simultaneously they sang about issues which needed to be changed. Most of the pieces were performed by choir, some pieces were performed in groups, and one piece was individual. The song, performed individually, had a choral performance recorded.

The low quality of some movies turned out to be disappointing, suggesting that the creation of the songs in itself was priority, rather than their later dissemination. One was rotated, many moved around because they were recorded by hand. Sometimes the audio quality was failing, or words were not clearly pronounced, so the lack of subtitles was annoying. The subtitles were inserted in a few cases only, and precisely in those videos where it would not be necessary. Song lyrics were rarely included in movie descriptions but sometimes partially if the song was republished. Some protest songs were made available with the apparent intention of ridiculing teachers by writing offensive descriptions or new titles.

The teachers wanted to get their songs into circulation quickly. Any post-production work on the recorded material would be time-consuming. As a result, spontaneity became the dominant aesthetics of protest songs. This turned out to be counterproductive, because in combination with the salary aspirations and the emphasis on the high level of education in the lyrics, it often embarrassed the viewers. Even if most of the unfavourable comments were politically motivated or even fabricated hate, the positive comments were restrained in nature and limited to repeating declarations supporting striking teachers. Sometimes, active allies publicly stated on social media that out of the many songs they watched, they managed to pick one that they recommended because it was worth listening to.

We can assume that for the authors and performers the lyrics were the most important message. The familiar melody was auxiliary, and the visual layer served to verify the message as authentic. But on social media platforms, protest songs suddenly became a commodity. They were compared to each other and everything that could be considered 'packaging' was discussed.

The case of a video, which, when published in its raw version, did not gain positive attention, evidences the importance of ‘the packaging’. Such a raw version was even republished by another user, and included a compilation of several teachers’ protest songs, over which the commentators published many malicious remarks. In the second version, an oral introduction preceded the video explaining the purpose of the protest. This simple procedure changed the reception of the video, as it encouraged viewers to leave positive comments and 'like' it. It also increased its viewership. Interestingly, in the 1970s it was experimentally proved that for the ability to cause a change of mind in listeners ‘speech-song combination shows greater change than either speech or song’ (Kosokoff & Carmichael, 1970, p. 300).

Contrary to great social mobilisation, such as anti-war protests (Haynes, 2008), the teachers did little to facilitate the dissemination of these songs. They did not encourage downloading, copying, or using. This restraint may have been due to haste, insufficient skills, or unfriendly reception among some of the audience. However, the use of popular melodies could cause the listeners' memory to be 'infected' with the text of the protest song and it would be difficult to recall the original content. Instead, phrases associated the with teachers' struggles would come back.

In terms of the production and distribution of protest songs, teachers did not treat them like material they would present in the classroom. They did not include instructions for recipients. They did not encourage them to take any action. In this form, this presentation only required listening. And listening to a song in front of a screen is something different than performing it together. Other content providers today plan a continuous production process and, thus, encourage viewers to subscribe to their channels. Teachers did not expect that there would be a sequel, that they would have to do it again. They informed the public about their situation and that was it. They did not challenge other teachers or schools to perform. Neither did they instruct what individuals could do,

such as call their representative in Parliament. There was also no incentive for the audience to push the song to a prime position in the radio charts.

Social analysis

Politicians from the ruling party in Poland have systematically dismantled democratic institutions. In this shift of the state towards authoritarian rule, they attach great importance to controlling key areas of social life and the internal coherence of the dominant narrative (Cervinkova & Rudnicki, 2019; Żuk, 2020). Yet, the fully controlled communication of the public media to the teachers did not have to be disdainful. But it was, because for right-wing parties in Poland, education is foremost a field of ideological struggle. And this is a fight that they constantly lose. The political and media hegemony of the authoritarian government prevented discussions with teachers, so they defended themselves with songs.

The fact that the teachers assessed the political situation correctly, singing about the ‘battue’ has been confirmed by leaks that have been published subsequently. On January 14, 2022, e-mails exchanged by advisers and politicians of the ruling party regarding the teachers' strike were released. Planned manipulations, instructing the media how to treat the teacher’s union chairman, and playing parents against teachers was a part of the strategy (Suchecka, 2022, January 14).

Although the teachers' response may not have been the best at the time in history, it was a sincere result of their evaluation of the circumstances. Regarding how to achieve an educational goal, Horton referred to his notes from the time when he was deciding to set up a folk high school: 'an answer [...] can only come from the people in the life situation' (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. xxii).

