



**ON THE FRUITFUL CONVERGENCES OF HIRSCHMAN'S  
EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY, AND SHIFTING INVOLVEMENTS.  
REFLECTIONS FROM THE RECENT ARGENTINE EXPERIENCE.**

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## ABSTRACT

Based on concepts formulated by Albert O. Hirschman in Exit, Voice, and Loyalty and in Shifting Involvements, this text proposes the notion of "horizontal voice" as a useful complement to Hirschman's explanations of kinds of action, the formation of collective identities, and cycles of politization and depolitization. "Horizontal voice" is shown as a necessary condition for the exercise of diverse models of voice originally proposed by Hirschman. The arguments presented in this paper are based on research and the daily life experiences of the author during the most repressive years of the last military regime in Argentina.

## RESUMEN

Basado en conceptos formulados por Albert O. Hirschman, especialmente en Exit, Voice, and Loyalty y en Shifting Involvements, el presente texto propone la idea de "voz horizontal" como un útil complemento de aquéllos, sobre todo en lo que respecta a modalidades de acción y de formación de identidades colectivas, y a ciclos de politización y despolitización. La "voz horizontal" aparece en este sentido como condición necesaria para el ejercicio de diversas modalidades de voz originariamente propuestas por Hirschman. El argumento del presente texto es ilustrado mediante los resultados de una investigación y las propias condiciones de vida cotidiana del autor durante los años mas represivos del último régimen militar en la Argentina.



## I.

As this volume abundantly, albeit partially, shows, the works that Albert Hirschman has addressed to the economic and political development of Latin America have had enormous impact on the students (and often on the social and political leaders) of the region. Hirschman's influence on Latin America, however, goes well beyond those writings: his more general or theoretical publications, including those that were written more with the developed world in mind, have been extremely useful to many Latin Americanists from various disciplines. In the present chapter, I will use some of the ideas developed by Hirschman in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, (EVL)*,<sup>1</sup> and in *Shifting Involvements, (SI)*,<sup>2</sup> which I found illuminating for the study of some issues raised by the hectic and violent politics of my country, Argentina. By "transplanting" those ideas to a deeply repressive and authoritarian context, I hope to show that they can be further extended in ways that enhance their comparative and theoretical import.

## II.

The coups that implanted bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in South America in the 1960s and 1970s occurred after, and to a large extent as a consequence of, serious economic crises, great waves of popular mobilization, widespread politization and--quite often--high and increasing levels of violence.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, however, as happened with the emergence of fascism in Europe, those phenomena had already peaked before the respective military coups. This was certainly the case in Argentina before the 1976 coup: the massive mobilizations, the extensive and intense politization of many individuals from practically all social sectors, and even the challenges posed by urban guerrillas, had been declining for approximately two years before the coup. Although

relevant data is sparse, it is clear that many individuals, tired of intense political involvement and threatened by the chaotic violence that characterized the post-1969 period in Argentina,<sup>4</sup> had quite eagerly returned to private pursuits before the 1976 coup.

In *SI* Hirschman persuasively discusses the factors that seem to account for the cycles of (to use terms which are equivalent to Hirschman's but which are more appropriate for my purposes here) politization and privatization observable in many countries. As Hirschman points out in *SI*, there are important differences in these cycles depending on whether or not the general political context is democratic. Pursuing this distinction further, we may note that when individuals opt for privatization in a democratic context, they are not haunted by the possibility of being victimized for whatever political reason. Furthermore, in those circumstances, the regime and, in general, the rules that regulate events in the public sphere remain unchanged, except for the lowered political participation entailed by the turn of many individuals to their private pursuits. On the other hand, when a new wave of politization occurs, the costs eventually incurred by each individual are those resulting from his/her changed allocation of time and efforts. A quite different matter are the additional (and eventually much more important) costs that may result from the actions of a government determined to prevent and, if necessary, repress such repolitization. As we shall see, both *SI* and *EVL* are useful for studying some processes that occur under bureaucratic-authoritarian rule, but further specification of the contextual assumptions of those works is needed: first, those regimes were committed to preventing the repolitization of their subjects and were ready to apply extremely harsh repression for that purpose; and second, even while living very privatized lives, many individuals had reason to fear reprisals motivated by their former politization.

In such situations, in Argentina as well as in Chile and Uruguay, many persons exited: they went into exile, some literally to save their lives, some because they could not stand the existing climate of pervasive fear and uncertainty. But many had not, or thought they had not, such an option. Their main alternative was the antonym of voice--silence--which is not discussed in detail under the contextual assumptions of *EVL* and *SI*. Silence and, as we shall see, "oblique voice" are, however, prime alternatives when the exit option is foreclosed and one is subjected to a repressive power.<sup>5</sup>

A situation such as the one I have sketched entails a sharp reduction of voice in at least two senses: first, in respect to the kind and number of individuals who can address the rulers without serious personal risk and, second, in what pertains to the permissible content and style of whatever voice is allowed to remain. Notice that I have referred to the type of voice that Hirschman analyzes in *EVL* and in the papers subsequently published in *Essays on Trespassing*:<sup>6</sup> This voice is addressed to the "top," by customers or citizens, toward managers or governments. This is what I shall call "vertical voice." This kind of voice is indeed crucial, but I shall argue that there is another type of voice that is no less important, and in some senses even more important, since it is a necessary condition for the exercise of vertical voice. This other kind of voice I shall call "horizontal."

