

**"Britain and the World
at the Dawn of 2009"**
Report of a New Year's Listening Post



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 experiences 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.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In this part, the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

1. Reality and Fantasy

Over the New Year I stayed with my God sons the little one is now 12 and just going to big school. The boys were playing computer games having a great time in zapping each other and killing off the baddies in the game; and as it was New Year the young one was allowed up late to see Jonathan Creek. However, it disturbed him and he could not sleep he was up all night and came to me for comfort. It seemed that it was something to do with not being able to distinguish between reality and fantasy. He thought Jonathan Creek was real. It seems that it is difficult to tell what is real in regard to games. I then wondered what do I know that is real and what is fantasy. Israel sustained bombing even children bombed. Is this fantasy or reality? I can't face reality or striving to be real. Is it fantasy or is it reality? As I listen what comes to mind is the disproportionate violence and difficulty in finding the boundary between reality and illusion, I wonder if this is what's going on with children. Am I threatened or not? It's a massive thing to be able to see the difference between reality and fantasy. All old light bulbs are now not available – a fraud it's surreal. Like a horrible dream. There is also a lot of misinformation re climate change; and bulbs do save electricity. Although there is health consequences as people can react to fluorescent bulbs. Illusion and reality is it as ever or new? In the Civil War people were told you've got to get out of this field there's going to be a war. They said what battle? what war? And there were people who stayed in the field. Is it stronger today?

2. News Management and Misinformation

The experience is one of uncertainty, not knowing what to believe. I watched a programme about Gaza and Israel employing strict news management. All reporters are gathered on a hill that is called the Hill of Shame. Is it a fact that news management

seems to be coming more and more to the fore in every field? It seems to be about control of impressions and views that can be experienced. In Israel, soldiers are not allowed to carry mobile phones they can't talk to family and friends. I saw a programme where a reporter was waiting to speak to the anchor man in the studio and he rang the army direct. Thatcher managed the Falklands information tightly; in Vietnam it was open house. A result is that regarding the Falklands the morale of the British people was managed. The issue of the manipulation of the media is not only about powerful people doing it but also the media themselves. You can't believe anything. News management is not new, the distribution of power shifts.

3. *Hopelessness vs. Hope*

How far do things need to deconstruct before something new emerges. Thank goodness that's over. I'm feeling pessimistic today the unacceptable face or ordinariness. It's a 'topsy turvy' world. I heard about some old friends we had not been in touch with for a while. They had a vivacious young daughter who suddenly died of a virus – her life was snuffed out. My elderly parents in law have no real wish to live but keep on hanging on in there. It's hard to face, I am ashamed at thinking this but it's hard to understand how a young life can be snuffed out when my parents in law are not. That's life. A consequence of jobs lost, firms collapsed a daily agenda in the news. We still need to spend on essential services etc but we are being laughed at. I deal with the tension by shopping at Pound Land and am thinking of knitting gloves for my kids. It's riddled with hypocrisy and confusion. Confusing exceptional and unexceptional – kill off computers and there will be no food in the supermarkets – people waiting to die. I think there is a kindling of hope in 2009, gloom and doom but the bubble has burst and we are left with relationships. No more the falsity of an economy. I've had a great New Year with neighbours who hired a room and it cost us all £5 each for everything we needed, nothing flash but a contented way of living. Did anyone really buy into that way of living? It's now possible to say does it really matter: I relish that. There is no need to keep up with the latest trends. As if we are on our way from a more illusory way of living to something that is closer to reality. I hope that's so but it's something we need to do for ourselves. It's a relief. The turning point for me was May 1979 when it changed for the better. I was passing a Woolies and saw what I thought was a wreath in the window, it was a generational experience and symbolic of the economy. What's happening? Western dominance has been on the slide for three decades, there have been big shifts but there are dangerous gangsters in the field of politics. There is a Mafia of ideas. We can expect to be in desperate straits this year, things are continually changing, massive upheavals occur and we soon forget them when the next arrives, we don't know what is going to happen next, we can't predict what the next issue will be, we are in a position of not knowing. The economic slump is bad enough but are there still changes awaiting us that we can't imagine? Time runs out, life changes completely, a possibility we take things for granted but I don't think we can. Obama the great hope, the Messiah, is it just a fantasy? There is a sense that a large part of stress is about protecting the edifice that is crumbling. A Board meeting asks what do we need to do to save the organisation and they decide to cut jobs. An arbitrary figure is reached and they act on it. But what if they employed people as long as possible? And go to the default stage if the company does not survive. It's almost hilarious. I received a notice of three things from my Council to keep me safe. My brother is keeping chickens, someone's allotment was looted they stole everything. There is an underlying fear of survival if the edifice crumbles. I don't think we can imagine what it would be like if the edifice crumbled. Is it real fear or fantasy? We had a power cut for five hours on the coldest day we were shocked at our reliance on services. But people came out with offers of meals. There is a potential for destruction we could build a new edifice or? We experience delusion when

we wake ourselves to the fact that banks don't have money, mortality, and riskiness. Things like a thirteen year old girl not wanting to be saved. I feel mobilised in a role, a gender role. There is a wanting to choose. As with the German who committed suicide because he was down to his last six billion. Yet others survive on nothing. There is a real confusion of the world and where I fit in it. It's a grim prospect, things like climate change, emotional issues, travelling in developing nations, the filth in Bangkok, feelings of helplessness, hopelessness. I am considering having a child. But would I bring a child into this scary world? Would they thank me for it? We've been here before, the Media, celebrity, diversion from issues. We like to scare ourselves perhaps as a diversion. May 1979 post war consensus broke down. It will take thirty years to sort it out not two years. Obama promised change but is trapped by Washington and need to appoint same old. No continuity.

