

**"Chile and the World
at the Dawn of 2007"
Report of a Listening Post
held on 10th January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part was concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that related to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1.

Female leadership, idealization and ambivalences

Analysis:

At Listening Post 2007, just like last year, interest and concern is shown for female leadership and its implications for Chilean society. Attention is primarily focused on leadership which has been exercised by the woman who is currently President of the Republic. This is the first time a woman has been responsible for managing Chile's government and this has meant opening up to a leadership paradigm change in both public and private arenas. In contrast with male leadership characterized by decision-making, action and aggressiveness, female leadership is understood as reflexive, introspective and open to the integration of feelings. Female leadership is seen as correcting the deficiencies of male leadership, entails hope for a better future and engenders enthusiasm and happiness because it allows for greater equal opportunities, more freedom and the possibility of creating a fairer and more cooperative society. However, female leadership is a new experience and entails uncertainty, confusion and ambivalence for people because it is seen as hesitant, indecisive, conciliatory and not very resolved in terms of decision making. There are ambivalences regarding female

leadership - it is considered useful and necessary for the era of change society is going through but there is also certain nostalgia for male leadership due to its implications of disciplined, firm and aggressive action. It is difficult for women to exercise leadership due to the overblown expectations people have regarding their actions, due to the effort required to bring intelligence, listening and feelings together as well as the public visibility and vulnerability the same are exposed to. Women in leadership roles feel closely watched by men who are eager to observe any mistakes these may make in these leadership roles and to subtract backing and legitimacy from the same when this happens.

Hypothesis:

In Chilean society individuals feel anxiety regarding traditional male leadership's inability to effectively meet the today's emotional restraint and material needs. This anxiety has led citizens to look for alternative and non-conventional leadership which could provide better welfare. By means of this process, individuals create psychic objects which are assigned the role of saviors and to which all-powerful capacities are assigned in order to solve the problems being faced by these individuals. This is the case of female leadership for Chilean society where people have idealized fantasies as to the savior role assigned to the woman who is now president of the Republic for the building of a fairer and more cooperative society. These leadership fantasies are generally tied to the fact that the president is a woman. The idealization granted to female leadership is a means of defense against the complexity of problems being experienced by society because in this manner citizens assign their desires for protection and care to these leaders and thus absolve themselves from any blame or responsibility which inevitably correspond to the same when it comes to facing problems. The use of a withdrawal mechanism which eliminates the necessary integration which must exist between male and female genders for the implementation of joint actions for problem solving is also in play. Ambivalence held by individuals regarding female leadership and nostalgia for male leadership is a sign of hesitancy people experience when it comes to creating positive psychic objects which enable more effective satisfaction of their needs for dependency, protection and care. On the other hand, women in leadership positions face anxiety in terms of people demanding timely and effective answers to their problems. It is a difficult task for these women to not give in to the force of this mass projection and not lose their sense of reality.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Free - floating violence in society

Analysis:

A second issue which draws the attention of people attending Listening Post is the degree of violence which surrounds Chilean culture. This violence is partially identified with the public conflicts which have shaken society during the year 2006, such as the case of what has happened between indigenous groups and the government, trade unions and companies, students and the authorities, or criminal actions against people and institutions. However, above and beyond the same, special emphasis has been placed on latent violence which is manifested in more private spaces such as what happens with families, couples and children, violence against helpless senior citizens which are left to fend for themselves; violence in the workplace, educational organizations and in general day-to-day relationships. People harbor free-floating aggressiveness which may become manifest in the event of harmless stimuli as actions which lead to moral or physical damage. This violence creates substantial fear because

it present in everyday living as a force which seems to be uncontrollable and hard to understand, meaning that people have to constantly be in complete control of themselves in order to face the same sensibly, whether one is an object of violence or if this violence lies in the individual who does not want to be overcome by the same. Being alert to violence creates a lot of wear and exhaustion, especially when it comes to eliminating violence and not taking it out on one's family, partner, children or one's self. Violence in society leads individuals to debate as to how the same can be faced in keeping with respect for personal and other rights without despairing. The other alternative is to flee from society's violent atmosphere and take refuge in intimate and private spaces where protection is available and people can avoid the risk of aggression.

Hypothesis:

Violence can be explained by people's yearning to participate in a society which does not offer stability or protection and where the sense of personal identity becomes uncertain due to the risk of exclusion and marginality inherent when it comes to participating in groups and institutions. This yearning makes people extraordinarily prone to becoming victims of schizoid and paranoid mental states and to employ primitive defense mechanisms such as withdrawal, projective identification and repression. Schizo-paranoid conditions lead people who experience frustration to seek for psychic objects to act as scapegoats upon which the blame for the evils of existence can be placed. Another person or group which appears to be different and more vulnerable can be an easy and immediate target for displacing and unloading rage and aggression which has been harbored by these people but which cannot be accepted, understood or given a constructive course of action. Individuals must have an inability to tolerate differences and frustrations which means that they easily become irritable and hostile with others. Deep down it is believed that today's society entails a certain level of dissatisfaction for citizens which creates a lot of rage because people feel they are at the mercy of forces which make people feel helpless. Conflicts taking place in society which attract public attention help people to displace their own rage and fury into these conflicts. Thus the frustration of participating in a society which is considered unfair, highly demanding and lacking content can be channeled. These public conflicts facilitate the "demonization" of people, groups or institutions upon which responsibility is placed for the evils of society.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Corruption and distrust