The use of protest songs was consistent with the 'high culture of protest' built on the myth of Solidarity (Prusinowska et al., 2012), and in line with the direction in which the active culture of protest is growing in Poland. From quiet and gloomy protests, characteristic of Eastern Europe, it is changing into multimodal forms of protest. Music plays a significant role in organising protests. The very rhythm given to demonstrations by samba groups causes even relatively small activities to gain momentum. However, the importance of singing together during demonstrations becomes apparent when the practice has ceased. In Poland, social movements have noticed the disappearance of singing during demonstrations in favour of chanting and playing songs through loudspeakers. This was counteracted by creating the so-called revolutionary choirs, i.e., groups of people who support various city demonstrations with their singing. Such groups include the Krakow Revolutionary Choir, the TAK [Tricity Women's Action] Choir and the Warsaw Revolutionary Choir ‘Warszawianka.’ Contrary to these prominent initiatives, the teachers' voice came mainly from small towns and were limited to performing one piece.

Reaching for songs is still not a straightforward choice in the Polish context. The state of music education is such that the skills of playing instruments and reading music are predominantly found amongst the elite. In relation to children recognised as gifted, music education in music schools in Poland has a long tradition and is successful. But in one of the diagnostic studies among candidates for early education teachers it was even clearly stated that the respondents 'do not have basic knowledge of the rules of music, which prevents them from performing the simplest rhythmic patterns or melodies, not to mention simple accompaniment' (Majzner, 2018, p. 243). Therefore, we assume that not every school could take part in creating protest songs. Mass audiences, although used to

consuming and evaluating music, could not understand the emotions associated with singing together, because they themselves did not have such experiences.

Authentic protest songs sung by teachers with their recordings lacking any post-production efforts surprised the public. The teachers ignored the dominance of the commodity character of contemporary music and clashed with social expectations towards education as a profession preparing for the challenges of modernity. As a result, figuratively speaking, even if in 2019, children in Poland, like those in the USA and UK, dreamed of becoming youtubers rather than astronauts (however alarming or infantile it was), teachers showed that school will not help reach even such dreams. As one commentator summarised a set of videos: 'You want recognition, so you've arranged it. [And now] most of the society considered you unsuitable for educational work'. This is the strongest recap in public discourse of what happened during the 2019 teachers' strike. It remained unanswered because the strike failed and there was no energy for the conversation or a plan on how to continue it. It is also easy to believe that unfavourable statements are hate, and hate is artificially produced, so commentators are not real people. And there is no one to talk to. However, almost simultaneously during these few days of April 2019, teachers believed it was worth singing to everyone and anyone.

Conclusion

Teachers widely resisted the authorities that tried to degrade them. They risked their image to spread their indignation and to confirm the sincerity of their involvement in the strike. They appealed to the whole society, trying to challenge the dominant narrative and spark joy from their struggle. Within days they switched from following the school curriculum to a radical popular education mode. They really tried to do their best. Yet, they lost. I showed that the lyrics of the protest songs carried messages that people of other professions could identify with. These were both general issues and respect for human dignity; professional and public issues, i.e., those relating to working conditions and the quality of education for the next generations; and concerning the functioning of the state, i.e., a critical analysis of the functioning of the media taking part in the political campaign. The usage of comparisons with animals, common in songs, was a common procedure.

Protest songs, however, did not prove to work as one of the many products distributed on social media platforms. Teachers' aesthetic choices were embarrassing or simply rejected. It was teachers' professional neglect to leave content distribution to itself without instructions to urge consumers to act as citizens.

An analysis of the context in which the protest songs were created and used showed that the teachers were strategically at a disadvantage. They could not break through with the typical, rational discourse in the conditions of the domination of the propaganda directed against them. The songs they used as a tool fell on a soil neglected in terms of music education. Even so, the protest songs have proven their potential, and some lyrics are growing stronger with time.

Recommendations

According to the programme of critical discourse analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) and the tradition of pedagogical research, the diagnosis should be supplemented with recommendations (or even prescriptions, Toolan, 1997). Since the audience had problems with the visual layer of the songs, one can skip the visual part and publish protest songs, replacing the filmed performance with content of symbolic meaning.

A simpler message makes it easier to focus on the lyrics of the protest songs. Yet, unfavourable comparisons, such as those to animals, may – on the other hand – be tricky. The political arena is a complex field and there are many traps one can fall into. Quoting one of the songs again, we can conclude that 'no matter how hard you try, you will not avoid the social battue' [2]. But it is important to consciously choose the comparisons and vivid images.