In a democratic context, we assume that we have the right to address others, without fear of sanctions, on the basis of the belief that those others are "like me" in some dimension that at least I consider relevant. If we actually recognize ourselves as a "we" (for example, as workers who have the right to unionize), we have taken a necessary, and at times sufficient, step towards the formation of a collective identity. Such an identity entails not only that we share some basic (if often fuzzy) ideas about what it is that makes us a "we," but also that we share some ideal and/or material interests, the pursuit of which supposedly will guide our collective action.<sup>7</sup> When I am addressing others, or others are addressing me, claiming that we share some relevant characteristics, we are using horizontal voice.

Horizontal voice may or may not lead to the use of vertical voice. There exist collective identities which are not interested in addressing those "in power". On its part, vertical voice may be individual, such as when a customer writes to management or a citizen to a member of parliament or when an entrepreneur enjoys direct access to a public agency. This may be the usual mode of vertical voice in business organizations, but in politics--particularly in democratic politics--the more important mode of vertical voice is collective. Collective vertical voice at times is used directly, such as when individuals take to the street together to express their grievances. But the more frequent mode of collective vertical voice is indirect, particularly in the densely organized world of contemporary societies: i.e., when some individuals speak to the authorities claiming that they are doing so in representation of some reasonably ascertainable constellation of individuals.

Whether in its direct or indirect modes, collective vertical voice, at least if it has reasonable hope of being heard, must be based on the plausible existence of a constellation of individuals whose ideal or material interests it invokes. This usually means that some process of collective identity formation has occurred. Horizontal voice is one of the mechanisms that lead to such identity formation. Certainly, collective identities may be created or reproduced by the discourse of those "on top" toward their subjects. But the possibility of using horizontal voice without serious restrictions or dangers is a constitutive feature for a democratic (or, more generically, a non-repressive) context. Horizontal voice is a necessary condition for the existence of the kind of collective vertical voice that is reasonably autonomous from those "on top." This, in turn, is a necessary condition for the existence of a democratic context.

Notice that I am not referring to all sorts of social communication. Even though the analytical boundaries are fuzzy, here I want to confine myself to collective identities that are political in a rather narrow sense: those that somehow wish to address themselves to the existing governmental authorities, or those that for whatever reasons



want to change those authorities. An important case (important at least in regard to the intensity with which it is likely to be felt) of political collective identity is that of those who oppose a repressive regime and who, even though they may disagree in other important respects, converge in the common purpose of terminating such a regime. I shall argue that this kind of situation demonstrates the importance of horizontal voice and, consequently, the convenience of extending Hirschman's framework to include the former.

### III.

Now I must briefly tell a story about which I have given more details in recent works.<sup>8</sup> The origin of this story is that, for reasons that are of no interest here, I chose to remain in Argentina after the March 1976 coup until December 1979; i.e., during the most repressive years of a very repressive regime. In 1978, my wife, Cecilia Galli, and I decided to investigate in others the fear that many of us had of being abducted, tortured, and murdered, allegedly for political reasons. We also hoped to find the sharp opposition to the regime that we supposed many concealed behind a very privatized life. Thus, we undertook to interview as many persons as we could; we tried only with persons we had known before, or those who were referred to us by previous interviewees who could reasonably guarantee them (and us) that neither we nor they were police informers. The result was surely the most unrepresentative sample in the history of the social sciences. In addition, we kept something like an ethnographic diary. In it we registered the many events in which, inspired both by our professional training and the paranoia we developed under such conditions, we saw pervasive fear and uncertainty. Furthermore, aided by a world that became more *machista* than ever, as well as by her foreign accent (she is Brazilian), Cecilia asked the manifold *personae* one finds in a big city like Buenos Aires some "naive" questions about the regime and the changes in their lives after March

1976. This is the limited and biased data that our neurotic behavior led us to gather. (Only after having left Argentina did we realize that obsessively doing what we were trained to do was our way of displacing and to some extent exorcising our own fear.) But since I doubt that under similar circumstances anyone could do much better than that, I shall make use of this research in illustrating the arguments that follow.