Analysis:

Cases of corruption in organizations, especially in public services, which have taken place recently in Chile are being considered as well as how citizens feel affected by perplexity and distrust. The issue is tied to incompetence and the lack of moral fiber when it comes to the leadership of organizations which breaks down credibility of leaders and how political, economic and social institutions work in the country. After being made aware of these acts of corruption, abuse of power and the misuse of public goods, people feel let down, leading to loss of trust deposited in these public personages as well as in political groups and institutions. There is a deep-rooted mantle of distrust as to how society is governed, which people and groups really make important decisions and truly affect how the country moves forward. All of the above leads to the conception of society as a perverse system, where hidden political forces with considerable power manipulate and deceive citizens. When these cases of serious and widespread corruption are unmasked, individuals no longer know what is real and what is not, everything becomes volatile and ephemeral because all manner of deceit and

treachery hide behind the false front of reality. Individuals regret the fact that this can take place in democracy; the symbolism of democracy with its values and rituals ends up being a farce. Discouragement also becomes widespread because people do not know how to get out of this situation because the hope of returning to democracy as a corrective measure was always behind the horror of military dictatorship, but when this takes place under democratic rule, where are the moral reserves to ensure that corruption does not linger on and to restore trust in institutions and the authorities? The way we choose leaders for public and private organizations is being seriously questioned and it seems that influence by hidden powers determines how these positions are filled more than personal merit. People believe that what we need is to rationalize society, intensify the use of standards and control measures in order to unmask and punish any indication of misuse or abuse of power.

Hypothesis:

The incompetent and corrupt behavior of leaders leads to severe anxiety and desolation because people have deposited their trust and credibility in the same in the understanding that leaders will know how to intelligently and reliably answer the needs of today's society. People feel cheated or betrayed by the misuse authorities make of the schizo-paranoid mental state, corrupt leaders become scapegoats and are "demonized" as perverse entities responsible for society's discontentment. On the other hand, the feeling of abandonment and disbelief regarding leaders is echoed by individuals who are uncertain as to how to understand why acts of corruption have taken place and are wondering who they can trust and what to do in order to move ahead. Anti-anxiety defense mechanisms are activated in this case, individuals have fantasies which idealize rationalist, bureaucratic and regulatory behavior of organizations and society through which, the same would supposedly be able to halt corruption and its effects and therefore gain control so that these corrupt actions never take place again and ensure that inept leaders are not tolerated. This defense presupposes an understanding which reifies the causes of corruption, denies or represses the fact that this action is directly associated to conscious and unconscious social processes where responsibility for corruption is probably not an issue just for leaders but also for other subjects who have anonymously contributed to the same.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4

The example of young people in the event of society's helplessness

Analysis:

The group discussed the intense conflicts which took place between students and the government during the year 2006. The leadership, intelligence, courage and discipline exercised by students in order to voice their interests, to be listened to and negotiate with the government in order to reach solutions for their problems is truly admired. The country witnessed the conflict and its development and watched as students took to the streets and in the main cities throughout the country protesting and harassing the government as well as the political parties which back the same. The student conflict is seen at Listening Post as an awakening from the lethargy and helplessness citizens feel in terms of the problems faced by today's Chilean society. We discussed how people tend to be submissive, accept things the way they are and conform to decisions made by the authorities which negates their capacity to make complaints, protest and defend their own interests. We believe that people are still dependent, and act with a mentality in which they wait for authorities to take the initiative for actions which enable care and protection for citizens, but evidently with the students this is not the case. These

students gave us an example of how we can overcome the helplessness and malaise which people harbor. We believe that it is time for adults to stand aside and let young people become stronger protagonists in society's advancement and that leadership must be renewed. We also believe that people's silence is a legacy of the military dictatorship. There are many citizen sectors without any spokesperson to communicate their needs and which have the means to satisfy their needs, we would especially like to point out the case of young people living in poverty who choose to escape being excluded from society through drug abuse.

Hypothesis:

People experience anxiety and rage due to their malaise caused by being members of a society which does not properly satisfy the needs of those depending on the same. This is aggravated by the fact that these feel tied to social conventionalisms which lead people to behave complacently and in conformity because they are afraid to take control of themselves and their circumstances. The actions of young people who let their voices be heard, challenge and fight the authorities is idealized by some citizens who are vicariously able to express their own rage and malaise. Thus the conflict between students and the government is useful because people massively project their own frustrations with the system and indirectly manifest their own protests. People fantasize about young people leading society, producing improvements and welfare. Anxiety created by failed dependency is therefore faced, the fear of autonomy must be faced as well and conflict must take place in order to avoid becoming submissive and complacently obedient. People realize that they need individual courage to be able to face their problems and to challenge the authorities and conventionalisms, which generates anxiety because the same implies the risk of being discriminated against, excluded and punished.

