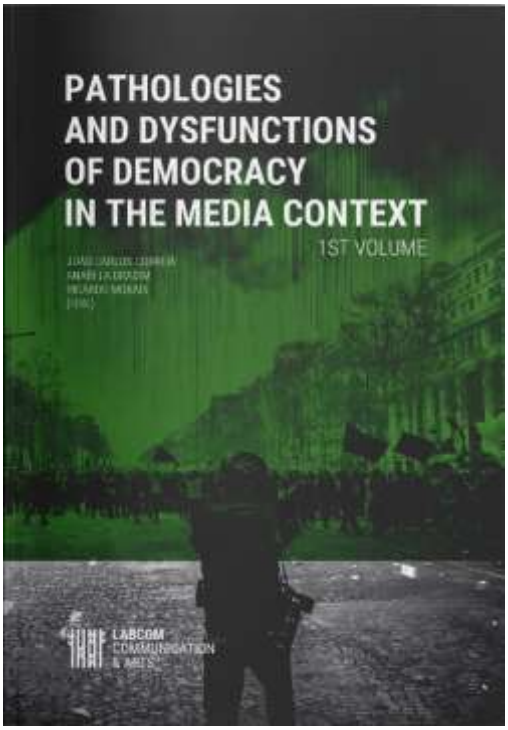

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Communicative Silences in Political Communication

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Abstract:

Traditionally, silence has been related to citizen disengagement and disempowerment. Indeed, at first light, the growth of silence is linked to deficits in democracy since silence is understood as passivity while action and speech are the dominant, and sometimes exclusive, modes of political *praxis*.
But silence can mean different things to politics. It can assume a coercive dimension when it is imposed over marginalized groups (the powerless); nevertheless, it can also assume a form of resistance and empowerment when it condenses self-assertion and becomes a form to navigate relations of power.
In this paper, we contribute to a politics of silence by examining how silence can be a factor of empowerment and liberty. Focusing on the notion of "communicative silences", we posit that silence is not a dysfunction of political communication but a significant element of democracy. Far from being a pathology, silence can also be another mode of communication, one that it is separate from speech.

Keywords: Political Communication; Silence; Democracy; Politics; Silent Citizenship;

Introduction

We live in societies that do not tolerate well silences. We could almost say that we live in noisy societies where mutism is a threatened phenomenon. It has been suggested that the development of sound amplification is the most anti-social invention of modernity (Sim, 2007: 4). In effect, how can one express himself when he must hear all the time? Amplified sound and noise pollution can saturate the environment to the point the individual cannot escape it and cannot be heard. Modern media exorcise silence trying to avoid it fiercely: internet never stops streaming as television never ceases to broadcast. As media discourses become omnipresent and uninterrupted, silence becomes harder to achieve and to guarantee. Our culture is committed to the expansion of communication and, consequently to the contraction of silent moments.

Yet, silence has played a crucial role in human culture: they are critical in religion (ascetism), science (reflection) or the arts (silence as an artistic tool). The ability to be, to think and analyze and to create are dependent of a forbearance from speech or noise. Silence has been seen as an absence, as a lack or deficient of communication. Those who mention silence envisage silence as a threat to community, something akin to a failure or malfunction. "Silence is that which is imposed upon marginalized groups, for example, so it is easily assumed that silence must be overcome. Silence is indicative of miscommunication, so a model of community based on an image of language as transparent communication must eliminate silence" (Ferguson, 2004: 2). Silence is linked to the horror of lack of communication, of aporia, it has to do with the renouncement of the ties that unite fellow citizens.

To post-structuralism, silence can be fearful because it entails ideology as well as hierarchical and discursive orders (Foucault, 1971). The binary dichotomy speech/silence is a powerful tool to negotiate relationships as discourses produce their own silences. "There is not one but many silences and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (Foucault, 1990: 27). The famous adage: "*Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent*" with which Wittgenstein concludes his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* can perhaps express this dialectic speech/silence. It is as an impotency of speaking but, mostly, as the recognition that there are limits to speech. Beyond those limits, it is the silence the stretches its domain. However, silence is not inevitably a form of violence. It can contain also a space of dialogue and encountering. It can also be a meeting space of possible hospitality to one another (Derrida, 2000). Derrida claims that silence is not a lack but the very origin and source of all speaking. It is silence that "bears and haunts language, outside and against which alone language can emerge" (Derrida, 1978: 54).

So, silence is not just miscommunication, it is not contrary to communication but may also be a form of communication. After all, there are meaningful silences (Glenn, 2004: 16). Silence is not the absence of meaning: there are silences that eloquently speak (Beville&McQuaid, 2012). Silence can, for instance, become a statement, a refusal to accept, a defiant attitude. It has some communicative functions that can be positive or negative: it can bond a group of people or divide them; it can hurt but it can also heal; it can reveal or conceal something (Jensen *apud* Sim, 2007: 14).