First, however, some minimal background is needed for those who are not acquainted with contemporary Argentine history. At least since 1969 we Argentines inflicted upon ourselves the following: an extraordinarily pervasive and chaotic violence, where various so-called "public security agencies," guerrilla groups, and bands organized by some unions and business groups killed each other and many unarmed persons; the plain fact, that almost literally nobody could feel safe from that violence; massive and recurrent demonstrations, often violent, which expressed and reinforced widespread politization in streets, factories and schools; an economic crisis that may be synthesized by noting that, according to the (artificially low) official prices, in the months before the March 1976 coup, inflation ran at about 1,200% per year; and a government, that of Isabel Perón, whose irrationality and talent for the grotesque only the imagination of García Márquez, Carpentier and Roa Bastos had dreamed of.

Then the 1976 coup took place. For reasons I cannot discuss here, but which are in part (but only in part) accounted for by what I have just described, the regime implanted by that coup was, plainly, terroristic. Not only did it apply severe and cruel repression to many individuals; it did so in a decentralized, largely unpredictable, and usually clandestine way. That this was so is sufficiently well-known today, so I do not need to go into details here. I must only stress that the risks were as high as they were difficult to gauge: almost anyone (because he/she had been politically active in the past, or simply because he/she knew somebody whom some repressive agency suspected of "subversion") could be abducted, tortured and murdered without even knowing the

"reasons." Furthermore, since in keeping with its terroristic nature, the regime refused to issue any clear rules about what was and was not punishable, it was practically impossible to feel safe--in our melancholic encounters with Chilean and Uruguayan friends we found ourselves envying them because of their no less repressive but more bureaucratized, and hence more predictable, regimes.

#### IV.

There was, however, one major prohibition that was clear, not because somebody decided to make it explicit but because it is inherent in the very nature of repressive, deeply authoritarian rule--not only at the level of the nation-state but also, with a logic that reverberates through all social contexts, down to the more micro levels. That logic means that occasionally one may address the rulers, on some issues and in the forms that they determine and may modify at their whim; but what one should never do is to address other subjects of the rulers in terms of the shared condition as such subjects. This is the logic of *divide et impera*, not only as a useful strategy for maximizing power but as the very core of authoritarian domination, made nakedly explicit at its more repressive limits.

Accordingly, during those years in my country, with some risks and slight chances of success, one could think of using some vertical voice (i.e., "respectfully petition the authorities" on some thoroughly depoliticized issues), but what meant almost certain death was any attempt to use horizontal voice. Individuals had to be isolated, obedient subjects of the regime, happy to devote themselves to their private pursuits--work and family--avoiding the dangerous world of public affairs, of which the rulers claimed they were taking good care. Any attempt to maintain alive former collective identities (such as those of members of a political party, or workers who had conquered certain rights, or

students who could ask questions) was a sure signal of "subversive contamination." Even apparently innocuous activities (such as being part of a music or theater group, or participating in a study group on whatever theme, or simply joining other persons chatting in the street) were suspect and, therefore, dangerous.<sup>9</sup> Getting together, in any of the manifold forms of sociability one takes for granted in more benign contexts, was suspect precisely because it meant getting together. Since it was potentially even more subversive to address relevant others beyond face-to-face relationships, by perverse mechanisms that it is not the occasion to narrate here, the media were strictly controlled. This was not only with respect to overtly political messages, that anyway nobody except the rulers and their propagandists would have dared to convey through the media. Controls were also applied-- as a linguist at the service of the regime told a theater director we interviewed--to messages that "even if apparently apolitical, could trigger semantic series of subversive potential."

It goes without saying that attempts to extend mutual recognition as opponents to the regime--the, under the circumstances, crucial type of horizontal voice at stake--were especially dangerous. We shall see, however, that this kind of voice was not entirely suppressed, and I shall argue that, in contrast with what a repressive regime can do, at least for a time, with vertical voice, not even the most efficiently terroristic regime could ever completely suppress horizontal voice. But, before making this argument, we must undertake a digression.

## V.

Even though I cannot report our research in detail here (this is the subject matter of a book which until now we have been unable to write), I must mention some relevant findings. We found, indeed, fear in our interviews, in many cases repressed and

displaced toward other objects. This was a major, if ultimately precarious, ideological victory of the regime. In spite of the fact that during the second half of the interviews, some of those persons began to convey to us a deep feeling of loss because of the extremely privatized lives they were living, many of them agreed with the messages with which the regime bombarded them everyday. First, nothing could be worse than the generalized chaos of the preceding period; even the peculiar "order" that the regime offered--an order in which violence came from only one side, its own--was preferable to the former chaos. Second, at the roots of the country's problems was the "irresponsible demagoguery," and the easy chances it offered to the "subversion" that had characterized the widespread politicization of the pre-coup period. Third, the economy seemed to be under control, even if at the cost of a brutal redistribution of income. Fourth, the duty of every good Argentine was to work hard and enjoy the benefits of the upcoming "economic modernization" of the country, and to take good care that the ever-present danger of subversion would not again raise its head in the family, the school, the workplace and the streets.