Analysis and Hypothesis 5

Experiencing external oppression: isolation and alienation

Analysis:

Listening Post participants suggest that they feel it is very difficult to counteract external social pressure, which in many cases are experienced as oppressive and overwhelming agents. The existence of a social fabric which may contain said feelings seems to be diluted, and the intense atomization of social ties leads to the sensation of widespread despair and loss of sense. Social order appears to be ruled by external forces beyond the subject, and nothing more can be done than to obediently accept what is being imposed. Individualism and the exacerbated concern for one's own interests entail the subject's supposed possibility for satisfaction. If it is possible for one to properly be inserted in social spaces, there must be a possibility for participating in gratification offered by the system. Within this context, all variables associated with the use of urban freeways such as collection, fare variations, displacement comfort, etc, come up as critical elements which separate the group between those who feel oppressed and those who are able to enjoy the benefits provided by the same. Reclusion in small spaces, whether these are the workplace, family, friendship or other spaces, seems to be the antidote for facing a competitive world which offers no alternatives or incentives to act any other way.

Hypothesis:

Spaces for active and effective social participation appear to be either non-existent or highly diluted. There is a series of fears associated to an uncertain future and de-

vitalized old age. The present appears to be charged with "externally imposed" demands which limit space for people to devote to what provides them with real satisfaction: family life, community activities, leisure, etc. In this sense, it is difficult to be able to act safely when so many counterpoised variables come into play. There is an illusion that there are spaces where satisfaction can be found. Notwithstanding, this illusion is threatened when individuals come up against the high separation and divorce rate. This indicates that the very essence of the supposed refuge of family life is being threatened.

In keeping with the same, there is an illusion that young people seems to show the capacity to distance themselves from the question about the meaning of life and that they are able to live more connected to here and now. Notwithstanding, they evidence great difficulty when it comes to fulfilling their duties, living within a logic where demanding their own rights seems predominant. Likewise, young people's so-called freedom goes hand-in-hand with soaring rates of juvenile violence and alcoholism. Within this context, violence appears as an escape valve for strong existing social pressures at both interfamily and social levels. Violence in the streets comes up with a certain amount of legitimacy, implying that in response to widespread discontentment, social inequality and postponement that it is "almost natural" that continuous outbreaks of violence and destruction take place and whose effect is to serve as a regulatory mechanism for the system.

Analysis and Hypothesis 6

Polarization between nostalgia for a safe past and anguish regarding the opening of globalization

Analysis:

The group has experienced strong polarization between those who experience continuous malaise and anguish regarding the loss of clear social reference points and those who suggest living in a world with established borders. One point of view is that that the globalization phenomenon, characteristic of contemporary society, imposes lifestyles where there are no limits, and in which satisfaction models always turn out to be disproportionate. These standing models are ruled by a culture which idolizes economic canons which turn out to be overwhelming and alienating. In this context, nostalgia for a better past, with more precise and more stable limits and with closer and fuller social relationships is offered as an illusion of well-being and welfare. In this manner, up against extreme dissatisfaction and loss of sense experienced by some, voices are awakened showing the possibility of finding these satisfaction spaces in terms of family and friendship relationships. For these people limits can be drawn for the world, thus harnessing the ambition and massive opening contemporary society imposes as a standard to be reached.

In this context the image of Chilean society going through a transition or following a road comes up as an alternative as opposed to these counterpoised outlooks. The strong emotional and symbolic charge entailed by the notion of (political) transition is uncomfortable for Chilean society. A political and social reality characterized by the existence of unclear and hazily-defined political reference points is perceived, which in turn generates a complacent outlook lacking in generalized mobility at a personal, director and authority level.

Hypothesis:

This polarization denotes a huge difficulty in terms of integrating the unique differences

of present reality which suggests values under constant pressure. This implies co-existing with a threatening and demanding reality which leads to confusion and loss of sense. Nostalgia for a stable, protected and defined social order is offered as an antidote against the feeling of anguish generated by not knowing what the limits of existence are. A roadmap with "handrails" is seen as an infantile return to safety and stability. On the other hand, there are voices which show that is possible to find this safe arena by limiting expectations and empowering contribution to others. This arena is marked by a reality with tighter limits finding satisfaction spaces in intimate relationships. The problem seems to come up when these outlooks collide with realities which threaten the possibility of coexisting with this limited reality. Within this context the legalization of same sex marriage seems to indicate a transgression which breaks apart the supposed "openness to others" which these perspectives seem to suggest.

In this manner, the other person is acceptable as long as he or she does not break apart one's personal world outlook. However, it seems that proximity to this other person becomes a threatening reality which determines that others are to be experienced as a hell. Here it is relevant to state how it is easier to connect on an emotional level with the war in Iraq through television and the newspapers, than with one's next-door neighbor. In this context the image of a society in "transition" or in "transit" generates extreme skepticism, since we do not know which coordinates establish said transit. Corruption in politics, social inequality and the postponement of widespread levels of society produce a generalized malaise which is projected en masse upon anyone who seems to be different and distinctive.

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