In this paper, we contribute to a politics of silence by examining how silence can be a factor of empowerment and liberty. Far from being just an absence of something, silence is at the very core of communication. We posit that silence may not be just a dysfunction of political communication but an important element of democracy. Far from being a pathology, silence is another mode of communication, one that is separate from speech.

We start by looking into the relations between silence and politics while underscoring three ways to conceive that relation (oppression, resistance and empowerment). Next, we discuss the vocal ideal of democracy (Gray, 2015: 476) and the hypothesis of silence in citizenship. We conclude with a brief presentation of the notion of "communicative silence" and its main advantages to cope with three political challenges (abstention, political representation and deliberation).

Silence and Politics

There are three main perspectives on how to envisage silence as a political act: silence as oppression, silence as resistance, and silence as empowerment.

Opression

One of the most pervasive associations between silence and politics consists in looking into silence as a tool of sociopolitical oppression and control (Jaworski, 1993). By silencing opposition or neglecting the free expression of political groups, the State can exert control over dominated groups.

Clair (1998: 21) emphasizes how dominant groups impose silence to marginalized ones in a variety of ways: through coercion, hegemony, discursive practices, systematic structuring of institutions or informal impositions on conversations. The author is, thus, stressing, how silence is related to a power differential that is latent in every social interaction: those who speak and those who remain silent, those that makes other listeners and those who can just to listen. Whether consciously or unconsciously we inhabit silent spaces that could mean a variation on the distribution of political power.

Political enforced silence is observed in various parts of the world and in different periods in history. Censorship is a traditional mode to superimpose silence on sensible topics and it is apanage in authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. It can be addressed to individual but also to social groups or journalistic institutions. Most totalitarian regimes refuse to allow opposition any political voice in the political agenda and sometimes even label them as rebels and insurgents in order to legitimize repression. "The myth is fostered in such instances that no opposition actually exists, which is very much to the advantage of the ruling elite in maintaining its hold over the populace" (Sim, 2007: 159). We can also testify this "art of silencing opponents" not just in Islamic fundamentalism but also in western democratic countries. For example, in *Silencing Dissent: How the Australian Government is Controlling Public Opinion and Stifling Debate*, Hamilton and Maddison argue that the Howard Government in Australia, over ten years, "systematically dismantled democratic processes, stymied open and diverse debate and avoided making itself accountable to parliament or the community" (Hamilton & Maddison, 2007: 4). Southard (2007) contends that the National Woman's Party members- the "Silent Sentinels" - drew strength from restricting ideological forces to constitute a militant identity while they fought for providing political voice to women. Paradoxically, these suffragists battled political silence and fought for women suffrage while essaying to gain political voice through silent protests. Silence was here a symbol to the lack of political rights and it conveyed beautifully the message that there was a social group being silenced and deprived of the possibility to influence and vote on political matters. Another example comes, for instance, from 1917 and the Negro Silent Protest Parade where their silence was a means to silently resist the equilibrium of power between white and negro people.

Media are another key factor on the equation of silence and politics. Silencing the media is another ploy that governments resort to. China is known for having censors in Internet

and to restrict or prohibit the broadcast of certain contents. Israel keeps a tight control over news coverage from the Occupied Territories and most often the military impose media blackouts (Sim, 2007: 162). Norris and Inglehart, for instance, point to the impact of restrictive media environments on regime support and how dissention is erased or obliterated by suppressing or limit public voicing (Norris &Inglehart, 2008).
So, silence can function as a means of severing political autonomy and the revindication of alternative points-of view. We are describing silence as being enforced or imposed. It was a kind of compulsory silence that oppresses minority groups and bounds the political powerless. Thus, silence can also be observed in the voicing of public opinion. Noelle-Neumann's (1993) spiral of silence – being the inability to publicly express, by the individual, his own political preferences in face of contrary public opinion - can be comprehended within this perspective that frames silence as an imposed (or self-imposed) restriction. Silence is, then, a symptom of an inegalitarian and powerless relation.

