

Beyond exit and voice in Euro-Mediterranea: an afterword

by Nicholas Van Hear

How should we interpret the upheavals in politics and mobility that have featured so strongly in the Euro-Mediterranean region over the last five years – upheavals eloquently interrogated by the contributions in this volume? One possibility is to exhume an old political science framework for explanation of such events – the ‘exit, voice and loyalty’ schema that Albert Hirschman put forward in the wake of major geopolitical events with similar portent several decades ago (Hirschman 1970, 1993). In this afterword to the volume I explore whether the Hirschman framework – or a modified iteration of it – still has the explanatory power to address the episodes and issues that are the subject of this book.

Let me start with what is perhaps a commonplace observation: that educated but largely jobless or precariously employed young people — including many with tertiary education — appear to be drivers of both recent worldwide protests and much global migration -- in Euro-Mediterranean space as in other regions. Indeed, this seems to be the case in the so-called ‘global north’ as much as in the so-called ‘emerging’ countries: people in their twenties and thirties in both of these worlds protest and move – and sometimes do both. Of course it is not only the young who move and protest, but it is this group in particular that has the resources and the networks (digital and other) to move away and/or to engage in political activity.

I suggest that many of the ‘squares’ protesters in Tahrir in Cairo, Taksim in Istanbul, the EuroMaidan in Ukraine, and so on are of this ilk. Likewise the sub-Saharan Africans stranded in Libya or crossing the Mediterranean, or the Asian and African migrants and refugees stuck in Turkey, or the migrants holed up near Calais: these are not the rich, but nor are they the poor – rather they are often college-educated, or dropouts, either persecuted by oppressive regimes or thwarted by lack of opportunity to meet their expectations. From similar (though not identical) socio-economic backgrounds are the *jihadis* from Britain, France and Germany going to fight for ‘Islamic State’, Al Shabab, or similar groups.

How can we characterise these people? Do they constitute a class? They may indeed have some features of classes, if by this we mean groups of people in the same socioeconomic position who act collectively in pursuit of their interests. But it is perhaps difficult convincingly to characterise such a disparate social formation in this way.

If the notion of class does not capture them adequately, what about the idea of a generation? Perhaps they can be seen a 'historical generation', or even a 'generational unit' in Karl Mannheim's terms, which has class-like features and can act in class-like ways:

The generation unit represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such. Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units. (Mannheim 1952: 304. Italics in original)

However we portray them, the somewhat obvious observation about the common class-cum-generational origins of movement and protest perhaps deserves closer attention than it has received to date: for what is the relationship between burgeoning international migration and the recent upsurge of global protest and resistance movements – the *Indignados*, Occupy, anti-austerity protest in the global north and global south, the Arab uprisings and other pro-democracy movements, and the like?

There are optimistic and pessimistic ways of addressing this question, depending on one's stance on the costs and benefits of globalisation.

The more optimistic version is to see migrants' and protesters' activities as part of shifts in the global political economy wrought by the success of the neoliberal variant of globalisation. From this perspective they are associated with the so-called 'expanding middle' (Wilson and Dragusanu 2008), by which is meant both the rise of middle income countries and the connected phenomenon of the 'exploding global middle class' (Kharas 2010). Thus the pro-free market Economist Intelligence Unit identifies three types of protest: firstly, anti-authoritarian and pro-democracy movements; secondly, 'traditional', economically-oriented, anti-austerity protest – the fallout of global economic crisis; and lastly the new 'horizontalist' social movements, often fuelled by the first two, but seeking a new kind of global order, against neoliberal capitalism and featuring 'anti-Politics' drawn from an erosion of trust in political leaders, institutions and business (EIU 2013). It is no coincidence that protests have erupted in many of the so-called emerging countries that appear on various 'alphabet soup' lists compiled by Goldman Sachs economists and other proponents of neoliberal globalisation – the 'Next Eleven' (that is 'next' after the BRICs), a list which includes Egypt and Morocco; Jim O'Neil's MINT countries (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey); the CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia,

Viet Nam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa), and so on. From such a perspective, protest and mobility can be seen as manifestations of the inevitable 'growing pains' of globalisation.

