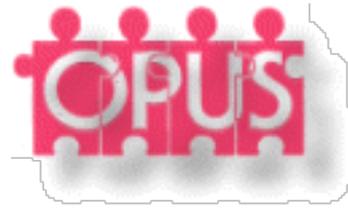


## AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

United Kingdom 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 four interrelated themes:

#### **(a) Terrorism in France**

I was surprised by the silence, I thought people would be full of last week's events. There are big implications it seems like a watershed. After 9/11 this one is also horrific and my mind goes to young men, to try to understand their minds. I have difficulty in thinking about it. I worry about the idealisation of the Charlie Hebdo message. Yes, it's difficult to approach this event with any moral certainty. Have I got any principles? What would I die for? Children believe in free speech, I still believe in religion – there is some chance we were led down a road. At school people talked a lot about making choices. Reflection on our own murderous thoughts, the OPUS project is all about encouraging the reflective citizen. Where do you draw the line? The holocaust was ghastly yet these things are still happening somewhere in the world. We remain in denial of similarity by the separate countries from others. Its strange, but when I was at the LP last time, it took place at the same time as the tragedy in Norway. It seems that now something dreadful coincides with this event. It's surprising that these massive crowds gather together when these things are happening.; large numbers, having a need to reassure themselves. Thinking about what you said, there is a wish to understand why; people wish to understand. I am curious of how last time coincided with an event that pre-occupied everyone for two months. Thinking about the young people who were

victims of that event . Wondering about the impact on young people. If they hadn't ignored the young it might not have happened. Understanding war, ideas of war, geographical sites are now redundant, it's global, and there is no single geographical base. Thinking about how we are in denial about, although these events are horrific, we are not outraged, it's as if its 'the way things are'; its everyday life experience. We avoid difficult stuff. There is no sharing of experiences. I feel overwhelmed, out of control, thinking about it, but not in touch with what's happening beneath the surface 'out there'. How aggression is channelled. Who are the baddies? The French magazine shouldn't have done it. I have sympathy for 2 boys, orphans from a colonial past. Brutality to migrants, a war is going on beneath the surface. Who are we at war with this week?

### **(b) Generational issues**

Thinking of roles, I have a role in the NHS given me by my employers. I am thinking about young people how they feel alienated, there's a lot of discomfort, young adults; young men mature in these surroundings. When working with young men there is a struggle with adolescence. Both young men were in care earlier in their lives, perhaps this says everything!. My son is 15 and goes to school in South London, He, like other young people, is economical with words. We got into conversation at the weekend. We talked about Charlie Hebdo, He asked who says what? They shouldn't offend other people's religion. This is provocation. Another thing pre-occupying me is are we really a bastion of free speech? I don't know about France. I don't want to get into something that might escalate. Young people are feeling scared; school staff find that they are now a lot more independent, as they mature they need a lot of help. Thinking about families being totally powerless, it seems you have to rely on government. .. Sitting now thinking about this, my mind goes to difficult aspects of thinking how we are brought up, integration, moving to a different country, joining a culture, young people jumping from one place to another. I want to bring all things together. I have a sense of fragmentation - society at all sorts of levels. I've got lost in it. My God children are 17 & 19 their responses shocked me. They talked about their family and their on line family, all over the world. This seems to go on all the time. Old think in the old way, young think a different way. They don't think like others, not the same as we and our parents. This was in their experiences underneath the social reality, they are not as definable as we think they are. There is much miscommunication between generations. Charlie Hebdo is a pre-occupation of young and old. Children and young people have been referred to many times. I experience an emotional overload, they're bringing up children as emotional orphans.