Resistance

When trying to understand the relation between silence and power, one should not only talk about the silence of the powerless (silencing subordinated groups) but also about the silence against the powerful (silencing as a deliberate act of fighting power).
In contrast to the perspective of silence as something that restricts and impairs political participation, we will now consider that silence can, too, be a tool of political resistance. These two silences acts get together to maintain hegemonic configurations of power (Jungkunz, 2012: 129). In fact, silence can be negotiated, not just superimposed. Suppression and refusal along with engagements and resistance work upon these relations of power. Just remember the political engagement of silent vigils, just like that ones occurred in 1971 in North-America as a protest to Vietnam war. There are plenty of pictures, in Internet, portraying young women with posters "*Until American stop killing and being killed in Vietnam*".
It is true that silence is traditionally conceived as a ceasing of participation or a withdrawal (from a conversation, political or business life). By cutting off external stimuli and inputs, silence offers a space of retreat that ultimately states a form of disavowal. Linked to this withdrawal perspective of silence, there is a more overt refusal to participate. This refusal can assume a form of resistance and confrontation: in fact, by silencing one may not me giving up but, on the contrary, silence may be an active and confrontational attitude. Silence can, then, prove to be powerful, not only as a proactive isolation but also as a social function of resistance.
One easy and familiar example would be the individual whose silence serves to resist the authority of policemen whose power cannot force an answer. By refusing to speak, the individual is using a constitutional right but is, at the same time, resisting to participate in the legitimated use of violence that police and military forces assume. "Silence can serve as resistance to any institution that requires verbal participation (as do virtually all). On a macroscopic political scale, states often require such participation and subsequently employ a variety of means to compel it. The state-sponsored requirement to take an oath is a particularly overt form of obligatory speech" (Ferguson, 2004: 8).
Silence can become a form of resistance because silence is part of communication. By not engaging on conventional, ordered, regulatory or unitary discourses, silence can be an important way to disable disciplinaries discourses (Foucault, 1971). By doing so, silence transforms itself in a defensive function allowing for practices of freedom that

would be otherwise unattainable. As Jungkunz (2012: 134) synthetizes: “silence becomes a way to negotiate around and between and even is spite of a given regulatory structure”. In effect, many practices of everyday resistance and elusion to surveillance involve silence. Silences that resist are attempts to protest but they do not involve litigations nor are straightforward, vocal ways to make claims. Instead, silences that resist are practiced as forms of subversion: subverting the man, the government, the economy, the system (Jungkunz, 2012: 141). Silence as resistance involves a political intervention that is not conventional and, mainly, that subverts the configuration of discourses and narratives. The resisting silence displays the intention not to tell, not to consent, not to confess, not to answer. This kind of silence is insubordinate and, most often, it is based on practices of deliberate exclusion and silencing (refusing policies, injustices and decisions). In one word, resisting silences are insubordinate in two senses: they highlight defiant and disobedient attitudes that aim to negotiate; and refuse or work around the control of social and political expression.

Silences that refuse and resist are, thus, not attempting to enlarge one’s presence in the world: instead, these silences are about turning away a political world, a social life, an identity or a community. They silently propose the individual’s own absence. By deploying silent attitudes, individuals maneuver between engagement and disengagement allowing alternative ways to do (and to be in) politics.

In sum, silences that resist are a way to deal with power by gaining (another kind of) power: they do so my refusing to line up to what was supposed to say and to build a silent symbolic statement.

Empowerment

Silence can, likewise, be a form of power: it resists things said negotiation the contours of political life. Silence can, indeed, be a way of unsaying, a refusal to speech and classification. From this perspective, silence is not just related with the powerless but with the powerful: there are silences that empower, silences that are about gaining access to the political, social, economic, etc. “Silences that empower manipulate norms surrounding silence, speech, absence, and presence in order to bring attention to the detrimental consequence of silencing” (Jungkunz, 2012: 136). Those who use silences to empower are focused on the possibility of exclusion. In social and political contexts where speech is fundamental, silence calls attention to the relationships of inequality and to the break-downs. It can emphasize the inadequacies, differences, dissimilarities. In this case, silence is drawing attention to the dysfunctional relationships between subjects.

Silence as empowerment and as a form of navigating and negotiating power relations supposes an active, selective and protective practice. It relieves the individual from the compulsion to answer, to talk, and to self-disclosure.

It is revealing that this same protective dimension of silence is also alluded in the *Discourse of Inequality* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1992). In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau describes nature's silence in the civilized state. According to him, silence does not entail apathy or an unreflective man. It is, on the contrary, a shield to the over-exposure of the self. Silence is the very state of nature: a nature without speech, therefore without its intrinsic oppressions.

Silence can mean different things to politics.

As we have pointed out, it can assume a coercive dimension when it is imposed over marginalized groups, but it can also assume a form of resistance and empowerment when it condenses self-assertion and a form to negotiate relations of power.

So, we are starting to see that silences can be an important aspect of political life. But in order to examine the potentialities of silences to political communication, we should, first, consider the ways democratic theory has dealt with it.
The next section discusses how silence has been depreciatively measured by democratic theories. This is the first step to fully evaluate the importance of silence in political communication.