In other words, the repression that the regime applied for achieving the depoliticization of its subjects was successful for some time. Such success was based not only on the fear raised among those who disagreed but also--at least in our sample--because there were many who, even before the emergence of that regime, were in full swing away from the politicized pole of the Hirschmanian cycle of involvements. In the often repeated words of those interviewees, the previous period had been "too much," crazy years in which they had been "intoxicated" with politics, when they had believed, and at times done, things that now lingered on dangerously in their lives. Thus, even though, as mentioned, after talking to us for a while, some sadly recognized that they had lost something important in the shift toward their profoundly privatized lives, those respondents felt that they had become "more realistic and mature." After all, what life was

about was work and family and, eventually, with some luck, the purchase of the imported junk that the regime at the time was making available as the *panem* for its subjects. The *circus* was a one-shot event: the vicarious (but practically unanimous) experience of politically sanitized (but ecstatic) participation manipulated by the regime after the victory of the Argentine team in the world soccer cup of 1978.

Furthermore, many of those respondents seemed to agree so fully with the already-mentioned injunctions of the regime that they declared that, for reasons that in most cases they could not articulate, they had also drastically reduced other forms of apolitical sociability. But those reasons became clear when they talked about their children, or when we interviewed adolescents' psychologists and psychoanalysts. Any form of sociability that could not be controlled by the family or by the school (which, of course, became more authoritarian than ever) was inherently dangerous: "bad influences" could operate or, even if such were not the case, the son or the daughter could be linked to someone that the government (rather, the various groups that abducted and killed as part of the terroristic strategy of the regime) could at any time, and without possible appeal, define as "subversive."

These data have many implications, both political and psychological, with which I cannot deal here. But I hope that the underlying argument of this section is plausible: that it may be illogical but it is not existentially impossible that those individuals felt two very different things at the same time. On the one hand, they agreed with the regime that they should live thoroughly privatized lives, and that they should do whatever they could to prevent their family members from transgressing that norm. On the other hand, at a less immediately conscious level, they felt something of which, as some of them put it, they only became aware by talking to us about some public issues they had been striving to ignore: that, by so extensively privatizing their lives, they had lost something very important. They seemed to feel as if they had amputated an important dimension of their

lives, and that this loss was not only the suppression of their rights *qua* citizens, but also something that impoverished them in very intimate dimensions. Thus, many of our interviewees, at least at the level of their superficial beliefs, agreed with the regime about what was meant by a "good Argentine": half-time *homo economicus*, half-time jealous and authoritarian parent, and all the time an obedient subject of threatening powers.

In *SI* and further works, Hirschman, in a cogent critique of the usual assumptions of economic theory about stable and transitive individual preferences, makes the argument that, as illustrated among other things by the shifts between public and private involvements, "...men and women have the ability to step back from their 'revealed' wants, volitions, and preferences and consequently to form meta-preferences that may differ from their preferences."<sup>10</sup> The fact that many of our interviewees behaved as I have described but that, at the same time, they felt a deep sense of loss, supports Hirschman's argument. Our interviews suggest that, at least in cultures that share a common root in classical Greece, the idea that many of us have of a "well-rounded," properly self-esteeming individual includes both an active public life and an intense involvement in private concerns. But we cannot have both at the same time-- not to the degree that our more or less conscious normative images demand. So we tend to shift from one kind of involvement to the other. Thus, while we have chosen one kind of involvement over the other (and have dressed such choice with the remarkable talent we have for giving ourselves good reasons for our preferences), at a less conscious level we may be nostalgic for that "other world" which, at least for the time being, we have abandoned. *Angst*, omnipotence, denial of death, *hubris* and innumerable related terms point to a much more inherently dissatisfied and tense animal than the chooser between two or more preferences that mainstream economics--and, to a large extent, political science--present to us.

That the interplay between public and private impulses may be an unsolvable tension is suggested by the negative connotations that in our cultures evoke persons who give the impression of being entirely devoted to public or to privatized concerns. An entirely public man (not to say anything about the "public woman," as Hirschman reminds us in *SI*, that euphemism for prostitution which, in the sense I am discussing here, is not too different from the connotations of an "excessively public man") is suspected of having nothing behind the mask he wears, just shallow, "de-humanized" emptiness. This may be why the ultimate public persons, the politicians, find it useful to show that, in spite of their heavy public obligations, they have a beautiful, intense family life. On the other hand, a person entirely dedicated to his private concerns (his, because women are supposed to be so dedicated which means, precisely, that in an important sense they are "less" than men) raises connotations of selfishness and pettiness, of a life which is "too small," and without a dignified purpose. This may be why, when they have been successful in the very private pursuit of earning money, some rich persons feel obliged to show their "public consciousness." One way or the other, the language we use, as well as the innumerable portraits that the literary imagination has drawn of the manifold variations of these archetypes, express the feeling that a person "excessively" immersed in a public or a private life is less than "fully" or "truly" human.