### **(c) Reflections on Complexity.**

Complexity and a need to understand at a deeper level. Learning

starts with self. Things over there are belonging to us. There are now no boundaries, and there is habitual anger. The speed and pace of decision making causes difficulty, driving out space for reflection. I have very clear roles in my life, godmother; school grandma; committees; always engaged in roles. Two days ago I was thinking of coming home; filled with disempowerment; couldn't think of voting, not heard anything of substance. The underlying terror was frightening. I became aware that I have roles that I don't know about. One of my roles is as a grandfather. I pick up my grandchild in the afternoon. Before he was potty trained we had to arrange it that he did a pee before leaving school. Today, he fell asleep and I had to wake him up. He was suddenly very disturbed, regressed, he had wet his pants. Being young he was not able to tell me. I was putting the kettle on and he looked disturbed, I had no change of clothes. He had no words to tell me what had happened, he just looked at me. He should have told me. There is a part where we can't find words for what's happening. I asked him to tell me what was wrong and he became flooded with embarrassment. Maybe we all would feel the same if we broke down in tears. I read about the NHS Emergency Call system, where one of the questions they have to ask is 'are you conscious?'. When queried as being silly, I was told 'it's on the list' so it gets asked whether its silly or not. I don't feel we are conscious enough to know what's going on, I read about non-violent terrorism that is going on all the time and is among us now. Someone was talking to me using adjectives, metaphors, to describe what's going on in their heads; what these emotions are about. I didn't get it. Until I thought of unpacked metaphors, then; Oh I get it!! understood but he didn't. One of the videos was of a young mother – seemed almost a natural thing, a natural progression, he couldn't recognise this. If only we could use words, one of the disturbing things is the use of words, symbolisation that provokes attack. Research done on air crashes showed that communication between pilots and air traffic controllers who were overloaded resulted in misunderstandings. .

#### **(d) Culture and Identity.**

I find myself thinking of the book 'Outlier' about legacy, what we bring to our cultures. I was an immigrant child of refugees. It was not possible to understand who you were; where you were from. If you don't feel comfortable with the culture of a country its difficult. I'm going to vote in Greece; I'm going to make a statement. But what's the point? It seems there is no point. I'm encouraged to hear you talk about this. Getting back to Greece, I was thinking what everyone goes on about. I think it's the most important thing tonight, because of one serious issue, another gets blocked out. Facing up to what's happening in Greece and in Europe is very important. Most people are not interested in what's happening in Greece; but its very exciting and may get Europe out of its stuckness. I am soon going to Greece with my son. My wife says, 'oh dear its dangerous'; but I feel differently, I see the

circumstances as freshness: representative democracy. People have lost faith in representative democracy. People are looking for another way. I've never felt so lonely now I'm in my 80's one of the things contributing to this, having worked as a psychotherapist I was often in teams. Now it seems other people are not where I am. I'm sure what I've retained, what I've learned, can be adapted to the troubles of different countries in the world or Europe so that we understand, as opposed to all the time attacking. Its important we understand these things in Europe. What do we pay attention to? How can we stay focused on; and what are we deliberately not conscious of. Boundaries are not containing; things are spilling out; family structures are failing. Things are chaotic, there is fragmentation. There is a distinct culture. There's a flattening out of things. This is an affect of Globalisation, it's displacement, everything is a side issue from something else.

### **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. Globalisation: The Effects of Economic Colonisation.**

**Analysis:** The chickens are coming home to roost. Globalisation has brought countries together from all over the world, the history that's taken place between us has now to be paid for. We were so distant but now things are closer to home and we have to pay. Because of Globalisation, and the global division of labour, the experience of colonised histories – French, British, Russian etc., is now coming home to roost. Hence globalisation is now pulling us apart rather than bringing us together. Conflict and terror is a manifestation of Globalisation. I had this feeling when I came in; I can't avoid this can't avert my eyes, it's in your feelings. You need to have the courage to look. But this is too difficult to look at. Like the universe the global world is still expanding. There were Christian definitions of Muslims as infidels. And based on difference, Muslims are now going to Syria to fight. Young people are attracted to Syria, and claiming the same historical Western justification for killing. However brutal, it came out of a sense of feeling right. The history, is one of colonial or colonising, it only doesn't make sense to us, if we deny that this occurred. Now we are talking about a form of economic colonisation. Over the centuries we have talked of a 'just war', For example. The

crusades went to the Middle East and slaughtered thousands of Muslims. There is considerable hypocrisy on the part of Western nations: For example; France, speaks of democracy as being founded on Fidelity, Equality Egalitarianism but does this refer to immigrants as well? There has been a long history of exploiting people in the name of western principles. Nation states are seen as impossible for people who don't experience the same principles or the same treatment. There is considerable confusion between what is said and what applies. The two most defective ones, France and America, become national targets.