Hiding the identity of the performers may reduce the intensity of hate speech. The anonymity of the creators will force comments on what is available to criticism, that is, the new knowledge interests carried by songs. The classification of what constitutes knowledge interests was descriptive (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, 1998) but our results indicate that communicating organizational issues in protest songs such as giving instructions to listeners and viewers should be a norm. If the songs are to arouse listeners to a dialogue or action, it should be communicated, because it will create a real opportunity to go beyond mere consumption. Eventually, I must partially agree with Scandrett (2014) that reducing popular education to one method, even if it is mass-produced protest songs, is risky. One-method popular education requires high-quality actions, while struggle requires them to be quick. Favourably, if the protest songs created in 2019 will not be forgotten. Based on previous experiences, such songs can contribute to teacher education programmes (Esteve-Faubel et al., 2019; Everhart, 2012; Scandrett, 2014). Thanks to protest songs, the memory of past social struggles come alive in subsequent struggles, which forces participants to think about the next steps, such as the future. After all, research on protest songs is usually conducted because the old protest songs are still humming somewhere, even after the immediate needs pass. Therefore, coming back to the definition of a protest song sketched at the beginning, I should supplement it with a postulate. A protest song is a song performed by protesters that brings back the memory of past struggles and prepares for the next. Then it will be up to the next study to investigate how protest songs affect the individual time perspectives of listeners and performers of these songs. And this, in turn, may contribute to the return of songbooks in contemporary projects of radical popular education.

References

Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol. 2000.*, *29*, 447–466. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447

Bodene-Yost, Z. (2013). The Danish Folk High School and its Presence in the U.S.: The Failure of the Danish-American Folk High Schools vs. the Success of Highlander Folk School. *The Bridge*, *36*(1), 74–89. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol36/iss1/9

Bohlman, A. F. (2016). Solidarity, Song, and the Sound Document. *The Journal of Musicology*, *33*(2), 232–269. https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2016.33.2.232

Buckley, C. G. & Bowman, B. (2021). Not (just) a protest: the Youth Strike for Climate as cultural exchange and collaborative text [Research Report]. British Council.

Butterwick, S., & Roy, C. (2020). Finding Voice and Engaging Audiences: The power of Arts-Based Community Engagement. In B. Grummell & F. Finnegan (Eds.), *Doing Critical and Creative Research in Adult Education* (pp. 89–99). Brill Sense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420755

Cervinkova, H., & Rudnicki, P. (2019). Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, Authoritarianism. The Politics of Public Education in Poland. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, *17*(2), 1–23. http://www.jceps.com/archives/6398

Choi, S. Y. P. (2020). When protests and daily life converge: The spaces and people of Hong Kong's anti-extradition movement. *Critique of Anthropology*, *40*(2), 277–282. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X20908322

Esteve-Faubel, J. M., Martin, T. J., & Esteve-Faubel, R. P. (2019). Protest songs about the Iraq War: An effective trigger for critical reflection? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, *14*(2), 179–195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197918793003

Everhart, K. (2012). Cultura-Identidad: The Use of Art in the University of Puerto Rico Student Movement, 2010. *Humanity & Society*, *36*(3), 198–219. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597612451243

Eyerman, R. (2019). Protest Music in the Age of Trump. *Books & Ideas*. https://booksandideas.net/Protest-Music-in-the-Age-of-Trump.html

Eyerman, R., & Jamison, A. (1991). *Social movements: A cognitive approach*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Eyerman, R., & Jamison, A. (1998). *Music and social movements: Mobilizing traditions in the twentieth century*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511628139

Fairclough, N. (2006). *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/2074659

Halibutt. (2006). Contour map of Poland [Image]. Wikipedia. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Polska_kontur_bialy.png

Hall, B. (2006). Social movement learning: Theorizing a Canadian Tradition. In T. Fenwick, T. Nesbit, & B. Spencer (Eds.), *Contexts of Adult Education: Canadian Perspectives* (pp. 230–238). Thomson Educational Publishing.