A more pessimistic interpretation of the emergence of this class-cum-generational social formation and its mobility and political activity sees these 'growing pains' in a very different light, as being of a different kind and intensity. As one commentator on the protests, Paul Mason, a TV journalist who has covered many of the protests, puts it, 'at the centre of all the protest movements is a new sociological type: the graduate with no future' (Mason 2013: 66). This 'sociological type' is often both transnational and has some characteristics of a class:

...members of this generation of 'graduates with no future' recognise one another as part of an international sub-class, with behaviours and aspirations that easily cross borders...the boom years of globalization created a mass transnational culture of being young and educated; now there is a mass transnational culture of disillusionment (2013: 69)

In many ways this rather less sanguine view resonates with the idea of the global precariat characterised by Guy Standing. Generated by three decades of neoliberal globalisation, and considered part of a flexible labour force by international capital, the precariat for Standing comprises those whose lives and identities are out of joint, and who are unable to live and pursue livelihoods in coherent and sustainable ways. They are often educated but insecure in terms of livelihood and living. Many protesters and would-be and actual migrants can be seen as part of the global 'precariat', and they may follow rather different trajectories of mobility and political activity, as we see in the following section.

Exit, voice and loyalty redux

The conventional way of presenting the alternatives to difficult conditions has been the exit/voice/loyalty triad proposed long ago by Hirschman (1970). Put more simply as 'fight or flight', this amounts to the choice between protest and resistance on one hand and moving out and away on the other. Loyalty or acquiescence is Hirschman's third, more passive option.

According to Hirschman's simple idea, the pressure of discontentment leads to the two active options, leaving (*exit*) or articulating grievances in order to try to resolve them (*voice*). In his original conception, the two had a pendulum-like or inverse relationship, so that as one increased the other decreased. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he modified the basic idea, suggesting that exit and voice did not have to be in an inverse relationship, but could work with each other to hasten the fall of oppressive regimes such as obtained in eastern Europe.

Taking this a little further, Pedraza (2007, 2013) has suggested a useful framework in which she identifies four possible permutations of exit and voice (which I have modified here with due credit to her):

- Exit impedes voice: exit weakens civil society by depriving it of motivated and energetic people who can articulate grievances
- Exit becomes voice: those in exile or in diaspora articulate the grievances of those remaining at home who cannot express discontent because of repression and fear
- Exit helps/augments voice: those who leave strengthen civil society in the communities they leave behind by sending resources and ideas while away, or by bringing back resources, ideas and organisational techniques on return
- Exit and voice grow together: exit and voice work in tandem, reinforcing one another.

The first two permutations perhaps used to be the most common, but now the last two are more likely. Indeed, we can perhaps see all of these permutations working in recent events. But the much-vaunted growth of social media, as well as diaspora TV and radio (Kosnick 2008, Castells 2013, Mason 2013), have made much easier the third and fourth permutations of exit and voice working in tandem: so it is not exit **or** voice, but exit **and** voice. Transnational resources can be drawn upon to strengthen protest and resistance. During the recent wave of protest it was largely the 'graduate without a future' that took the lead, making use of transnational connections partly forged by migration – their own or that of those they are close to.

Assent and dissent

The discussion can be given a further twist, for neither exit nor voice necessarily take a 'progressive' form as we have seen in the Arab/MENA region no less than in other places.

With this in mind, there are at least two 'exit' manifestations:

- exit to join a diaspora which maintains ethnic, nationalist or other sectional identities, and which might take either a loyalist or oppositional stance towards the regime in the country of origin
- exit to join a cosmopolitan, universalist-oriented (middle) class, which may transcend sectional allegiances and articulate liberal or libertarian ideas and values

Of course there are positions in between these 'particularist' and 'universalist' positions, or both positions could be held over time.

Likewise there are two or more 'voice' variants:

- universalist, 'progressive' voices, as articulated in anti-austerity protest in both the 'global north' and the 'emerging' world, Occupy, pro-democracy movements like the Arab spring (the early, optimistic version), and in movements with mixed demands in places like Turkey, Brazil and elsewhere
- particularist 'reactionary', atavistic voices, including variants of fundamentalism and authoritarianism, al Shabab, al Qaeda, IS, military intervention, the Arab nightmare, and so on.

