

**"South Africa and the World
at the Dawn of 2007"
Report of a Listening Post
held on 10th January
in
Pretoria**



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.

Theme 1: Leadership is not good enough

Theme 2: Identity is changing all the time

Theme 3: Unfinished business

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

leadership is not good enough

Analysis:

Leadership is experienced in terms of many splits. The first split refers to past and present. Mandela, as the first democratically elected South African president, is idealised as the hero and his successor, Mbeki, as the anti-hero. The present government is blamed for not being present and visible enough and not offering containment to the

nation in terms of violence, poverty and AIDS. The blaming is rationalised by saying that "it is now permissible to blame leaders, which was not the case before". The second split refers to race and gender. The previous white (male dominated) government "messed up the country and relationships" between different groupings. In the new black government, the males are fighting amongst themselves for leadership, while some are stepping out of their roles. It seems as if males are struggling to act as effective leadership role models. At the same time, there is a conscious effort to include more females in executive positions, in government as well in organisations. The females are used as diversity objects resulting in a lack of authorisation and even "being set up for failure". It seems as if no leader from any diverse grouping in the country is fit for leadership. Appointed leaders (and managers) are being watched and any sign of vulnerability, aggression, nepotism or corruption, are immediately splashed in the media as an effort to get rid of them. The frustration, anger and helplessness with national and organisational leadership, makes citizens look outside for help. Recently, Oprah Winfrey, the US talk show host, sponsored and started a new and exclusive school for girls south of Johannesburg. Her regular appearance in the media makes her look like the new hero, offering the young and disadvantaged some safety, a quality education and a bright future (which the government is not offering).

Hypothesis:

The high level of violence, poor education and mediocre medical care in the country, frustrates and angers the nation. The tax payer expects the government to listen to these issues and pro-actively rectify the situation. Because this is not happening, helplessness and hopelessness set in. Citizens use flight as a defence by using rich outsiders as heroes to compensate for the lack of internal leadership (knowing that this will also not work).

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

identity is changing all the time

Analysis:

South Africa is very aware of how its position in the world and in Africa has changed over the last 12 years. Internationally, the world has a positive view on the new multicultural democracy, modern constitution, economic growth and tourist attractions. In Africa, the government is taking up the role as peace maker, the country is representing Africa as the only non-permanent member for the United Nations Security Council, and many corporates provide agricultural, scientific, managerial, banking and medical resources to poor countries on the continent. Positive feedback from outside strengthens a positive identity as a self managing democracy. On the other hand, the internal experience is negative, filled with fear (of violence and aggression), uncertainty about who we are ("what is a rainbow nation") and how to conduct ourselves. Citizens are trying to get to grips with the effect of the past dispensation - the country's history is re-written to include the role of the previously excluded races (black, coloured and Indian) and gender (e.g. adding "her"story to "his"story). Citizens are bombarded daily by news and experiences of loss and death as a result of uncontrollable violence, illness (such as AIDS), poverty and corruption.

Hypothesis:

The South African identity mirrors adolescence with its "Sturm und Drang" and split between (positive) external and (negative) internal experiences. Respect and

recognition are experienced in relation to external peers and authority (in Africa and the world). Internal relationships are filled with distrust, fierce competition, discrimination, envy, violence and corruption. It is difficult to self-authorise in taking up the role of a responsible citizen, because there is no history (memory) or role models for providing opportunities for all to live with mutual respect, recognising similarities and difference.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

unfinished business

Analysis:

The South African society is obsessed with its past, making it difficult to move towards integration and forgiveness. On the one hand there is the view that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was not effective or was not even needed. This represents the sentiment that the past is too threatening to work through, too insignificant to stop and think about, or that nothing has changed much. On the other hand there is the view that the TRC ended too soon. During the hearings, the commission did the work ("Tutu cried for all of us"), and the country looked on in amazement. There was not enough time to allow for the masses to start listening to content and intensity in order to absorb and understand some of the pain. This resulted in many projections onto groups of citizens, which are still contained. For example: Black people express being tired of hearing how bad blacks are and that only they are responsible for crime; white people express being tired of having to defend their so called advantaged position and to cope with their guilt about the past. The TRC's focus on racial issues should also be extended to gender issues. For example: (1) Discussions between black males and black females about the apartheid era, the effect of males leaving their families to work in the cities / on mines, the women working as nannies in white homes, becoming part of that household and forgetting the family of origin; (2) the denial of unpopular identities such as the coloured and Indian groups; (3) mixed race and gender in management - working with and reporting to someone of the opposite diversity ("As a black woman, I can not trust a white male manager to represent me and negotiate on my behalf"). Perhaps the new generation carries the hope to move on. Apartheid was officially dismantled almost 13 years ago, and young children ask their parents: "Why are you so obsessed with this thing apartheid? Move on and get a life". Some also ask, "was separate development really so separate?".

Hypothesis:

South Africans have unfinished business with their past which seems to be unsolvable. Consciously, it is suppressed by some, yet unconsciously it affects everyone. The fantasy is that it will be addressed and solved by some macro intervention. The real challenge is for each citizen to take stock of his/her own position and to work through these issues on the micro and interpersonal levels.

Convener: Frans Cilliers