



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they 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': 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. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following 4 interrelated themes:

1. [On being a citizen: to know or not to know?](#)
2. [Our corrupted culture](#)
3. [Fascism](#)
4. [Navigating through not knowing: the taxi-driver inside me](#)

1. On being a citizen: to know or not to know?

The first theme that emerged from the Listening Post was the duty of a citizen to be informed about what is going on and at the same time the difficulty for citizens to manage the information presented by the media. Citizens seemed to be experiencing a painful and scary external reality, while at the same time a harsh, overwhelming and confusing bombardment of inconsistent, often exaggerated information, serving conflicting interests and intruding into people's homes, taking over their personal lives.

One member described her struggle to keep up with the news. Whereas on one hand she avoided getting organised to get her TV to work; On the other hand she quoted the words of a child in the nursery she works in, whose family does not have a TV; "mum, there exists TV". She explained that she watched the news in the streets, where she saw prostitutes early in the morning on their way to work, the new homeless people, who are decent, well dressed and reading their newspaper in their "street homes", distribution of food...

Yet another member responded with his experience of talking with a taxi driver who told him that when the media were on strike everybody was out. Because there was no TV, people were in the streets and living their life. TV presents a common problem. When you escape from it, you are left with the substance of your personal problem, life. When people were not listening to the Mnemonium news, they were more cheerful, going out.

Too much preoccupation with the 'news' can be confusing and people do not turn the heating on, because others do not. Another member added that there is a collective trauma, the crisis...the impact appears on the financial. Everybody cuts, because others cut – even if they don't need to. This overwhelming information, combined with a confused social identity, creates panic, confusion and disorientation; an attitude of 'wherever the wind blows', or one of immediate "I know what needs to happen" action. An example was the leadership and followership of the Golden Dawn, the fascist political party, which is now the third biggest.

Therefore, on one hand the group embraced the importance for the citizen to be active and to know what is happening, but on the other there were important concerns as to what becoming informed does to us. The discussion oscillated between TV being a healthy way to protect oneself or a destructive way in which people turned a blind eye.

Public news ordinarily enters one's private life. Now, however our private life is the news: media intrudes with a national problem; the hidden was happening in public. So, as the news was out there, the role of the media was lost and had become a cruel intrusion. People seemed to be attacked from outside the boundaries of their home, but also from inside by a thoughtless TV. There was a loss of home; of a safe place. People were struggling to re-establish a sense of a safe, personal space.

2. *Our corrupted culture*

Another important theme that seemed to concern the group was the level of corruption and greed at different levels of the society; politicians, the super rich, the taxation system itself and eventually the citizen. The result was a state that had to rely for taxes on those who could or did not want to evade paying them. In a period of increased taxation and cuts those who abided by the law were the losers. This created instability and mistrust towards the state, even amongst people with some financial security.

The example of money laundry through charity as a strategy for the super rich to pay fewer taxes gradually rendered opportunism as the main motive behind caring for the 'common good'. This generated confusion: the strategy of loans also involved eventually those who got them. Although in a capitalist system it is people like the Lehman brothers who appear to keep the economy going, perhaps at a huge cost to their personal life and happiness, there seems to be something unethical in their attitude. In the case of the Lehman brothers, they tried to trick their partners, so as for the responsibility to be shared.

Lack of awareness rendered citizens collusive to efforts perverting the common good. For instance a secretary of a hospital who is a member's friend told them that a politician had taken his child to the hospital, for an appointment that cost 65 Euros. One doctor said to the politician that he did not need to pay and so they did not and left the building. Both the politician who should have reacted differently as an example for that secretary, themselves struggling to pay taxes, but also the doctor, revealed a well-learned culture of confusion that embraced perversion of the common good. One stole a lot, a little – it did not matter. It could be tolerated as long as one had their family, children.

One may complain about corruption, said a member, but how is one going to get their job done? What do I do with the tax when I pay for something, what is the seller doing with the tax, and what is the state doing with the tax? "No one knows". In this 'no one knows' context of uncontained rivalry "Our belongings are threatened" and citizens are not enabled to take up responsibility.

A member remembered listening as a child to an adults' discussion where the state had done this or that. She had asked her mother: "Who is State, mum?" Her mother had answered to her "it is us".

Perhaps there was an indirect acknowledgment of corruption being very much related to this unresolved confusion that belonged to childhood. The belongings that were threatened were reminiscent of children's rivalry over toys, where there does not seem to be an adult able to reassure and to facilitate growth. A child in us, who never understood why 'State' behaved the way 'he' did and who grew up and gradually adopted 'State's' odd behaviour.

3. *Fascism*

Golden Dawn being, with some consistence, the third largest party in Greece at the moment was seen as a strain by all members of the group. What was seen with concern was the very worrying aspect that Golden Dawn was increasingly taking over the role of the police. What the police could not resolve, Golden Dawn 'could'. Police officers aligned to Golden Dawn fascist ideology were even passing contact details to citizens who contacted Golden Dawn for help. Informally, Golden

Dawn became part of the formal system; the new Greek mafia. Another member added that police officers used their role to expand the political party they themselves were part of.

