

**"Chile and the World
at the Dawn of 2011"
Report of a Listening Post
held in January**



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, 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 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. The interrelated hypotheses followed.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

*Natural disasters, human catastrophes
and lack of confidence on institutions*

Analysis: L.P. participants evoke the traumatic events that affected Chile during 2010: The earthquake and tsunami with its sequels of death and destruction; the 33 miners trapped alive in the depths of the Earth for over three months; and the tragic fire in a prison in Santiago where 81 prisoners burned to death. Their remembrances testify the sadness and desolation caused by the loss of lives, material losses, territorial losses, and for the discouraging implications these disasters entail for Chilean society. The participants communicate a deep lack of trust in the institutions that regulate and sustain life in society, in the face of the ineffectiveness and inefficiency shown by them during these traumatic events.

When the earthquake and tsunami occurred, institutions exhibited lack of co-ordination and delay in saving lives and providing basic aid to the populations that were victim of the tragedy. The fact that 33 miners were trapped underground denounces a labour institution that tolerates extremely dangerous jobs that expose workers to accidents, diseases and risk to their lives. All of this, within the framework of an economic institution based on conservative neo-liberal roots, favouring and protecting economic results over social considerations. The case of the 81 prisoners that burned to death is

the result of judicial institutions that suppress crime essentially through punitive policies, of prison overcrowding and the demonization of offenders. In these three disasters there is a symbolical convergence of the distrust felt by society with respect to institutions, especially in the sphere of public services, believing they are not able to respond effectively to the material, social and emotional needs of citizens, particularly in high-risk situations. These circumstances bring out in people the feeling of being abandoned, the lack of support, of security, and the imperative need for each person to fend for him/herself in order to overcome the vital challenges of daily life. This reverts to an individualistic stance that frightens because of the loneliness and the lack of social trust. There is a yearning for trust by Chilean society under the prism of idealizing a permanent benefit that, once attained, will make it possible to hope for a better, more reliable and competent society.

Hypothesis: Remembrance of the natural and human disasters occurred in Chile during 2010 opens up a wealth of anxieties associated with death, loss, pain and immeasurable trauma. The protests and complaints of their distrust of institutions are defences protecting them against the unacceptable fact that human life is fragile, vulnerable, and that death, the end of existence, is unpredictable, surprising, and sometimes, takes on a collective tragedy dimensions.

The earthquake, tsunami, miners trapped underground, and prisoners burned to death, are events that destroy every illusion and fantasy about institutional strength, about the existence of a social order that looks after, protects and gives a lasting meaning to individual and social life. The occurrence of these disasters forces citizens to face death and the ephemeral nature of their control over life. Their complaints about distrusting the institutions allow a space for individuals to host the illusion of institutional improvements that will remove far away the risk of death, especially in such a catastrophic way as it recently happened in Chile.

Moreover, claiming to mistrust institutions denies the basic condition that all citizens are active members of those institutions, and thus are responsible for the deficiencies in their way of functioning. This attitude encourages the citizens' responsibility for institutional improvement. However, individuals avoid taking charge of institutional deficits, transferring the responsibility to anonymous authorities, and taking cover behind the position of victims. When an appeal is made for the establishment of social trust to fight institutional distrust, the proposal aims at the efforts that the authorities should make to effectively establish confidence. Upon achieving the creation of confidence in the society, individuals are only left with the ritual of its implementation. Thereby, trust would improve institutions and they would be more and better prepared to address the challenges of society. This simplistic way to understand trust ignores the fact that it is a fragile good, that it requires thought, permanent containment and reiterative efforts to rebuild it and thus maintain it.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Solidarity and massive mourning

Analysis: In close association with the previous issue, L.P. participants set forth the solidarity responses implemented by Chilean society, in particular, to approach the earthquake and tsunami disaster. The participants present a chauvinistic image characterizing Chileans as a generously supportive society that is always prepared to go in aid of fellow citizens suffering misfortune, by providing comfort, money, material goods and labour. Solidarity is attributed as a distinctive Chilean characteristic as

compared with what happens in other countries of the world, especially in the United States of America, where citizens have an individualistic, cold and indifferent stance in the face of the difficulties experienced by others.

The L.P. reflects how in the case of the earthquake and tsunami, as well as in the rescue of the miners, society's solidarity was articulated in television mega-events convening audiences of thousands, who were wrapped up by emotional speeches mobilising them to empathize with the victims of tragedies and make donations –in cash or kind – which finally led to attain millionaire goals that aroused widespread complacency. L.P. participants criticize the television shows that orchestrate collective solidarity in the face of disasters, because behind them there are powerful entrepreneurs who make lucrative businesses based on these tragedies. They also remark that massive solidarity orchestration through television has a strong element of perversion, in that there is an enhancement of the shows exhibited, which casts a shadow over the intention of meditation and grief that certainly encouraged solidarity initiatives originally. The L.P. identifies other forms of solidarity: personal or group meditation, more lasting and less public that with respect and dignity evidence genuine and generous compassion for the victims of the tragedy and their suffering. Particularly in young people, there is a remarkable capacity for giving, without reservation, to the compatriots in need. Religiosity is also indicated as a spiritual wealth to comfort those who suffer and to transmit the strengths of transcendence and faith.

