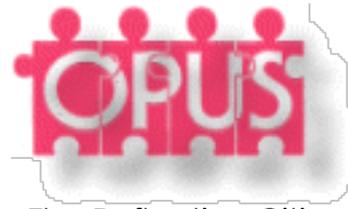


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

France and the World at the Dawn of 2015 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 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 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 interrelated themes:

1. Violence

The participants first point out the barbaric and deadly violence. Violence is first and foremost the link to life, to death. The fact that this violence be so close, and not thousands of kilometres away like other recent events, causes us to become aware of it with particular acuity. This confrontation to what is essential provokes varied reactions from the desire to live for some, to death as an escape for others.

This violence is expressed in different ways: economic violence, social violence, violence linked to religion. The world is going through a crisis. More and more people are homeless. For some women on the panel, this applies equally to the violence against women and more specifically, the young girls who were kidnapped, sold, raped and married off.

Some participants feel that the violence brings to light their own past experiences: childhood in a war ridden zone, the deportation of a close family member during the Second World War....

Islam is mentioned, without any link to the violence perpetrated, as well as other religions such as Christianity and Buddhism.

2. Unity, Community

There is a certain unity within the group seeing that every member brought up the terrorist attacks and the marches, each in their own manner.

The fact of participating in the Sunday, January 11th march, with nearly 4 million people in the streets of numerous French cities, corresponds to a need to feel this pulsating link between humans. We are together united, determined pacifists, striving for human dignity.

This could be understood as a reaction to the inner violence such as described before.

The crowd is united. Above and beyond the mix of ages, the array of ethnic groups, a strong sense of cohesion is expressed through the slogan, "I am Charlie", which can be seen on the banners, on people's clothing, even painted on the skin. Each individual experienced this in his/her own manner, going towards the same goal with very few exceptions.

The only negative aspect of the march was seeing world leaders forming a human chain in Paris while activities in their own countries do not correspond to the message of freedom and peace put across.

3. Information

The news was broadcast through different media during the terrorist attacks, mainly through the different T.V. channels and radio stations. There are masses of information. Much of the news was not sorted. Most of the participants experienced an insatiable need to keep up with the news. Many were glued to their sets for several days watching the same newscast over and over again.

The newscasts often target very emotional reactions to the events, instantaneous, without any historical references to the past, which is now forgotten.

Another level of analysis was the manner in which the terrorists used the newscasts in a strategic way. The horror is shown using sophisticated technologies, and where the barbaric nature of it all, is in the limelight.

4. Positive aspects

We witnessed the impact of the recent tragic events in people's testimonies. To the extent that it is difficult to speak about the positive aspects of the past year. Nonetheless, amongst the last participants to express themselves, several evoked experiences that they had had prior to the recent attacks, not wanting to simply obliterate it under the

impact of the events.

The fact that one's mental force holds up when facing troubled times was underlined. One tries to bear up well to actively face the adversity of the situation.

Le poids des attentats dans les situations évoquées, on l'a vu, est énorme. Néanmoins certaines des dernières personnes qui se sont exprimées ont tenu à faire état de cet avant attentats et à ne pas accepter de gommer celui-ci sous la pression des événements.

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 resulting analysis has been distilled into the following two interrelated hypotheses:

1. Violence, traumatism and collective reactions

1.1. Analysis

Violence and Traumatism

The central theme is the bafflement when faced to the events, and the fact that people stay in this state in spite of the passing time. People are glued to their screens, watching the same images again and again. Time is suspended in the present due to the repetition of the newscasts. The symptoms of a real trauma spread across the population. When seen through this angle, the "I am Charlie" slogan is the expression of solidarity with those who died. It also expresses the guilt of those who remain alive.

On the other hand, one has trouble labeling the events. For some, we are at war, and the massacres are like those linked to war. Others refute the expression "war". We are therefore not at war, but resisting. The fact that this violence stems from inside France, seeing that the perpetrators were French, makes it even more destabilizing and hard to bear.

Unity and Collective Spirit

The fact that the members of the panel belong to diverse religious and ethnic groups prompts them to speak about their personal varied ties. Their differences incite them to speak up. In each of the panel members, the reactions to the events in this "mixed" French society revives his/her own self-referencing and internal struggles. Likewise, the violence witnessed causes our weaknesses to surface, such as past experiences linked to war, conflicts or violence towards women.

News

The way the news is broadcast especially on television, takes on a traumatic form such as the repeated televised acts of terrorism or the intervention of the special intervention forces. This corresponds to a repeated onslaught of traumatism in the way the news was put across. Were the journalists themselves under the spell of the pervasive trauma?

In this first phase of reactions to the events, there is a certain lack of comprehension as to what is at stake. One also needs to step back and take into account the socio-historical context.

The events shocked us by the brutal reality of the violence. But the impact of the shock was linked to the symbolic nature of the attacks. This attack was not like former attacks against the general population, such as the ones in Paris on the Boulevard Saint Michel or the Rue de Rennes, but attacks against "target", cartoonists, policemen, and Jews.

The violence is linked to a lack of personal ability to contain his or her own impulses.

When watching the repeated broadcasts and debates, we not only wanted new information, but also new explanations to clarify the situation.

This brings up the theory of the psychoanalyst, Michel de M'Uzan on the "repetition of the identical" in which everything is strictly repeated, leading to a deathlike wish, and the "repetition of the same" where subjects try to deviate from a fixed repetitive course to find outcomes to the deathlike situation.

The situation is tense between the media and the networks. The media often say that the Sunday marches in France were in the name of security, a way to refuse terrorism. While the members of the panel claimed that it was above and beyond all, to affirm such values as liberty, democracy and secularism.

1.2. Hypothesis

The events traumatized society. People were emotional. They were unable to think things through. Thoughts were repetitive and confused. However this behaviour explains an attempt to overcome the situation. The feelings of violence that come up are due to witnessing the pure brutality but also bring to the surface each person's own past experiences and personal multicultural identity.

2. Reality and Symbolism

2.1 Analysis

The huge force expressed about the events is, as we said, prompted by the need to affirm certain values, in particular that of freedom. People express the will is to refuse to be constrained to standard thought. French identity encompasses these values. French thought could be represented by Voltaire who said, "I do not agree with what you say, but I am ready to die, for you to be able to express it." In other words: feelings of unity are built on shared values, not on links to religions or communities. Freedom and democracy are particularly highlighted. People are proud to be French, sharing the same values. When deeply analysing the situation, the symbolic dimension lies at the centre of the problematic. The fact that the first victims were cartoonists (freedom of speech) is of utmost importance. But we can't be led to believe that the French are absolutely unanimous. Some young people are outcasts. We can wonder why we abandoned them. Questions are raised concerning being on the inside or outside of society. Others query the problem of being recognized, one's identity. Behind this somber portrait after all, some continue to focus on living more than anything else. It's also the spirit of Charlie, looking towards life.

2.2 Hypothesis

In this period of deep changes in societies around the world, each of us needs to find a collective set of references that will hold up over time. Collective values that allow social, religious and ethnic differences are crucial. Life The sense of life is not governed by religious and economic considerations, but through harmony between personal and collective values.

Convener: Maryse Dubouloy and Patrick Obertelli.