The group became increasingly more interested in the purpose it served; that being for people to vote for Golden Dawn. A vote for Golden Dawn was seen as a way of rectifying Greece's humiliation. Golden Dawn was passing those feelings of humiliation onto immigrants and it was now they who were the humiliated ones and not the Greeks. Another aspect was that Golden Dawn expressed a desire of the Greek people for someone to pull the politicians from the ear and to tell them off, at a period where the opposition was not playing this role, especially under the pressures related to the Eurozone and the requirements for political stability; several people in power got away with arbitrariness and the very few scandals, which were revealed, came to light mainly to placate people's rage. Golden Dawn served the fantasy that someone would make the politicians hear that they had done something really wrong. Another member stressed that Golden Dawn voters were the vulnerable, i.e. old people, who had been feeling excluded and pushed out of the agenda of what is or not important for future negotiations. Golden Dawn would respond providing pseudo-solidarity; they would get organised and enter one's house under the call to sort out the rivalry between the Greek and the Georgian wives of two brothers breaking down everything.

Golden Dawn was doing 'good marketing'. As a member highlighted, they spoke as if they referred to 5 year olds: "we nationalise everything, all for the people, come and eat". Their way also seemed to refer to 5 year olds; "the tough dad who comes and clears up". This idea was embraced by the group and another member said that Golden Dawn voters were people who needed to feel that they were with the powerful.

In a period of intense anxiety, uncertainty and unbearable feelings of not knowing what was going on and what Greece's future would be like, omnipotent leadership, which 'knew' how to sort out the crisis, had spoken to the heart of many citizens, who under the enormous Greek pressures were unable to think of the impact their choice could have on their country's democratic system. Democracy was, anyway, absent.

4. Navigating through not knowing: the taxi driver inside me

The last theme we focused on as a group was the idea of belonging. Members expressed their dilemmas. Not wanting to be blamed, but struggling to take up responsibility, to be with the winners or to be with the losers? To leave the country or to find a place where they felt they belonged? To be responsible by getting involved in politics or to withdraw? The person or the group?

An impasse seemed to be experienced: We were the same people. How could we possibly change the model simply by changing teams? Syriza had raised many hopes in people. But who joined Syriza really? People who were previously voting for Pasok! We were carrying the same positives and the same negatives from one party to the other. But it was still us. How could we deal with the changes without holding on to what we knew? Believing selectively to what made this transition more comfortable was seen as almost inevitable. At the same time how could we be happy when others were not?

While thinking about this transition the image of taxi-drivers became of great value. Highly skilled, qualified young people, doctors, economists, engineers with masters had faced unemployment many years ago and had become taxi-drivers. Although in the past this image had been the expression of the failure of our system, members of the group seemed to identify with those taxi-drivers in a different way in this particular context. They were carrying the experience of what many young people were now dreading. They were driving in the streets, witnessing and surviving the increasing violence, they were the wise ones, the 'psychologists' as one member said.

While some people try to align themselves with the powerful, others with the excluded or the politically active, there were a number of people trying to navigate themselves through this chaotic situation in Greece.

The group gradually focused on important dilemmas in a different way. A member suggested that perhaps we needed to think of "as well as"; to think about the personal as well as the collective; to

do what we can. To look after one's personal interest without hurting others. We were the same as before, but we were also different between us. Some people were more prone to adopting the attitude of the activist, while others might need time. One might be somewhere in the middle; just a facilitator. There were many different voices and it was important to try and listen to them all. It was important for one to understand where they were, before taking a position. Another member agreed, adding that by doing simple things, such as paying attention to the way one parks their car, the way one talks to their child or tries to individuate we could take up responsibility. We are not the thoughtful, considerate people, while others are doing the nasty things.

The first part of the Listening Post ended with a member sharing a school experience that she had as a child. While in primary school she had a very strict teacher. He had never beaten her, but there was terror around. She changed school. She admitted that she had been feeling the same way in the context of the Greek crisis. Although she was not particularly affected, what was going on around her affected her. This time she felt she would not change country; she would change attitude.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 and 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may have been predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at the 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. The resulting analysis has been shaped into 3 interrelated hypotheses.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: The group was interested in the corrupt Greek culture and in particular in the phenomenon of citizens openly not abiding by the law. One member of our society reminded us of the occasion when the law restricting smoking was introduced. Although citizens had paid the money used for the campaign preparing the ground for the new law through taxation, when the law came to force the majority of people resisted and never really abided by it. We tried to understand what was behind this refusal to follow our leaders and the law. There was something about voting them to lead and then humiliating them by not acknowledging them as leaders. At some point a member wondered whether we loved Greece and another added the question of whether Greece loves us. This is reminiscent of the avoidant-disorganised attachment towards the authority figure, which precipitates abuse. The child behaving like that then is hard to receive care by any other caregiver, who therefore fails to provide for that child what they possibly were prepared to offer. This is then experienced by the child as confirmation of the assumption that the parental figure is unreliable and unloving. The Greek people were similarly behaving in a way that made them hard to care for. A member of our society suggested that throughout Greece's modern history there has been constant abuse, starting with the Ottoman Greece for 300 years, then poverty, immigration, the World wars, the civil war, dictatorship. There seemed to be a trauma that kept repeating between citizens and those in authority. Leaders abusing their authority and citizens abusing the system; a cycle that was bound to be repeated with the way the current crisis had also been experienced.