Silence and Democracy –the vocal ideal and silent citizenship

Silence can be ostensibly anti-democratic.
We say those who remain silent are consenting something (portuguese adage that can be translated in English as "silence gives consent") (Cardoso e Cunha, 2005). This idea is already present in Plato's *Cratylus* when he links silence into consent. "And since we grant this, Cratylus—for I take it that your silence gives consent (…) (435 b). Silence is treated as a way to cope or accept power. Defying the political tirant means to stop being silence and denounce his tyranny. Martin Luther King also says something similar. In a sermon in Selma, Alabama, on 8 March 1965, the day after "Bloody Sunday," on which civil rights protesters were attacked and beaten by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he said: "A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.". This line was popularized on social media as the following quote: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter". Once more, we see this approach that equals silence into consent.
The hypothesis that silence can be a threat to democracy come from the fact citizens are less likely to vote (Franklin, 2004) but more important, from the fact they are less capable of influencing the agenda of politicians and policymakers (Bartels, 2008). Coleman (2013) and Urbinati (2014) both draw attention to the growing deficits of voice in political decision-making. Citizens seldom manage to have their voices heard by governments. Developing this, Gray (2015: 474), for example, posits that contemporary democratic citizenship is becoming a *silent citizenship*.
Traditionally, silence has, at least in part, been related to citizen disengagement and disempowerment. At first light, the growth of silence is linked to deficits in democracy. "Silence is primarily interpreted to be a private withdrawal from politics that contrasts with voice (…)- a normative vacuum in which citizens are excluded from democratic political decision-making through lack of resources, opportunities, information or articulateness" (Gray, 2015: 475). Democratic theory usually characterizes silent citizens as those who are apathic, inattentive or negligent on public affairs. Silence has been, thus, associated with indifference and detachment from public debate or deliberation, and it is not unfrequently related to an inability or willingness to take action (electoral abstention). Silence is understood as passivity (the realm of the powerless) while action and speech are the dominant, and sometimes exclusive, modes of political praxis. To be more exact, traditional democratic theory identifies silence with lack of speech. And since the creation and maintenance of community depends on communication, silence is viewed as being incompatible with community and society in general. Underlying this perspective, here is "a model which conflates community, communication and speech. Silence, whether that of a subaltern group or as perpetuated by institutional mechanisms, represents a threat to that nexus, and by extension a threat to politics" (Ferguson, 2004: 5).
Habermas' theory of the bourgeois public sphere is a great example of a social theory envisaging silence as a shortcoming of political communication and, more, as a threat to

politics. Politics would only be attainable on public domain by the exercise of collective reasoning and critical voicing that could influence political affairs. The public sphere was a place where private individuals articulate, voice and critically discuss public matters. It served as a counterweight to political authority as individuals gathered in face-to-face meetings (coffee houses, theaters, public squares, etc) as well as through media such as letters and books. To Habermas, the vibrant and influent activity of the public sphere was linked, not to silence, but with the strict and rigorous individual voicing and participation (Habermas, 1991).

Moreover, Habermas' later approach to contend social power and equality in contemporary times, took him to suggest a Universal Pragmatics and an "ideal speech situation". In fact, similarly to his theory of the public sphere, Habermas finds in the verbal encounter between individuals the solution to modern dilemmas. In *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984; 1987), and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) he resorts to discourse theory and speech act theory to anchor core concepts like "communicative reason" or "communicative action". Habermas is, then, reducing freedom and justice to the availability of speech (Ferguson, 2004: 6). His normative theory of communicative action is crucially based on a view on democracy that depends fundamentally on speech, language and communication. Underlying Habermas' social and political thought, there is this assumption equating silence to a menace. His approach grounds community, understanding and justice into a normative view on language. Silence is positioned at the side of inequality and oppression. If, to him, based on Universal Pragmatics and Communicative Action, community is all about language and speech, it is no surprise that silence is a prelude to indifference, lack, and social fragmentation.

Democratic theory had always the tendency to put words and speech as the only possible mode to communication. This view that puts silence as a political menace is deeply ingrained, popular and widespread. Voice is the metaphor to public argument realizing the deepest aspirations of democratic citizenship. The vocal ideal of democratic citizenship (Gray, 2015: 476) entails a conception where having a voice and standing for it is the most elevated means of empowering those affected by political decisions. Dahl is very clear on this when he comments: "Silent citizens may be perfect subjects for an authoritarian ruler; they would be a disaster for democracy" (Dahl, 1998: 97).