Haynes, L. (2008). *From Vietnam to Iraq: A content analysis of protest song lyrics of two war periods*. *人間文化研究. 10*, 247-261. http://id.nii.ac.jp/1124/00000230/

Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change. In B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters (Eds.), *Amerasia Journal*. Temple University Press. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.30.3.356n382r2336wk8w

Hurner, S. (2006). Discursive identity formation of suffrage women: Reframing the "Cult of True Womanhood" through song. *Western Journal of Communication*, *70*(3), 234–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310600843512

Johnson, B., & Cloonan, M. (2009). *Dark side of the tune: Popular music and violence*. Ashgate.

Kipnis, A. B. (2015). Agency between humanism and posthumanism Latour and his opponents. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, *5*(2), 43–58. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.004

Knupp, R. E. (1981). A time for every purpose under heaven: Rhetorical dimensions of protest music. *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, *46*(4), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417948109372503

Kosokoff, S., & Carmichael, C. W. (1970). The rhetoric of protest: Song, speech, and attitude change. *The Southern Speech Journal*, *35*(4), 295–302. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417947009372062

Langdon, J., Jackson, M., & Kitcher, S. (2020). Pedagogy of song and restorying hope. In B. Grummell & F. Finnegan (Eds.), *Doing Critical and Creative Research in Adult Education (*pp. 167–176). Brill Sense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420755

Majzner, R. (2018). Wiedza muzyczna absolwentów szkół średnich – kandydatów na nauczycieli wczesnej edukacji [Musical knowledge of high school graduates - candidates for early education teachers]. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas. Pedagogika*, *16*, 235–246.

Prusinowska, M., Kowzan, P., & Zielińska, M. (2012). Struggling to unite: the rise and fall of one university movement in Poland. *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements*, *4*(1), 327-359.

Roy, C (2002). The Transformative Power of Creative Dissent: The Raging Grannies' Legacy. In: O'Sullivan, E. V., MOrrell, A., & O'Connor, M. A. (Eds.), *Expanding the boundries of transformative learning* (pp. 257-271). Palgrave.

Scandrett, E. (2014). Popular Education methodology, activist academics and emergent social movements: Agents for Environmental Justice (action note). *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, *6*(May), 327–334.

Smolińska-Theiss, B. (2019). Teacher in the face of educational change – from service to resistance. *Pedagogika Społeczna*, *37*(3), 309–324. https://doi.org/10.35464/1642-672x.ps.2019.3.22

Stolarski, M., Fieulaine, N., & van Beek, W. (2015). Time Perspective Theory; Review, Research and Application. In M. Stolarski, N. Fieulaine, & W. van Beek (Eds.), *Time Perspective Theory; Review, Research and Application*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-07368-2

Suchecka, J. (2022, January 14). Afera mailowa i strajk nauczycieli. "Zostaną dobici i poniżeni falą hejtu". [The e-mail scandal and the teachers' strike. "They will be finished off and humiliated by a wave of hate"]. *TVN24*. https://tvn24.pl/polska/afera-mailowa-i-strajk-nauczycieli-zostana-dobici-i-ponizeni-fala-hejtu-5559249

Toolan, M. (1997). What is critical discourse analysis and why are people saying such terrible things about it? *Language and Literature*, *6*(2), 84–103. https://doi.org/10.1177/096394709700600201

Vlieghe, J., & Zamojski, P. (2019). *Towards an ontology of teaching: thing-centred pedagogy, affirmation and love for the world*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-9361-8_1

Wagner, J. (2020). Resisting performativity measures through local activism: A critical exploration of the 2019 polish teacher strike. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, *18*(3), 1–28.

Westerman, W. (2005). Folk schools, popular education, and a pedagogy of community action. In E. T. Ewing (Ed.), *Revolution and Pedagogy: Interdisciplinary and Transnational Perspectives on Educational Foundations* (pp. 107–132). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403980137_06

Wprost.pl. (2019, April 9). Prezes PiS ogłosił program „500 zł na każdą krowę". Zobacz najlepsze memy! [The party leader of PiS announced the program "500 zł for each cow". See the best memes!]. Wprost.pl. https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10206649/prezes-pis-oglosil-program-500-zl-na-kazda-krowe-zobacz-najlepsze-memy.html

ZNP (2019, April 10). Strajkuje 74,29% szkół i placówek. [74.29% of schools and institutions are on strike]. *Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego*. https://znp.edu.pl/strajkuje-7429-szkol-i-placowek/

Żuk, P. (2020). One Leader, One Party, One Truth: Public Television Under the Rule of the Populist Right in Poland in the Pre-Election Period in 2019. *Javnost - The Public*, *27*(3), 287–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2020.1794413