We have had a Pope For 1,500 years, during which he has been labelled as a father figure, but we've never had a good father. There is something aggressive about nationalism. The French police and military wanted to kill them (terrorists), they also killed four hostages. The avoidance of us enables things to continue unchanged. 9/11 was labelled as a war on terror there has been no reflection, there is still racist action against Muslims. It seems we can keep going to war. A history of contradiction: Globalisation brings us together but we are fragmented.

**Hypothesis 1:** Because of the economic colonisation programme pursued by the West as part of the Globalisation process, national boundaries have been largely destroyed bringing peoples and cultures closer and closer together. Whilst still seemingly separate countries, many are now largely controlled by the West as they continually search for cheap labour to meet manufacturing needs. A result is that many nationalities are now sharing common geographical spaces. However, the closeness results in an awareness of the disparity of wealth, resulting in reflection on past colonisation and conflict; which is now renewed.

## **2. Globalisation: The Effects of Historical Colonisation.**

**Analysis:** We are under pressure to adjust to that. Not together but to inter penetrate – so many different cultures living in same country. We are like headless chicken, we need to be reassured for missing being next to someone who cannot talk much. Lots of people caring and giving. Something stopping us talking about it trying to adopt a way of talking about it. Freedom of movement results in rubbing shoulders with people from different cultures, Technology expands recruitment of different peoples. The West is a culture trying to stay the same way. A clear and declared way, Islamic needs are not part of that culture..

There is no identity: we struggle with identity. Young people brought up here are having to adapt to our culture. It must be a problem being attached to a country that hurts you. Very often outsiders are not feeling welcome; there is a struggle to find a safe place. You know who you are, where you are, and what you have to do. Complexity ties us

to conform. Denial, not able to see straight. Global issues, that we are all caught up in. It is difficult to maintain a sense of being the same – identity. Freedom of speech yes, but also a duty to care. Most people didn't know what to think. It's so alien when it comes to thinking; they just go with the majority. It seems to be a totally unreflective society. There is anger and panic about what we do to each other; we don't listen to each other. There is no meeting around communication generally. How do we understand; especially young people. There is massive complexity, only one big topic in a way – one leverage for our agenda. Yet we are bombarded by so many disasters. I feel lucky to get two words in. I am feeling 'loneliness' and 'austerity' If we are experiencing life as austere, it means we don't have enough. This results in taking what's yours, all people coming in. Initially very frightening. I have thought about it: the increasing divide in this country and how difficult it is to talk about it. I find there is displacement in meeting eyes. Averting eyes to inhumanity of our inhumanity, our values culture. There is difficulty in being human. We seem to be struggling with an all-encompassing hypothesis. We are talking about feelings of love and hate. We need to be self-reflective. Tolerance means putting up with things. There is hatred in it. Tolerance means you disagree with it. Tolerance bring down boundaries of Europe. We were happier apart; to live together you have to be tolerant but deny your sense of identity. How do we really feel? There is an issue around complexity about values. It's unbearable but we could all live together. We need to adapt every day, make decisions, the situation is wrongly politicised. The young have no experience of difference. There is a need to view all as one. After the Australian siege it resulted in people joining Muslims 'I'll ride with you'. Sitting and being alone. No one to reflect with. It's painful. Difficult to stay there, much easier to project. Really angry and cumulative you don't have time for niceties, anger one thing, hatred another, become murderer.

**Hypothesis 2:** Because of the need and desire to provide for cheap labour in the service industry within Western countries, the Globalisation process introduced a policy of freedom of movement of people. This has resulted in large numbers of economic migrants settling in Western countries. Many of these immigrants were from countries that were subject of past colonisation this results in peoples of differing cultures living together in Western countries in what might be described as a form of hierarchical relationship between colonisers and colonised. They both live together in what is considered to be a democratic society that emphasises the importance of a commitment to equality. However, this is not the experience of the colonised and this results in conflict which is often based on past colonial experiences.

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