

## "South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2009"

Report of two Listening Posts  
held on 4th December 2008  
and January 2009



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

### → Report 2

#### South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2009 Report 1 of a Listening Post held on 4th December 2008

##### 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, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

It was wondered what unseen/unnoticed forces prevailed in the ruling party in South Africa which led up to the appointment of Zuma as leader (and then), the subsequent expelling of Mbeki, and subsequent formation of a new political party. Mbeki was seen as elitist, authoritarian and accused of ignoring the consensual tradition within the ANC, causing division in the party. However, after the identified scapegoat was removed from power, that for which he was accused, i.e. causing a split, became a reality. The practical split became a reality only after those events. While many people wanted Zuma to be ousted, Mbeki was ousted in populist manner instead and this was an unseen shock to many. Unexpectedly and generally unforeseen, a schism was opened up which led to a split in the party

The discussions then moved to what cannot be seen. Two instances were talked about relating to cancerous growths. In the one a daughter visited her family and all seemed normal – two weeks later the cancer was discovered and she had to undergo drastic surgery. In the other a man was told that the tumour had disappeared and despite several scans there was no sign of it. Two weeks later the tumour was still in evidence as shown by other scans.

Loss was then mentioned and several examples given where one person seemed to suffer an inordinate amount of loss over a period of time. One woman had a paraplegic son and another who was schizophrenic and now her sister has been blinded and is living with her. Some other similar examples were mentioned. Other losses being experienced at present have to do with real or impending retrenchments.

A client was talked about who was raped by a traditional healer and came for therapy on the anniversary of the rape 4 years later. Her recent history has been a tragic story of abuse and broken trust. She came from a very poor family who scraped together the money to send her to university. On one occasion she trusted a friend to pay the rent and told the friend where the money was. Later she discovered that the rent had not been paid and the money was gone. The friend denied her part in the event. Her parents then suggested that she consult the traditional healer. Another friend accompanied her to the traditional healer and had to wait outside. The traditional healer had dogs in the room and they were trained to bark and howl when he raped her. She did report the event to the South African Police and laid charges but later was informed that there was insufficient evidence. She was thus betrayed by the healer and the police, both of whom held roles, which encouraged her to place trust in them.

Questions were asked about who or what is pulling the wool over people's eyes that impending disasters cannot be seen till they happen because so much of what has happened does not seem to make sense. Again the global financial crisis was mentioned. In South Africa there is much disillusionment after the euphoria of 1994 because the lack of morals seems to overshadow even what is good. It was suggested that this has to do with people who have been entrusted with power and authority from an infantile dependent position and not being held accountable to constituents in a mature and democratic manner.

A way to understand what is happening is the changing consciousness regarding the church and religion. Christianity is ceasing to function as a defensive container against moral dilemmas and complexities as it did in the past. The vacuum, which is left by the changing consciousness, results in some of the chaos being experienced. Reference was made to Wesley Carr having written about the army and the church as being containers for dependency but this was in a sense a negative containment and did not work any longer. The question was posed about how to contain dependency in a more flexible and less paranoid way.

Mention was then made of two cases where it was very hard to determine if the paranoia was 'real' in the sense caused by factors in the present for example being made psychotic by the administration of medication or whether it was a psychotic episode.

A possible 'new' container, it was suggested, would be increased individual insight – a conclusion that is often reached during Group Relations events – that each one is ultimately on his own and needs to deal with this.

It was also mentioned that when iconic figures tumble chaos results in paranoia and compulsive actions and the focus is on events of the day such as the recent cholera epidemic or a virus doing the rounds to manage the anxiety. The real causes are then avoided as in Zimbabwe.

The discussion then moved to people wanting utopia and to live in a fearless world, which contributes to an unthinking and unaccounted dependency on leaders. People also have a need to get rid of their fear but it was realized that fear and showing it are normal and healthy in the circumstances in which we live. Somehow maintaining a balance seemed important though – a balance between being too empathic and carrying the fear in the soul.

## Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

- Things are not as they seem
- Loss of trust, morals, faith and work
- Schizoid paranoia
- Cancer prevalence to do with loss, stress, pace of life, lifestyle, diet and carcinogenic substances in the food
- Fear
- Defences against any discomfort
- Chaos spins around to greater creativity

## Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, 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:** The violated trust arises because of unrealistic expectations of and beliefs in leaders, which have become archaic and leaders who are forced to maintain the status quo. Over time, where an archaic status quo is maintained, people will either act out in anger or feel empty and then introspect, in both instances eventually expelling the leader.

**Hypothesis:** Because we want to defend against our own discomfort and (fear, boredom etc) we invest in individuals or institutions unthinkingly/unquestioningly. These leaders cannot contain the dependence invested in them and then abuse this investment, which leaves emptiness in individuals who then either begin to explore their inner reality or they again select pseudo authority figures.

Convener: Dr Lorna Brown

→ [Report 1](#)

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**Report 2 of a Listening Post held in January**

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organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

## **Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

### **1. Blurred Boundaries**

Many boundaries are becoming blurred, vague and are even disintegrating, causing chaos and a sense of madness / craziness. The 'boundarylessness' of globalisation is felt increasingly which influences the way we do business and conduct relationships; geographical and state boundaries are managed poorly (allowing for people to cross borders voluntarily such as between South Africa / Zimbabwe) – this resulted in xenophobia and violence; secure political boundaries are crumbling (such as the ANC being challenged from within); economic security has fallen away (leading to retrenchments and more poverty); educational standards are dropping; social values and conduct are challenged and 're-engineered' (there is a believe that social integration has taken place and talking about race relations has become a taboo topic); values associated with leadership are challenged (if corruption is accepted as a norm); and health is threatened (by cholera).

### **2. A Negative worl-view**

Society is overwhelmed by complexity, chaos, change, interconnectedness, volatile relationships, disappointment and uncertainty, leading to an extreme negative world view ('where we only expect the worst'). The past is idealised ('when we knew what was going on and what was expected'), the present is not enjoyed (it is filled with constant and extreme hard work / labour without rest or fun) and the future is seen as a hole of uncertainty filled with threat ('doom and gloom'). Thinking becomes more linear, problem solving 'instant and quick' and relationships superficial.

The own difficulties and present position is constantly compared with the 'other countries or parts of the world who do not struggle with these issues.'

### **3. Cope and hope**

Recently a new political party was formed as a break-away from the ruling ANC, called Congress of the People (COPE). Cope / coping became a metaphor for moving away from pessimism and despair towards hope for a more balanced political dispensation. Suddenly the future looks brighter when we can project our hope onto the 2010 FIFA World Soccer event, the upgrading of national infrastructure, decrease in interest rates, lower inflation and how the next generation copes with 'the new democratic South Africa.' It was also mentioned that because we have survived similar problems in the past, we will survive these as well.

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## **Analysis and Hypothesis 1**

### *Blurred boundaries*

Society is challenged on the macro and micro levels in many ways, causing anxiety and insecurity, which are not contained by the expected structures such as government, politicians, the economy and society at large. The result is that the individual has to increasingly take care of the self, use inner resources and self-authorise up to the point of burnout and despair.

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

### *A negative world-view*

Anxiety and stress cause depression and negativity in almost all spheres of life as if the macro economic and political depression is being absorbed in social and interpersonal relationships. The negative is introjected and the positive is projected onto *the other*, keeping the identity split.

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 3**

### *Cope and hope*

Coping with existential anxiety is based on trusting the universal, systemic and unconscious life forces towards equilibrium, linked with an inner strength to survive. The belief is that the moment there is too much of one side (such as power, corruption, pain), its opposite will emerge in unexpected, surprising and interesting ways. Thus our trust in life's fairness and balance is restored.

**Convener: Frans Cilliers**