Again these are of course ideal types, with grey areas in between.

Assent or loyalty to the regime one lives under could be thrown into the mix as well. But nuance is necessary here too. Critical of the Hirschman perspective for what it obscures or misses, my colleague Dace Dzenovska (forthcoming) suggests that 'endurance' can more accurately capture what people do when they stay put rather than move – a more active option than implied by loyalty or acquiescence. So perhaps we should re-cast the Exit, Voice and Loyalty triad as Exit, Voice and Endurance – moving from EVL to EVE.

Private exit, public voice?

There is a further angle to all this, to which Hirschman also perceptively drew attention. As he rightly observed, *exit* is often essentially a private activity -- 'a minimalist way of expressing dissent', as he put it (1993: 194). *Voice* on the other hand is typically a public activity, thriving on action in concert with others. This might be qualified to underline that, in aggregate, exit can become a very public activity, with significant public or collective consequences.

Hirschman revisited his original idea in the light of the implosion of the Soviet bloc from the late 1980s. He noted,

The real mystery of the 1989 events is the transformation of what started and was intended as a purely *private* activity – the effort of scattered individuals to move from East to West – into a broad movement of *public* protest (Hirschman 1993: 198).

For him the explanation was that 'exit... ignited voice' (1993: 198).

There has of course been debate about whether migration or mobility themselves constitute political activity and about the transformational potential of migrants both 'in themselves' and/or

‘for themselves’ (to draw an analogy from Marx). For example, Hardt and Negri (2000) see migration as class struggle:

Whereas in the disciplinary era *sabotage* was the fundamental notion of resistance, in the era of imperial control it may be *desertion* (212)....Desertion and exodus are a powerful form of class struggle within and against imperial post-modernity (213).

While this is largely fanciful, some of what they say with respect to desertion resonates with Ivan Krastev’s recent commentary (2014): he suggests that the recent wave of protests mark an ‘exit’ from politics which he sees as a negative development in the sense that the protesters eschew ‘organised’ politics (ie that of parties and lobbies). Others, including this writer, would call this an exit from ‘big P’ Politics (that of parties and institutions) – which can be seen as a positive development if it has a progressive and prefigurative character. In this respect, I rather go along with Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2013) and their notions of the ‘autonomy of migration’ and the ‘mobile commons’:

The autonomy of migration approach foregrounds that migration is not primarily a movement that is defined and acts by making claims to institutional power. It rather means that the very movement *itself* becomes a political movement and a social movement (2013: 184).

What then of the relationship between the public and private in the recent wave of global protest and its counterpart in global mobility? Do small private acts, like individual migratory moves, become public ones in aggregate? And if so, under what circumstances?

A case might be made then that increasing transnationalism, partly as a result of migration, has emboldened youth to act through the transnational transfer of ideas, values and experience spread through social media and the mobility of some of the actors – leading to exit *and* voice, or migration and protest acting in tandem and reinforcing one another. In effect, movement that is usually thought of and experienced as a private act becomes part of the public sphere. If the protest impetus seems to have dissipated for the time being, this combination of mobility and protest remains a potent one for social transformation – the more so if it can move beyond national confines. In other words, if we saw protesters in North Africa and Turkey connecting much more than they did at the protests’ height with their counterparts in Brazil and Thailand, then the proponents of neoliberal globalisation might well have good cause to worry.

The transnational dimensions of all this have been accentuated in recent years: think of the different transnational combinations of exit and voice in American or Australian Egyptian who goes 'home' to protest in Tahrir Square; the Canadian Tamil who protests in Toronto at war crimes in Sri Lanka; the Turkish activist in Berlin organising demonstrations in support of compatriots in Gezi Park in Istanbul..... or indeed the British Muslim who goes to fight with Al Shabab or 'Islamic State'.

Indeed, at the time of writing (mid 2015), the dominant figure in public debate was not the libertarian, 'horizontalist' revolutionary, but rather the 'home-grown jihadi' or the 'transnational retrogressive'. But is there any reason why the pendulum should not swing back again towards progressive transnational political action once again?

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