



Argentina and the World at the dawn of 2020

Listening Post Report (Buenos Aires, 10/02/2020)

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Part I: The sharing of preoccupations and experiences

A note of group composition and dynamics:

To begin with, some notes on LP group composition and dynamics during the session. The group was made up of four members and the convener. The LP in Buenos Aires is proving particularly difficult to organise and convene, which is one of the reasons why the previous LP convener in Argentina eventually stepped back from this task and the LP activity altogether. This particularly LP was eventually convened with sustained and persistent effort over a period of several weeks and it was one of the smallest groups in the long experience of the convener. From the laborious recruitment experience there is a sense that Argentines do not prioritise reflective activities of this kind due to the current economic climate, long working hours and the time of the year when most people depart from the city to go on holidays. The lack of interest in this type of voluntary, reflective activities in the country is a persistent issue which would warrant a much more in-depth study.

The members of the group came from various walks of life, none of which was Group Relations. They were medical scientists, professionals and academics. They were all Argentines except one who moved to the country from Chile when he was a little boy and the convener who is Greek.

The group was thoughtful and engaged with the tasks in a meaningful way, as to produce rich associative data and meaningful hypotheses.

Preoccupations and Experiences

The main “event” of the year for the group was last year’s elections which changed the government from neoliberal, centre-right one to a populist (Peronist), centre-left one. The group reported their tiredness from the constant changes in Argentine society particularly regarding politics and the ever-fluctuating economy. There was an expressed wish for more social and national stability but also for social unity. The latter theme was associated with a long-running commentary in Argentine society around the word “grieta” which literally means “crack” or

“fissure” or “divide”. This divide refers to the polarisation of society between one view or another, either this is politics (right vs left), economy (neoliberalism vs protectionism) or even football (River vs Boca).

The group talked about their sense of Latin America being “exposed” to external forces that it cannot control such as political or economic shifts in other parts of the world, which come to have a great impact on Argentine society. For example, how a steep drop in the Turkish lira a year ago meant that the Argentine peso followed the same route (*the peso has devaluated greatly in the past couple of years*). The theme was also associated with how Europe sells its rubbish to China.

In connection to the latter, the issue of ecology was considered and the constant contamination of the environment with microplastics. One member of the group reported a recent estimation that it was calculated that “on average, we are eating an entire credit card per month per person” in terms of human consumption of microplastics. The group was shocked with that estimation and expressed a lot of frustration in the lack of initiatives from society for this to change “[as a society] we have all the tools and power to change this but we don’t!!” The issue in Argentina is also very present in its very large agricultural sector which is not so much regulated in terms of pesticide use (“they are poisoning us, they are killing us!”)

The mood in the group shifted into considering ways to cope with the above preoccupation which mainly revolved around the purchase of local, organic food and vegetable from small unionised farmers. The access to such produce is a recent development in Argentina that is catching on very fast.

Another recent development is the fast growth of the feminist movement in Argentina which made itself visible only in the last six or so years. The group reflected on how important it is for Argentine society to consider the feminist perspective not only in terms of social attitudes (machismo), professional opportunities and medical access (abortion is still illegal in Argentina), but also in terms of “raising our kids not to be machistas”. But the group also recognised that society is still cautious of fully embracing the feminist movement which is viewed by the ‘old guard’ as oppressive and uncomfortable (hence the derogatory term, “femi-Nazis” which is waived against feminist groups).

Finally the group reflected on the recent influx of immigrants from Venezuela into Argentina, which are estimated to be around the two million mark. There were comments about similarities between Latin American nations (“we put this bullshit in our heads that we are so different from one another?”) but also comments around the identity of the Argentine society – a society of immigrants which “disappeared” the native populations more than any other Latin American nation.

Part II: main themes

- 1. Inclusion vs. Exclusion:** society is characterised by rampant economic and social inequality and very few instances of social mobility by the most vulnerable sectors. Historically, this

was considered an inherent characteristic in this part of the world, which people accepted as a given with little initiative for change. But, the latest economic crisis in Argentina has re-awakened the will to address 'divide' in society between the most privileged and the most vulnerable (as a member put it, "people have to let go of their exorbitant privileges for social justice to become reality"). The recent change in government and the sudden rise of the feminist movement have given second wind to these social attitudes.

2. **Political and social change:** Argentine society is a highly politicised society, which has given rise to various political ideologies, doctrines and movements. Most of these movements claim to address 'social injustice' but little has been done to affect long-lasting change. As the country traverses yet another period of economic instability with a steep rise in unemployment and poverty, there seems to be an awakening to the lack of social justice and a growing social conscience of groups which were historically exploited (such as, women and immigrants).
3. **Feeling exposed:** the lack of social and economic safety net has given rise to anxiety over the, often unseen, forces, which can come to have a detrimental effect on the Argentine way of life. The group often wished for more "stability" and the end of continuous economic difficulties. Nevertheless, there is certain ambivalence in that wish as Argentines often pride themselves in their 'unique' ability to successfully transverse the frequent economic crises.

Part III: Analysis and Hypothesis formation

In lieu of forming concrete hypotheses regarding the emerging themes, the group pursued several lines of thought in trying to explain the dynamics in question.

- The group suggested that a recent rise in 'social justice' movements has been linked with violent changes in the last four years of neoliberal governance. Argentina is a country that has long suffered from the types of economic policies and it now seems that people are gradually becoming aware of their own power to affect change. This is evident with the resurgence of the feminist movement but the real challenge is poverty. Will society decide to give up some of its 'exorbitant' privileges to address long running social injustice or will it return to the previous status quo?
- The long-standing social 'divide' in society should not be addressed by a search for 'unity', rather society should aim to 'include' different rather than pushing difference under the carpet with dreams of unity and homogeneity.