This attests how heavily democracy depends on political communication outside formal, governmental structures. But, most distinctively, it attests how political communication is averse to silences. Indeed, silence is being interpreted as an absence or failure of voice in politics, devoid of intent, content or meaning. According to this widespread perspective, "silent citizens are politically undemanding: those who are silent either prefer that democratic politics operate in the background of their lives, or are incapable of meaningfully contributing to collective decision-making processes. Silent citizens are also politically unorganized: mostly because those who are silent disproportionately lack access to politically relevant resources for voice, including time, money and education and civic skills" (Gray, 2015: 477-478). Because of these attributes, silent citizenship is thought as having negative effects on public opinion decreasing the diversity of voices being heard (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). In the same way, silence tends to tilt representation towards particular interests (the already wealthy and powerful) in detriment of those with less influence who tend to follow particular voices and, consequently, adopt conservative positions.

This dysphoric description is certainly well justified in some cases. But, at the same time, this vocal ideal of democratic citizenship (Gray, 2015: 476) can sometimes be overgeneralized within contemporary political theory.

Because the assumption the links democracy and political communication to voice and public speaking is such speech-centric, the domain of silent citizenship has remained a field underexplored. Given that communication is immediately associated with speech, and that democratic citizenship has a vocal scope, studies on political communication tended to forget silence and its conceptualization. We agree with Gray when he advocates that "the vocal ideal fails to provide the tools we need to account for other motivations citizens might have for remaining silent, besides disengagement and disempowerment" (Gray, 2015: 483).

If we are to ponder on the significance of silence in political communication, we should broaden the specter of possible meanings and distinguish potential dimensions of silence beyond lack, absence, failure or apathy. A comprehensive and relevant way to look to "the silence debate" in political communication would not exclusively consider democracy from be speech-centric point of view. Instead, it would consider *extrinsic* forms of silencing (distortions, ruptures, disbelief, disregard) but also *intrinsic* forms of silencing (that ways silencing is an act of communication and a central element of political discourses and negotiations of power). In other words, we are interested in highlighting positive, constructive and euphoric aspects of silence in political communication by focusing, not on the powerlessness side but on the empowerment side. By separating *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* forms of silence, we are differentiating between silence as imposition and silence as a choice; between silence that disempowers and silence that empowers. While stressing *intrinsic* forms of silence, we open space to reflect the communicative dimension contained in it. In effect, *we should include in our exam how citizens communicate preferences and judgments* in decision-making processes and acknowledge that the choice of silence, in itself conveys little information about the preferences and political attitudes of individuals. The vocal ideal of democracy has, first of all, interpreted that silence as expressing a negative political attitude. However, that perspective does not necessarily register silence as a communicative act. It comprehends silence as denial or negligence without posing the possibility that silence, instead of evidencing lack of motivation, could, in fact, configure *a certain kind of political motivation.*

Beyond this vocal, speech-centric, rhetorical idea of democracy and political communication, we encounter a crucial difference: the silence that is suffered due to lack of opportunities and capacities is qualitatively quite dissimilar from the silence that, despite the existence of healthy and numerous opportunities, opt, decide and choose to abstain from voice. *This is a silence of a radically new type: a communicative silence*.

Treating silence as a communicative function of political communication opens new possibilities for political theory to identify occurrences in which silence is not a symptom of deficit but, possibly, a symptom of enrichment and transformations of citizens' political participation.

Not all the silence is necessarily coercion or lack. A model of communicative silence can indeed anticipate special situations where the refusal to speak manifests a communicative power to state certain political positions in developed, complex, 21th century democracies. By contemplating a communicative model of silence in political communication, democratic theory can go beyond its speech-centric matrix and comprise an expansive understanding of political expression. Silences can, then becomes, another possibility to disclosure choices, affirm political commitments and reinforce political messages (such as distrust).

So, in the next section, we account silence as a distinct mode of communication separate from speech. By rejecting institutionalized pratices of power, communicative silence is not a detached or aloof gesture but possibly an exquisite and unexpected form of claiming

a (outsider) role on political processes. Some types of silence, can, in this way, play a positive role in democracy.

Communicative Silences

In this section we suggest a renewed position on silent citizenship endorsing silence as a communicative event. Because traditional democratic theory identifies silences with absent voices or failed communication, it misses the motivations for political mutism or verbal discretion. They tend, so, to mix active and politically engaged attitudes with those that are not.

Some degrees of silent citizenship have been already discerned and they vary according to their level of engagement. Gray (2015: 475) differentiates between awareness, ambivalence, aversion and disaffection.