If, as I am suggesting, a shift toward a very politicized or privatized life is deeply conflictive and leads to guilt feelings that we usually repress from our consciousness, it follows that the strength of the "rebound effects" from private to public involvements that *SI* discusses, is dependent upon the general contextual situation. In a democratic setting, the decision to live a very private life is, in principle, a free one; if afterwards I decide to involve myself politically and then I look negatively at my "excessively privatized" previous period, short of acute neurosis I cannot but criticize myself. The situation is different in repressive contexts. As we saw, our interviewees were living extremely



privatized lives for reasons more complicated than the coercion that the government was applying. But when, as we shall see, a new cycle of politization occurred, those persons could project upon an obvious target all the blame for what they now recognized as deep losses during the period through which they had just lived. That target was the authoritarian regime. The availability of such an external (and, of course, in many senses, very appropriate) target exempted those persons from self-criticism and, thus, unleashed the full intensity of their guilt-feelings and grievances against the authoritarian regime. This is why Hirschman's "rebound effects" are likely to be stronger when a politicized cycle occurs after a period of privatization that has been backed by a repressive power. This strengthened rebound effect, even if not particularly useful in terms of the self-knowledge of the individuals concerned, is a powerful weapon against authoritarian rule. Through it we may understand another theme often tackled by the literary imagination: the scenes of liberation from authoritarian rule, where those who have fought against it are the more serene, while those who have been passive or in some senses collaborated are the more cruel and vengeful. But for this enhanced rebound effect to occur, some horizontal voice must have reappeared. This theme will occupy us in the following pages.

## VI.

The remarks of the preceding section can now be put in a different way: at its limit, the logic of authoritarian domination tends to exercise full control of the collective identities of its subjects (as we saw, in our case, the constellation of attributes connoted by the idea of "a good Argentine"). This is a monological structure: those "on top" address their subjects and allow very little, and strictly controlled, vertical voice; furthermore, they forbid the dialogical structure entailed by horizontal voice. This results not only in the suppression of the specifically public dimension of the subjects, but also in a severe loss

of their sociability. The themes of loneliness, of cold as opposed to the warmth of spontaneous sociability, and of darkness as the expression of the cognitive difficulties resulting from the suppression of most channels of free communication, are recurrent in literature, psychology and history (as they were in our own feelings and in those conveyed to us by our interviewees) in the depiction of the experience of repressive rule. He who must listen but cannot speak is the infant in the authoritarian family. Such an infant cannot possibly know what is good for him, much less for others; he must be told who he is: with whom, how, and why he should identify.

In a nation-state (as well as, I surmise, in many organizations) the obliteration of horizontal voice has some crucial consequences. First, it is a sufficient condition for the severe decay of vertical voice. Even if an authoritarian regime would leave unobstructed the preexisting channels for the use of vertical voice, the suppression of horizontal voice entails that such information as does get through to the top consists exclusively of individual--and in a sense perversely privatized--messages. This means that collective vertical voice (which, as we saw, presupposes collective identities which in turn presuppose the use of horizontal voice) is suppressed. Furthermore, the obliteration of horizontal voice means that those social sectors whose mode of voicing cannot but be collective, are condemned to silence; consequently, as we descend the ladder of social stratification a deeper silence is imposed. Thus, whatever vertical voice remains is not only drastically diminished, it is also inherently biased. A second consequence is that, since all sources of collective identity not monopolized by the authoritarian rulers are prohibited, they place extraordinarily jealous demands on another theme of *EVL*: loyalty, in this case the loyalty due to the collective identity that those rulers wish to impose. This is a jealous demand, because it pretends to exclude all others, and--thus--it defines a *contrario* that most dangerous of categories to be placed in, all the way from repressive regimes to street gangs: those who do not "truly deserve" to be considered members. A

third consequence is that the more repressive a regime is, the more exclusive and paranoid it becomes toward autonomous sources of voice. The resulting closure to potentially relevant information entails the lack of the "corrective mechanisms" discussed in *EVL*<sup>11</sup> and, at the limit, is equivalent to the clinical definition of madness--this is why these systems are disaster-prone, as was superbly illustrated by the Malvinas/Falklands fiasco of the Argentine regime.

Another consequence of the suppression of horizontal voice--already suggested--has to do with the subjects of repressive rule: the atomized life they are forced to live, the extreme privatization of their concerns, and the caution and mistrust with which the few remaining occasions of sociability must be approached. These restrictions entail a sharp impoverishment, as our interviews and observations in Argentina showed, even of very personal and not at all political dimensions of human life. As research on political culture shows, in all countries there are many who never use vertical voice, probably do not feel the tensions between the public and private discussed above, and still may be quite happy human beings. But life with horizontal voice severely repressed is plainly awful. If I have not become a perfect *idiotes* and, thus, if I have opinions about the politics and economics of my country, I need others, who even though they disagree, confirm that my opinions and beliefs are not senseless. Without the emotional and cognitive anchoring that such communications furnish to my personal and social identities, the very assumptions about what is real and valuable may enter into flux. Short of the psychological disintegration of the individual--of which our interviews with various sorts of psychological therapists gave sad and quite extensive evidence--the resulting tendency converges with the purposes of the authoritarian regime: to take refuge in an extremely privatized life, "forgetting" the dangerous and cognitively uncertain "outside world." On the other hand, if in such situations one still tries to use

horizontal voice, some interesting things happen. This will occupy us in the following section.