4. Violence

Upset at Gaza. Feelings of retaliation intellectually this is not the way to tackle the problem. Israel Goliath and Palestine David I want to get back at Israel. I'm not normally in to retaliating but it stirs me up. Haven't people always been dying it's the nasty side of me. We have a whole generation where reality has been removed until approaching death – the only true reality. Then we ask how come no one knows how to manage it? I thought of a few different things coming here. First I saw a young Asian man being stopped by two police officers in Victoria station he was carrying a rucksack. I experienced feelings of anger. Why him? A coincidence or what? What's happening? At other times I could have been more angry but not today – just numbness. Gaza has a certain kind of imminence to it, like a news story. I was running a workshop on diversity when I realised that I had not signed up for it. I had committed myself to not doing it as I was the first ethnic consultant in my organisation in 60 years. I felt a bit stupid. I'm not British I've lived in London for two years and work in Europe. Since being here I have notice and been disturbed by the violence of young people in this country but also young children. . I can't think of things being so hopeful when gangs are on the streets of London. We've got our come uppance but hopeful, I'm not so sure now. We need to help others. I'm not uncomfortable but others are losing their jobs and houses, but I go back to virtual reality. Grand Theft Auto I didn't have these things as a kid I wasn't allowed to watch atrocities on the television (Maumau) I was not aware of these things. Now it's in your face. I find myself thinking both a sense of relief but also reality of gangs and gangsters. Different now with the media where violence is in your face. My parents were born in India there was violence then as there has been in Palestine for 60 years. There has been a sort of democratisation of violence, maybe that's happening not just over there, it now comes closer. News management of the Victoria holocaust a famine erased from memory.

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 and Hypothesis 1: Hopelessness – Living with Fear and Uncertainty

Analysis

Gangs are about not being sure of identity; you can identify with a gang. This links to fear and insecurity. Gangs are adversarial its about finding what is the adversary. Gangs are against as opposed to working together.

The confusion between illusion and reality is now more pronounced in a worsening economy – how are people in this situation. We are experiencing feelings of hope and yearning that it could lead to something better. On the other hand there is anxiety to shore up the old systems, to avoid annihilation.

It's not just a Global recession but Globalisation is itself completely new, where did bling come from? The Global economy was an intentional world, mobile phones, computers, Gucci bags; all these were new. There s a new interdependency at Global levels. The current experience is helplessness, diversity, gang identity but also diversity exciting and scary. It is all unknown and I'm not sure where it will all end up. It could be the end life as we know it for Britain. India or China may be the dominant leaders. No one has a handle on it.

There's always been a question about how far we can make our own reality. The economy, media, gangs, people trying to define what.

The seeds are planted in young people's projections. They carry for us: diversity, equality, attitude to planet, not all in gangs, they are the future. It's not about we – the us – things will evolve. It's there in the mind of the young generation across the world.

Hypothesis

The underlying experience of members of society is the interrelated fears of death and violence and of not being able to distinguish between reality and fantasy. We can perhaps understand this fear and uncertainty in the context of globalisation having destroyed societal culture. In the absence of a societal culture members of society no longer have a framework that they can rely upon for their consistency, continuity and confirmation. When our world begins to crumble we also begin to crumble: members of society have no means to confirm their individual or group identities. In short, members of society have no means of reality testing. A result is that members of society have difficulty in distinguishing between reality and fantasy. This is experienced as helplessness and a state of psychological incompetence. They are left with concerns for the future well being of society. One of the ways they deal with this is by scapegoating young people as in there involvement in gangs while at the same time putting unreasonable projections into young people as the saviours of society.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2: Hope – Towards a New Way of Life

Analysis

It seems that there is a degree of control in deconstructing, I have in mind the image of the Twin Towers shot to pieces, and deliberate deconstruction, but also an image of a better way of life, a better way of being. But there is still the issue of protecting the edifice, do we dare to unpack it to suit today's needs or will it end in death and destruction.

Do we have enough knowledge to make a success or will we destroy it all?

The question is to what extent we can make our own reality? It's a matter of having agency over our own lives. There is a fantasy that capitalism sustained growth. We all have to question the future: A more modest future.

Otherwise it will be like a new global warming – apocalyptic.

Could it be that the most appropriate thing to happen is the credit crunch – a collapse? But that collapse is about much more than values and assets of companies. Stock markets are telling us the same message as climate change. It's telling us that the current way of living is not sustainable. It's more than just about the value of companies. Reactions are primitive and violent, it provides us with one view of hope and maybe that's the way it is. But the temptation to rebuild the edifice is and will remain enormous.

What is the reality beyond that? The least hopeful outcome is to keep things the same. It seems there is a choice, keep the edifice propped up or tear it down and start again, either way it's a really stressful thought.

If we are globally interdependent we can move forward but can we bear the difference?

Hypothesis

The overlying experience of members of society is that we are at, or approaching, a sort of 'tipping point'; a point where things cannot get worse and that there is hope of new beginnings. It is as if this period in our history which has been evidenced by 'death of a way of life' has reached a point where we can begin to consider the development of a new way of life and a new culture. This prospect is viewed by members of society as an opportunity to build a greener, fairer and more sustainable future. However, with all its faults the current way of life is all that members of society know and the prospect of a new way of life is experienced by members of society with fear and trepidation as to what this new way of life might be. They are thus trapped in a world of not knowing. On the one hand, members of society are hopeful that this is an end to an old way of life and time for new beginnings. On the other hand, they are fearful as to where it will all end up. This raises extreme anxieties and fears for survival. Members of society are left feeling overwhelmed and fearful that either route might result in annihilation.

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