Hypothesis: Because of the repeated cycle of abuse between leadership and citizens, throughout the recent history of Greece, a relationship of mistrust between the two parts appears to be very well established. A placatory and clientele relationship had been keeping at bay the rage of citizens, who appear to be difficult to manage. In this context citizens have been experiencing the financial crisis as a further abuse by the government, while the government had tried to placate them, revealing its guilt and fear. As a result, this cycle keeps on being perpetuated and citizens maintain the idea that they deserve to take what they are not given.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: The group tried to understand the experience of there not being much space in one person's life for what was happening; too many voices for ears that were not listening. Who will offer their ears? Where to go to? How to move forward? The 'leave me alone' attitude was expressing this overwhelming experience from making contact, processing information, trying to understand, liaising with others. This attitude could be seen as denial of reality. At the same time, when information felt chaotic, the anxieties reaching the point of survival, the resources for hope almost extinct and the solidarity available appearing more as pseudo-solidarity, how could one find where they stood? How was thinking possible and where could people take their doubts, their beliefs, anything authentic in them? Citizens were protesting and being ignored and this increased a sense of exclusion that had pushed vulnerable citizens to mobilise through various groups; the church, the left, the anarchists, the Golden Dawn. "Our belongings are threatened" said a member, which was striking. It was our belongings that we could not let go of and survive the great social, economic, ethical Greek and global crisis.

Hypothesis: Because of the massive and constant changes that are happening in Greece at the moment, people come into contact with that side of themselves that does not understand, feels confused, helpless and hopeless. They chose *not wanting to listen* (to the news) and not to know, while at the same time they feel not listened to and not clearly informed. This makes them project their side that does know the side of them that does not listen onto the government, which knows but withholds, has a hidden plan, which is not for the people's interest and also to the omnipotent parties, which promise a quick fix of this very complicated problem. At the same time people project the contradictory 'to listen and to not listen' onto the image of a government not listening and Golden Dawn pulling the government's ear to force them to listen. As a result, citizens lose the opportunity to use their capacity and strengths, the resources and knowledge, which are available in order to find their way, in order to drive their taxi safely to the other side, at the end of this transition.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: Members of our society acknowledged the need we had to belong, especially during this period of time, where anxiety was felt to be unprecedented. People needed to find other people who were like them and test their reality against them and also to find meaning. When everything appeared to have fallen apart and broken down, citizens' need for a safe place, where conflict would be absent if possible, was a matter of survival. It will be interesting to see whether this period will turn out to be the Golden one for Couples and marriages in Greece. Having more than the rest of the people was unbearable, having less was unbearable too. Being the same would serve to regulate if not to eliminate envy, guilt and conflict; Just like the member of our society who spoke about the necessity of changing school, when living in a state of terror and under the pressure of having something more than some other children who were mistreated by the teacher. In this terrifying crisis, each was looking for a "bag" to get in, as a member of our society described it in a very lively way. Whichever bag one chose, however, sooner or later differences would start to become apparent. This meant that one would have to move from bag to bag, looking for that safe place. The remarkable mobilisation of fascists expressed this need to restore sameness. What was very different about them though was that they were not changing bag, but they were getting rid of the difference wherever they encountered it in a very concrete way; even by murdering immigrants. The discussion embraced the idea that we needed to change mentality rather than school, or bag. What comes after the bottom?

Hypothesis: Because of the intense anxiety citizens were experiencing in the context of the current crisis there was a need for an idealised safe place, where citizens would have an absolute sense of belonging and where they hoped they would be able to quickly find a way of life through the adverse conditions; a psychic retreat from persecutory guilt, where mourning of an old way of life could be avoided. Failure to find that place led to frustration for those in the paranoid-schizoid position, or to disappointment, for those in the depressive position. As the anxiety remained extremely high, the frustrated ones were a lot more numerous and they would either keep moving from bag to bag, or, in the case of the fascists, would try to get rid of differences. A good illustration of this state of mind, nonetheless psychotic, was the fascists' one about homogenising Greece, by creating a split between Greeks and non-Greeks (and killing the non-Greeks). The general trend of intolerance of difference resulted in the undermining of creativity,

which is the aspect of ourselves that is most required for positive change to take place and for the discovery of a new way of life.

Convener: Dimitris Vonofakos