We will not dwell in the mapping of this attitudes behind silent citizenship. In alternative, we prefer to reflect on the general properties and advantages of considering silence as a positive outcome on political communication. Once silence is recognized as having a communicative intent - like speech - we can surpass those conceptions that see silence as an effect of inequality and asymmetric distributions of power. In contrast to this view, *the hypothesis of communicative silence supposes that silence is a form of practicing power*. As such, silent does not directly mean exclusion or even seclusion. Perhaps, it is because silence can empower that we witness vulnerable citizens (such as gender or ethnic minorities) doing such an intensive and exhaustive use of silence (ex: the "Silent Sentinels"). It is at the moment they are vulnerable that citizens are empowered to use silence as a positive stance to wordlessly make their points they may start to feel they do have an impact (however small it may be) on public decisions and collective debates. It is true that they may not deliberate in the conventional sense; yet, silence does not unavoidably mean that they are not interested to discreetly make a point. Speaking is crucial in political communication but the growing prominence of silence and its variations (vigils, voting abstention, refuse to participate in political polls, silent protests, pacific occupation of public space, parades, marches, etc) should make us turn our heads into the realms of nonverbal communication.

We call "Communicative Silences" to those wordless political behaviors that express something with a clear objective and intentionality even if without verbal messages. They encompass the political attitudes that betray a given position but that are expressed by silent or wordless forms of communication. Without entering the Palo Alto school (Watzlawick *et ali*., 1967) discussion about the intentionality of communication and its concomitant adage "One cannot not to communicate", we put communicative silences as dependent of intentionality.Therefore, a silence has a communicative charge when he is intentionality used to convey certain meanings or when that silence is perceived to contain or evoke, implicitly or explicitly, an intention with communicative meaningful implications. For instance, Johannesen (1974) argues that in meaningful silences we have to assume that some thought processes are involved. And Jaworski (1993) signals that silence occurs and is perceived as significant and meaningful when talk is expected and is intentionally withheld. This possibility of meaningful silences is just now being extended to the domains of political communication, but it is well known for many years in interpersonal communication. Wong (2003), for example, has concluded that, despite cultural differences, different groups of people demonstrate experience of using silence to convey feelings and thoughts. Wong talks, then, of the use of silence as a means of communication.

Silence becomes communication when it is intentionally manifested. Communicative silences include intentions or goals and involve a manifestation of purpose. Communicative silences are, then, reflective activities; but, instead of being symbolically express through language and speech, they produce a non-verbal discourse on political issues. There is still a "voice", but this is a paradoxical voice: one that cannot he hear and, yet, it screams a political position.

We are, then, dealing with a metaphorical sense of "voice" when we say that communicative silences produce an unhear, wordless, mute voice. These kinds of silences lie beneath nonlinguistic elements and are, mostly, inferred. We are taking into political communication the intentional uses of silences to convey meaningful messages that people naturally use. What is interesting in silence is that it is socially constructed (St. Clair, 2003: 87). In every culture is exists with communicative implications. Although it may be an accepted behavior (as in Japan) or a behavior to avoid (most western societies), silences possess an extensive pattern of social and cultural use. Wainberg (2017) distinguishes between 15 types of silence including "political silence", "rhetorical silence" and "sacred silence".

By acknowledging this variety, we are in conditions to accept communicative silence as a way that citizens have potentially at their disposal to transmit meaningful, even if subtle, political messages. It should be noted that by "political communication" we understand a broad field concerned with the spreading of information and its influences on politics, policy makers, the news media and citizens. It encompasses, among many other things, political campaigns, media debates, social media posts or formal speeches. Bringing silence into political communication studies underscores how silence can be an affirmative, planned and deliberated attitude to citizenship and democracy. We are not here dealing with silence in the sense as a rhetorical political strategy (Anderson, 2003). Nor are we referring exclusively to those particular silences who violates expectations that are held by the public as in cases of media blackouts, refusals to be give a public speech or denials to answer journalist's questions. This type of silence is situated on a micro-level of political communication (ex: the president refusing to speak on a pressing issue) (Brummet, 1980).

Instead, in this paper, we situate silence at the macro-level of political communication: silence not as a singular, individual, specific act but silence as some collective endeavors whose effects are projected as part of the decision-making process. So, we look to silences not so much as rhetorical maneuvers, used by politicians, to give emphasis, authority or denying importance and legitimacy; nor we focus on media coverage of silences affecting the public's perception of a political issue. Communicative silences include, in contrast, all the inferred meanings given by the different political actors to silence as an intentional and active expression of behavior.

Political communication may take multiple forms in today's democracies: by accenting silences as communicative constructs we give it a wider understanding. By on hand, we have direct vocal, rhetorical, linguistic expressions of political choice and decision-making (such as deliberations, campaigns, petitions, votes, political crowds, speeches and commentaries).