## VII.

It is conceivable that an extremely repressive regime could, at least for a time, entirely suppress vertical voice. But the trick with horizontal voice is that, even if such a regime might get quite close to it, it can never completely suppress or control it. Not only through personal experience in Argentina but also in a comparative study of authoritarian rule<sup>12</sup> that I undertook with a group of colleagues, the importance of what I shall call "oblique voice" became evident. This is a particular kind of horizontal voice. It intends to be understood by "others like me" in our opposition to a repressive regime and, at the same time, it hopes not to be perceived by the agents of the latter. After the March 1976 coup there was not much horizontal voice in Argentina but there was something, enough for not falling into utter despair. Certain unconventional (slightly so, there was not room for more than that) ways of dressing, clapping hands with excessive enthusiasm in front of public authorities, going to the recitals of singers or musicians who were known to disagree with the regime, some quick glances in the streets and other public spaces-- these were some of the ways with which, in this most fertile area of human imagination, one could recognize and be recognized by others as opponents to the regime. Notice that such signals did not intend other behavioral consequences, such as the ones that members of a resistance movement ready to enter in action might exchange. Notice also that there were no instrumental rewards expected, and that oblique voice always entailed some degree of risk. But these signals had great emotional and cognitive import, as the way to recognize that each one was not entirely alone in his/her opposition to the regime. This was the untransposable limit of the violence of the regime, that residue of oblique,

non-verbal horizontal voice which one could still exercise when all other forms of voice had been suppressed. As Hirschman notes in *SI* and other works<sup>13</sup>, there are some activities that gratify because of the very fact that they are undertaken; this is why some forms and moments of political participation cannot be reduced to a utilitarian calculus nor, consequently, are subject to the free-rider problem.<sup>14</sup> This is suggested by oblique voice, that irreducible core of political involvement: by exercising it one obtained the crucial cognitive gratification of confirming a shared collective identity, as well as the no less crucial emotional benefit of asserting one's self-respect as a non-*idiotes*. Notice, finally, that even though oblique voice is practiced in an apparently depoliticized context, it has an intrinsic reference to a very public involvement. It is this capacity of linking the most personal with the most public, not only of oblique but also of all sorts of horizontal voice, that makes it so important politically.

This argument can be further illustrated *a contrario* with another piece of the story I began to narrate above. I was living in Brazil when the Argentine government launched the invasion of the Malvinas/Falklands. As soon as it happened, I felt a strong urge to go to Buenos Aires, hoping that I could find others who shared my unconditional rejection of such an adventure and of the war it would predictably trigger. But I was immensely distressed to find that an overwhelming majority of my acquaintances, including many of those who opposed the regime, enthusiastically supported the invasion and, later on, the war. "Before anything else we are Argentines" was the argument I heard *ad nauseam*. Until appalling defeat occurred, the regime was enormously successful in establishing a hyper-nationalistic collective identity that practically erased all others. Even oblique voice almost disappeared; almost everyone was trying to "help the country" win the war. This led me into quite a few painful discussions in which even opponents of the regime accused me of "thinking like a foreigner," if not worse. The rather lonely reflections with which I tried to stand fast to my opinions and values were not enough, not even when I

recognized in myself a well-known psychological problem: the immense difficulty of holding on to values and even to elementary factual opinions when most social interactions refute them. This had been quite easy to do before the war, while some oblique voice existed. But it became immensely difficult when even oblique voice was practically obliterated during those awful days. Then, faced with the arguments of most relevant others that I was at best misinterpreting everything, I realized I was losing the social support--cognitive and affective--needed in order to stick to basic opinions and values;<sup>15</sup> even what was and was not real became doubtful. Afterwards, chatting with persons who had shared my views during those days, they told me that they had suffered similar problems; some of them had ended up by supporting the war. (My own part of the story is that, in despair, in the midst of those events I exited to Brazil, where, even in a deeply polemical *milieu* with fellow Argentines, I found enough supportive interactions to enable me to stick to my opinions and values).

#### VIII.

As is well-known, the Malvinas/Falkland adventure ended in the complete defeat of the Argentine troops. It soon became evident to the population that the government had lied outrageously about the developments of the war, and that the behavior of many officers of the armed forces had been remarkably inept and cowardly. The regime thus entered into collapse, eroded by its internal conflicts and recriminations, and pushed by the rage with which suddenly many demanded rapid democratization. The atrocities that the regime had committed in the previous years began to be publicly exposed, jointly with the abysmal corruption of most of the rulers. These facts, which many had refused to acknowledge or had until recently justified, fed still further the moral indignation with

which most Argentines suddenly found themselves agreeing in their demand for democratization.

