

"Portugal and the World at the Dawn of 2008"



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

a) The Portuguese citizens are being overburdened with duties and strains, and on the other hand are being depleted of their individual rights; this state of things has a great affective impact leading to a reduction of the quality time spent with relatives (spouses, children, friends) and a reduction of amusement and leisure.

There is a growing difficulty in balancing personal and professional life; at the same time that people tend to work more and more (e.g. leaving their jobs late in the night), there are more restrictions such as rigid smoking bans; there is a growth of rigid regulations that are characteristic of northern Europe societies and in that sense are felt as slightly alien to a Mediterranean-Latin southern European culture like the Portuguese one.

b) People feel alienated from civic and social responsibility and alienated from the participation in law making. We do not now who are the individuals that write the laws and who writes the parliament acts. People tend to feel the law as something out of touch with reality and the day-to-day problems and issues of common people (e.g. the labour laws, the child protection laws)

c) There is a growing tension between the feeling of social injustice and the pressures towards civilization and law-abiding behaviours. At the same time there is the feeling that the formal powers and the ruling strata of society are not promoting social justice. This lack of social justice awakens basic emotional feelings and attitudes such as making justice by our 'own hands'.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis and Hypothesis of Theme 1

There is a failure of the symbolic aspect of laws and regulations. The laws and regulations are less and less verbally intelligible as a narrative with meaning, and more and more focused on concrete behaviours. This fact makes it more difficult for the laws and regulations to be introjected/assimilated by the individual's internal world, and this leads to a feeling of alienation and to the concreteness and the rigid aspects of laws and regulations. Therefore laws and regulations are felt as something impinged from the outside, and almost suffocating the individual choices.

Analysis and Hypothesis of Theme 2

There is a phenomenon of the individual responsibilities and choices being taken away from the citizens and being delegated to a faceless external power, which in turns provokes the feeling of alienation. What used to be the accepted notions of civic-polite-correct-righteous was taken away from the personal consciousness/ determination; it was confiscated from the individual and now belongs to a European power, the European Parliament. This is, according to a participant, a kind of “moral outsourcing” and a form of “identity alienation”. This happens, in part, because people need not being responsible and feel relieved when they are irresponsible; responsibility is projected to the formal powers and the bureaucratic regulations.

Analysis and hypothesis of Theme 3

We are more and more focused on small and mediocre things (such as the garbage in our street or the TV programs, or the hearsay about love affairs of public figures), because we cannot influence the bigger picture of society. Is this a rational answer? Is this the 'normal' ways of power alienating the individuals? Or is this a new kind of contemporary violence and abuse being done on the citizens by the power of the state?

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