Hypothesis: The earthquake and tsunami, in particular, implied a catastrophic change for Chile, leaving losses of hundreds of human lives, property, territories and ideals. Underlying those losses there is a grief that calls to mourning, which subsequently will allow having memories, remembrance and some form of individual and collective reparation. In this context we understand the massive solidarity stance in the realm of Chilean society in the face of the traumatic suffering from the earthquake, tsunami and, to a lesser extent, in the case of the miners.

It is our understanding that the political and economic leadership in the country, from a manic stance, decides to carry out massive solidarity crusades through television, as a symbol of the national collective mourning, to remember the loss of so many anonymous individuals. The mounting of an appeal for massive solidarity in television has many elements of simulated grief. There is an ambivalence in the way it plays with melancholy through images and testimonies that enable the audience to learn about the tragedy, but this is intertwined with the participation of public figures from politics, sport and entertainment, all of whom contribute amenities to the staging. In the end, the solidarity crusade becomes a great contest enabling a millionaire collection in aid of the victims; subsequently there is a generalized complacency that brings about the feeling that the mourning has been completed. There have been '24 hours of generous solidarity', an 'express' mourning' has taken place, and this allows, without apparent guilt, a prompt return to normality, especially if the individual is fortunate enough not to have suffered any damages by the catastrophes. Mourning, however, also takes place in other ways: more private, intimate and solemn; people allow themselves to feel the sadness and grief that lasts for days, weeks and months. Individuals and groups enter into, remain in, and transit through depression, in mourning for the losses experienced by society.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

*Vicissitudes of being members of society
and the resource of technology*

Analysis: The L.P. also provides a space for participants to report on the difficulties encountered in becoming members of the Chilean society, to feel the integration into a community that will effectively welcome and respect individual and group diversity.

There are two particularly outstanding difficulties: In the first place there is an image that current society is predominantly disciplinary and forces individuals to conform to a certain human profile: an individual that is able to meet high demands, in various areas of life, and not give up in the face of challenges, however difficult they may be. This social discipline results suffocating for people because of the enormous psychological and social costs it entails, as well as because it seems almost impossible to escape the compulsory discipline. How to address the multiple requirements without being consumed by an overwhelming stress is a distressing dilemma. The second difficulty consists in the tremendous fear felt with respect to 'the other or the others', in relationships with individuals and groups. In social encounters, being 'different' is seen as having a destructive potential that paralyzes the approach to the other, and when it takes place, it is full of suspicion, mistrust and mutual hostilities. In the face of this endemic fear, people and groups are inclined to resort to withdrawal, thus avoiding direct and intimate encounters with their inevitable conflicts and frustrations.

Under this disciplinary and fearsome mantle, individuals believe that the progress achieved in wireless communication technology offer protected opportunities to feel incorporated into society. Facebook and Twitter are effective instruments to establish links and virtual networks of contacts and friends. The achievement of virtual links is very much desired, because it is proof of being known, of popularity, of being appreciated and of affection. Television is also perceived as having a significant role in people's incorporation to Chilean society. Citizens, in their capacity as viewers of television programs, especially of news and shows, get a sense of belonging to the society. It is a virtual belonging that effectively protects them from the risks of participating in relationships with 'the others'. On the other hand, L.P. participants also remarked that in Chilean society there are opportunities to participate in groups and social networks where rewarding human encounters occur, as they have the ability to tolerate and constructively face the differences with the others.

Hypothesis: The vicissitudes that individuals experience in their membership and participation in Chilean society are based on persecution anxieties projected, in a manner suitable to the individual, to any other individual or groups whose difference is perceived as hostile and menacing for his/her own identity. A crushing disciplinary rigour is projected on society as a whole, from which apparently there is no escape, whereas, in fact, this is a device used by individuals to defend themselves from acknowledging that such rigour is within themselves and that they can autonomously discern what to do with expectations, how to determine their importance, and perform according to reason. Similarly 'the others', when their differences are intolerable, are used as scapegoats to whom attribute prejudices and stereotypes, responsibility for problems and conflicts, thereby justifying their own intolerance, exclusion and punishment.

Manichaeian thought, being common exchange currency between people, establishes mistrust and widespread fear; social relations are then fractured, become ephemeral and inconsequential. Community life should be avoided because it is dangerous for one's own survival. Thus, technology that provides virtual links is a protective resource that prevents the risks of having direct and intimate human encounters which cause frustrations. Instant communication technology enables the illusion of being part of Chilean society without suffering the frustrations and discomfort that inevitably occur when living in a community. For purposes of such communal life to happen and for it to

be of some quality, it is essential that in the social fabric there is a capacity to contain those differences, and thus articulates a political leadership that will allow effective integration. That political leadership clearly needs to curb narcissism in society and so allow an opening for humility able to sustain human interdependence relationships that may ensure well-being.

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