Even though the circumstances made this process particularly rapid and intense in Argentina, in the already mentioned study on transitions from authoritarian rule, we found that this "resurrection of civil society," as Schmitter and I call it,<sup>16</sup> is a typical occurrence. At some moment, and for reasons too varied to be discussed here, many individuals who have been formerly passive, depoliticized, acquiescent or simply too afraid to do anything, converge in a broadly-shared (and often daring) demand for the termination of the authoritarian regime. Whether successful or not in the achievement of its goals, such a convergence is a powerful driving force in the transition.

As I suggested above, the mechanisms that lead to this--for the actors, at least--surprising emergence, are more complex than the existence, under the *aegis* of the authoritarian regime, of many individuals who purposefully conceal their opposition until the situation becomes ripe for acting. Undoubtedly there are such individuals but, if the lesson from the Argentine case has any value, there are also many who are at best politically passive or indifferent during that period, but who as the contextual conditions begin to change, quite suddenly repoliticize in determined opposition to the authoritarian regime. When the regime in Argentina was already collapsing, in a rather perverse move--with the pretext that we had lost the transcript of their former interviews and needed their help for reconstructing them--we reinterviewed some of the more depoliticized and acquiescent individuals in our sample. On this second occasion, most of them were full of rage against the regime, the armed forces, its behavior in the war, and the atrocities it had committed in the country. Furthermore, some of those respondents had again become politically active. All of them "remembered" what they had told us before in a way that sharply contrasted with what they had actually told us. They were wrong, but evidently sincere, as they had been sincere before, in telling us, in the reinterviews, that they had

always strongly opposed the regime and had never accepted its injunctions. In the first interviews those respondents had given distressing responses to our probings concerning the abductions, tortures and murders that were going on: these were only "rumors" or "exaggerations" and, at any event, "there must be some reason" why some persons were so victimized. Refusal to know, and in some worse cases, identification with the aggressor and blaming the victim, were ugly mechanisms about which we had read in studies on Nazi Germany. To our deep sadness because, quite naively, we had not expected these mechanisms to operate in so many of our interviewees, we had to recognize them during our research; most of those persons told us on the second occasion that "only now" had they become aware of those atrocities and that, "of course," they energetically condemned them.<sup>17</sup>

The persons we reinterviewed gave us the impression that they had just "discovered" what they subconsciously felt they should have believed during the years of harsh repression. As a consequence, they had rewritten their memories to fit that discovery. The sense of continuity of their personal identity was preserved and, thus, they could look at the past without conscious guilt or shame: they had had "nothing to do" with the atrocities perpetrated by the regime (which was true in the real but partial sense that they had not personally participated in repression), and had known little or nothing of those atrocities. It is my impression that these important although unacknowledged changes were closely related to the previous obliteration of most forms of horizontal voice and, at the moment of the reinterviews, to the rapid recuperation of all sorts of voice that was taking place.

During our first round of interviews, trying to find a not entirely dark side to our data, we told ourselves that the refusal of many interviewees to recognize what was going on was a defense mechanism that preserved them for better times. Given the extremely repressive conditions, short of conscious identification with the regime and,



consequently and necessarily, with its atrocities, the actual alternative for such persons was to plunge into an absorbed private life, and to refuse to know what was going on "outside." This, at least, preserved them (more specifically, their self-esteem) for the moment when it eventually would become not too dangerous to "know" and, thus, to become indignant about what had happened. Imagining that they had "always" been sharply opposed to the regime and only coming to terms with reality after the regime had begun to collapse, are expressions of well-known defenses such as psychological rationalization, selective memory, and cognitive dissonance. The aspect of these complex phenomena that interests me here is how their occurrence may be triggered by changes in the political context.

As we found in the already mentioned study of transitions, there are--generalizing beyond the Argentine case--circumstances that lead to the collapse or, less dramatically, to the obvious decay of repressive rule. There are, then, some noble individuals who have the courage to say that the emperor is naked (some of them even had the courage to say it before, but then very few listened). There are, also, other no less noble individuals who dare to spread such, shortly before, unimaginable opinions. The exemplary character of those statements leads others, and then others, to address others saying that what really matters is to act together for the purpose of getting rid of authoritarian rule. In other words, civil society has resurrected, horizontal voice has reemerged, its "subversive" implications operate again, oblique voice becomes unnecessary, and--as a consequence--vertical voice aimed at changing those who are "on top" is heard. In the first stages of this process, repression by the crumbling authoritarian regime may be and usually is harsh, but it tends to be erratic and, above all, few believe that it can restore the hold the regime previously had on individual lives.<sup>18</sup> In such circumstances, horizontal voice again appeals to the "public self" of individuals, in ways that allow them to recover a feeling of integrity: now they can demand the rights that

pertain to them as citizens, and they again have moral standards with which to take a stand against the authoritarian regime. This is why the rebound effects toward public involvement are so widespread and intense in these cases: many repoliticize themselves, electoral campaigns draw big crowds, attempted authoritarian reversions are usually defeated with the support of an active and mobilized public opinion, and electoral participation in the founding elections of a more or less democratic regime is unusually high. Whatever free riding may exist does not weigh enough to weaken such processes, and there seems to be nothing like the perception of the "paradox of voting": on the contrary, participating in the demise of authoritarian rule and voting (the very act of symbolic and, to a significant extent, also practical negation of authoritarian rule, which constitutes not only the democratic authorities but also the voter *qua* citizen) are undertaken, as Hirschman argues, because those activities are felt as extremely rewarding in themselves.