By other hand, by taking into account silence, we have now at our disposal nonlinguistic forms of communication. In this sense, communicative silences are indirect expressions of political choice that must be interpreted and inferred. So, silence is a kind of supplement to voice: not an unavoidable replacement but a possible alternative to the clarification of political positions. Seen as empowerment, communicative silences stress, not exclusion (marginalized groups to whom silence is compulsory) but inclusion. Inclusion because those social groups found alternative ways to make themselves

wordlessly "heard". Inclusion because the symbolic resources so be silent are incomparably more accessible and abundant that those required to publicly speak. In communicative silences, we have political actors who freely choose to become (temporarily or permanently) silent in order to prove a point that does not require linguistic resources, opportunity or identity means. There is no vocabulary to attend, nor intellectual abilities to critically examine reasons.

By not speaking, citizens are still acting because that particular silence becomes a communicative form to express a perspective over an issue. Of course, we must condescend: what is expressed through silence has not the richness, meaning or complexity of verbal signs that are propositional. Still, silence exists in a given social and political context that, along with pragmatics, can orient the interpretations and inferences that silence expresses including beliefs, expectations and projections. Most of the political communication studies dealt with political actors who voiced, spoke and critically reasoned. By incorporating communicative silences, political communication can now deal with silent actors that despite their subtlety could still be engaged in some form of politics. The major difference to other studies is that communicative silences are understood, not to entail a passive or negligent attitude towards politics but an active, although indirect and subtle, attitude to political issues.

Communicative silences could be dynamic, deliberate choices whose importance to political communication lies precisely in the fact that they may reveal (at some degree) citizens' dispositions, judgements and leanings. So, according to these assumptions, political communication can and should pay attention to the role of silences, and how they are used by citizens and political actors to politically communicate. These silences we call "communicative" are behaviors that ostensibly express a range of possible political meanings. So, it is not just voice that empowers political actors (as in traditional theories of democracy). Maybe silence has political significance beyond neglect and apathy. Silence can, in reality, be interpreted as an attempt to call attention to the necessity of mutual agreement on sensitive or complex issues. For instance, media blackout, also referred to as a *silenzio stampa* (literally press silence), refers to the specific situation a football club or national team refuse to give interviews or in any other way cooperate with the press, often during important tournaments often due discontentment. They may feel that the media does not depict the club and their activities in an objective way and their vote to silence is a conspicuously form to express that very dissatisfaction.

Implications of Communicative Silences to Abstention, Political Representation and Deliberation

To conclude these necessarily brief comments on communicative silence, we want to refer to three theoretical implications. These assumptions are logic consequences that follow the theoretical framework we have put forth. They lack empirical confirmation. Still, they may take us to review our own perspective on silence citizenship and political silences.

First of all, by conceiving positively silence (as empowerment) we may have a renew point of view into a dominant phenomenon on elections: abstention.

We generally conceive abstention and silence as being related. Silence is here a symptom of unresponsiveness and lack of interest. But, what if, we put communicative silences in equation? If silences can be forms of expression, abstention must be considered at a new light. They would not be just effects of negligence or lack of interest but could also be treated as an alternative form to discipline political representatives. Abstention would, then, be a form of communicative silence where citizens passively answer to political agendas. Abstention could, thus, be an ostensive attitude of disfavor. It would mean

discordance and disappointment. By looking into abstention (and its silent configuration) from a communicative standpoint, abstention would contain a range of possible meanings that contemporary politics could use to better get into citizens.
In this way, silence generates a great deal of information and enlightenment to the political process. Communicative silences assume a point of reference from which political actors can infer evaluative assessments that may direct, orient or influence their decisions.
Not all silences are communicative. But that does not mean that all political silences reveal oppression or lack of interest. To political communication and democracy theory research, the true question is not to pass over silences as minor faults of citizenship and politics. It is to take those same questions to a level where silences could be understood by what they are and not what the vocal ideal of democracy reasons they are.
Second, and following up the abstention topic, communicative silences raise new doubts about political representation.
Because voting assumes such a central place in the communication between politicians and citizens, when these fail to show on the polls and do not use their right to vote, we immediately tend to think of inattention, inaction or apathy. But if - at least some - silences empower citizens, the act of not voting could be viewed as a political attitude. Of course, it is difficult to discern what is the meaning of that: disagreement with political program; lack of identification with the candidate; democracy distrust?
However difficult to apprehend that should not deter us to identify silences with certain kinds of motivations associated with political representation. It may point to a myriad of different things (maybe citizens think they should be more often heard…). Indeed, it could manifest a form of political expression that has nothing to do with voicing and speech but, still, it indicates a certain kind of preoccupations (and contestations).
Third, communicative silences can also have important implications in consensus and deliberation.
Silences are key indicators of possible opposition or assent. Could not silent disagreement be a form of deliberation, in the sense of reflection or cogitation? Deliberative democracy is based on discursive intercourse. But, what if silences could be also be a form of non-verbal discursive practice? After all, silences can be eloquent. And to be eloquent we need a discourse. So, by contemplating the hypothesis of communicative silences, we could displace deliberation and consensus to other domains that are not exclusively verbal or linguistic.
Once more, there are too many meaning nuances on silences. But that does not stop us to consider that some communicative silences function as alternative (minor or humble) forms of political deliberation. Silence may demonstrate genuine consensus (in a plenary voting, for example), but it can also evidence a conflict (ex: when political actors stop giving press conferences). In fact, when a consensus is reached and is putted into voting, political actors can vote their opposition and disagreement; or they can silently abstain to vote in a (not spoken) manifestation of dissent.
There are plenty of motivations to silence.
Our task here was not to exhaustively enumerate them nor proposing a typology. All we want was to consider silences as power mechanisms. We have briefly described communicative silences as positive and active expressions of political attitudes. The implication of silences as communication on abstention, political representation and deliberation were indicated and, hopefully, they can open new perspectives on the study of the meanings, intentions and purposes of the political use of silence on communicative processes.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper silence has been approached, not as a deficit, impairment or pathology of political communication but as an element we should pay attention since silence can also be a form of power in social relations.