What is clear in the admittedly exceptional circumstances of the demise of authoritarian rule, may well also be true--although less intense and, thus, more difficult to perceive--of many forms of political participation and repolitization occurring in more normal circumstances. The sense of personal worth and self-respect, the feeling that one is not an *idiotes*, the hope of achieving valued goals by means of collective action, the motivation of overcoming the "coldness" and "darkness" of an isolated life through the emotional warmth of sociability and collective identity, and the cognitive reassurance that comes from the public sharing of values and opinions with many others--all these are crucial phenomena of political life, even if often they fade away and then, again and again, reappear under old or new faces. These phenomena cannot be accounted for on utilitarian grounds, so we should not expect that they will be subject to (or, at least, that they should be dominated by) the dilemmas and paradoxes of the kinds of social action for which utilitarian assumptions are reasonably realistic. Horizontal voice has crucial

importance for the emergence and reproduction of such phenomena, as well as for the very existence of a democratic context.

## NOTES

- 1 Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- 2 Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
- 3 See esp., David Collier, ed., *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
- 4 These processes are analyzed in Guillermo O'Donnell, *El Estado Burocrático-Autoritario. Argentina 1966-1973* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrado, 1982; English edition, The University of California Press, forthcoming).
- 5 For a similar argument, Jean Laponce, "Hirschman's Voice and Exit Model as a Spatial Archetype," *Social Science Information* 13, Nº 3 (June 1974), pp 67-81.
- 6 Albert O. Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- 7 On this point, Alessandro Pizzorno, "Political Exchange and Collective Identity in Industrial Conflict," in Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, eds., *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), Vol. II, pp 277-97.
- 8 Guillermo O'Donnell, "Democracia en la Argentina: Micro y Macro," in Oscar Oszlak, ed., *'Proceso,' Crisis y Transición Democrática*. (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984), Vol. I, pp 13-30.
- 9 It even became dangerous to participate in psychological therapy groups: the repressors soon discovered that if appropriately pressured or tortured, members of such groups were excellent informants about any other members whom they suspected. Many psychologists and psychoanalysts stopped working with groups. As it often happens, this high uncertainty and risk has been better expressed in literary works; see, e.g., Humberto Constantini, *De Dioses, Hombrecitos y Policías* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Brujuna, 1984).
- 10 Albert O. Hirschman, "Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse," in *American Economic Review*, 74 (2), May 1984.
- 11 The tendency of authoritarian regimes to close themselves to crucial information and the destructive consequences that follow from this, are cogently discussed in David Apter, *Choice and the Politics of Allocation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).
- 12 Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Latin America and Southern Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, forthcoming). These processes are discussed in Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, "Political Life after Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Transitions," volume IV of that op. cit.

- 13 Esp., "Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse," *op. cit.*
- 14 As we shall see below, this is why Brian Barry's critique of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* to the effect that this work fails to take into account free riding and its consequences for political action, misses the target at least with respect to some, often very important, forms of collective action; Brian Barry, "Review Article: 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,'" *British Journal of Political Science* (4 February 1974), 79-107. Of course, the reference to "free riding" is to the *locus classicus* of Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).
- 15 Some readers may find interesting to know that, in those circumstances, it was helpful to me to remember the classic experiment of S.E. Asch, which had fascinated me when I studied in Graduate School. See S. E. Asch, "Effects of Group Pressure on the Modification and Distortion of Judgments". First printed in H.S. Guetzkow, ed., *Groups, Leadership and Men: Research in Human Relations* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951); reprinted in H. Proshansky and B. Seidenberg, eds., *Basic Studies in Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) pp 393-401.
- 16 Guillermo O'Donnell, and Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, *Transitions*, *op. cit.*
- 17 An obvious question that we posed ourselves from the beginning of our research was whether the respondents concealed from us their true opinions due to fear and mistrust. We are sure this was not the case because practically all the interviews, after an uptight beginning, became very emotional. Often our respondents cried and gave other unmistakable signals of the deep emotions they were feeling as they talked to us about themes related to the public sphere and/or their own past that--as some of them insisted--they had "forgotten." Both factually and emotionally the more difficult moment for us was not to begin but to end the interviews. In no less than half of the cases the respondents asked us to continue (after an average of two hours and a half of interview) or to make another appointment with them, arguing that the very fact of talking to us was very important for them.
- 18 These processes are discussed in O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, *Transitions*, *op. cit.*