This does not mean either that silence, even if it can have a communicative injunction, is considered as a virtuosity. Communicative silences have potential to impact political communication at macro-level but silence is not necessary a good thing. What we wanted to discuss was the singular possibilities that transform silence, from a parasite of communication into a form of political communication.

To remain silent does not necessarily point to subordination and (imposed) lack of speech. It is also a right that may impose severe limitations to political affairs, it also a way to influence and (paradoxically) intervene. The effect of silence empowerment in democracies has been already suggested (Gray, 2015: 487). We took this possibility and claimed that some silences are intentional, have a political message and, as such, present a communicative dimension.

By talking in "communicative silences" in political communication we are not suggesting that speech-centric, vocal, rhetorical democratic theories are wrong. When we refer to "communicative silences" we do not, of course, criticize all the speech tradition of politics We acknowledge those works and even say speech is central and essential to political communication. Speech enable a full reflection on matters and enables citizens to get together and recognize their identities. To Arendt (1958), for example, action and speech disclose to the world individuals own identities. They can reveal themselves as "who" they are, instead of "what" they are. Through speech we commit with ourselves and with others, gain refreshed perspectives and articulate our needs.

Instead, what we argued was that speech is not the exclusive mode of political communication. In contrast with democratic theories that put speech above other forms of non-verbal communication, we tried to show how silence deserves to be studied according to a positive role in political communication. It takes two individuals to enact a silence as silence affect human interaction. Silence may be, in some cases, just another way to navigate asymmetrical symbolic resources or unequal influence and knowledge. By emphasizing communicate silences, we open to silence multiple meanings.

So, silence is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy nor a deficit of political communication. It is also not necessarily a virtue.

To sum up, we have put silence as a potential communicative element that is relevant to democracy since it can influence political *praxis*. We are adopting an extended perspective on silence that separates its disempowering and empowering facets. Is seems silence can be used in positive ways and in alternative (not replacing it) to speech. There are claims that demand to be heard. But this public voice is predominantly produced in silent, without words or speech. It is other strategy: maybe a discursive strategy (cf. Foucault, 1990: 27) even if not a linguist, speech-centric discourse.

One of the most important things political communication research could do is to look into these discursive pauses and mutisms and trace a theory on its implications to political processes.

Possibly, it could be asked: why citizens turn into silent forms of political participation and why they have chosen those instead of more direct, traditional form of engagement? Why some citizens or political groups may think it is costlier and more dangerous to overtly speak? How silence strategies differ in its communicative intents? And is silent empirically effective or is it just a theoretical hypothesis? Do silence affect the perception

of citizens about political actors in comparison with those that prefer verbal revindications?

There are many questions to ask that demand more hypothesis, observations and operationalizations. Only more studies could fully answer these questions. In this paper, we take a more modest goal and tried to ponder on the silent dimension of political communication.

Silence is a complex subject. But, its prominence in 21th century politics pushes contemporary researches to evaluate its limits and functions. The biased view on speech and silence must not prevent us to study the political implication of silence (and in particular its communicative forms).

As Jungkunz remembers: "By illuminating the promise of silences as participatory resources in our efforts to struggle for democracy as a way of life, we bring within our disciplinary field of vision practices and subjects who have too often been placed at the margins of political science. Silences that empower, protest, resist, and refuse offer citizens, consumers, workers, friends, lovers, and thinkers ways to negotiate power dynamics beyond a one-dimensional emphasis upon speech" (Jungkunz, 2012: 149).

Silences can be drastically insistent as they become insubordinate, interpellators, or affirmative. It is this very complexity that cannot be exempted of a careful analysis as a tool to fight for democratic change. We must take into account silences and their inclusive ways to communicate different claims.

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