

**"Chile and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 11th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

1. Fast and deep changes and identity

Chilean society is suffering a process of transformation that has deeply affected its institutions and people's quality of life. People feel uncertainty and instability as a result of changes that influence different areas of daily life such as, job relationships, organizations, family and personal relations, and so forth. People feel insecure to face daily challenges. Personal relationships are unstable and fragile, which makes difficult to understand what is happening around, and to know how to behave in a confusing and contradictory reality. Taking part in this sort of society is very stressful for people since they are continuously attempting to find ways to adapt themselves to such demanding culture of permanent changes. This produces heavy feelings of despair and hopelessness. In order to bear this malaise some participants keep a critic stance against the "system", however they take part in it, and follow its rules; others go after an individualistic way of life trying to minimize the risks of dependency; others (perhaps the smallest group) are more autonomous and independent from the system, by facing it through the implementation of collective actions. Yearning for an idealized society and for a benefactor state, that in the past provided order, protection and security, is implicit in this kind of thoughts.

Hypothesis

Changes in Chilean society have broken with dependency culture that dominated for a long time life of institutions, and relations with the state, organizations, Catholic Church and family. The weakening of dependency relationships leads people to feel anxiety as a result of losing cultural referents that traditionally nourished their identities and provided "good and bad objects" to deal with personal and collective psychic processes. Changes of post-dependency culture are disconcerting for individuals, and they protect themselves against anxiety by idealizing the past. They project upon institutions and groups responsibility for difficulties and conflicts that affect them. Changes provoke schizoid paranoid mental states that hinder facing changes in a realistic and mature form.

2. Diversity, discrimination and disintegration

Other characteristic of Chilean society is its heterogeneous conditions and how social, economical, political, cultural and genre differences are used to cause discrimination, abuse and violence, obstructing collective integration and cohesion. Such diversity

considers very rigid and low permeability boundaries. The differences in society are manifested in several dimensions, the economic ones show sharp contrasts between the styles of life of richest and poorest people. Geographical boundaries limit strongly the areas where people live, exclusive quarters are for the wealthy, other districts are for middle class people and the urban periphery is where the poorest live. Listening Post participants observe that social life in local communities has deteriorated through the years, people feel a loss of attachment to an extended social network and for taking care and responsibility for that membership. Particularly the lost is strongly felt among people from wealthiest neighbourhood. There are acute ethnic differences in life conditions and opportunities between native minority and people with European background. Differences are also present at work in organizations, entrepreneurs and managers concentrate power and they are able to exercise strong domination and control over workers without much restriction. Workers are forced to participate under very precarious employment conditions, insecure employment, intensification of work and poor protection in health and social security. On the other hand Listening Post participants pay attention to differences associated with genre and its consequences of discrimination for women. At work women face barriers to occupy authority positions, they earn less money than men and they have to cope with different kind of conflicts proper of a patriarchal society. Also women in their private life, relations with couple and family, received strong social control and pressures to behave according to traditional expectations, submissive to men and taking full responsibility for family tasks and children caring. Violence in Chilean family and couples are understood as consequences of the conflicts that men and women live regarding their different conceptions of roles and behaviors. At the end Chilean society is seen fragmented, the strong differences make difficult the social integration and to have feelings of attachment and cohesion. Individuals feel isolation, they don't know how to make progresses to achieve a society more human, open, respectful and with common bindings.

Hypothesis

The changes occurred in society have brought the end of the dependence culture in Chile, institutions, organizations and groups have left to fulfill protective functions against anxiety in people lives. The institutional meaning of life, with order, coherence, security, integration evaporate, authority, as symbolic meaning, in charge of the management and well being of society lost sense, now individuals are forced to face their lives in their own hands with full responsibility. Post dependence culture make individuals more aware of differences and diversity, contradictions and fragmentation in society. Individuals experience strong anxieties because they envisage that in order to sort out fragmentation, to gain integration, they need to be more protagonist, proactive in social life, taking initiatives and using creativity. Making progress in that direction demands people have the capacity to integrate their psychic worlds, and then take actions to change external reality in society. The perception of Chilean society as fragmented and disintegrated protects people against the anxiety of being responsible for the society and its quality of life it offers to citizens. The projection of guilt regarding the frustrations individuals feel in society is also a form to ameliorate the anxieties associated with living in world plenty of complexities, contradictions and paradoxes.

3. Unsatisfactory and suffocating conditions of work reality

Listening Post's members describe a negative perspective towards the requests of present work conditions, which demand to fulfill adequately a multiplicity of roles. This situation brings about unsatisfactory life experiences and feelings of being oppressed by external forces that demand an efficient performance in all of life spheres. These heavy work and social requests impinge on the individual's functioning beyond work reality, thus affecting family and close relationships. Consequently, work plays a suffocating role in people's life, by forcing them to "sell themselves" in order to achieve high levels of efficiency. Reality is portrayed as demanding, changeable, and uncertain. In this context, individualism and the search for the satisfaction of personal needs, both emotional and material, emerge as ways to face this threatening reality. Parallel to the latter (and perhaps as a reactive effect) private social spheres are described as protective spaces where it is possible to properly satisfy people's needs. For some members, the root of the problem lies in the destruction of the social network. Responsibility for that destruction is attributed to the implementation of an economic model that is not concerned with people's problems, but rather operates following unfair rules that only reward those to have access to power and money. This means a static social dynamic where only money matters. In opposition to the work order, ruled by a materialistic logic that strips people of what is fundamental, the domain of social actions is described as the place where important and real needs can be satisfied. The difficulties of finding spaces to satisfy these social needs create feelings of powerlessness and discomfort that weaken people and alienate them from basic means to live in a more integrated form.

Hypothesis

It is very difficult for people to come into contact with their own experience as a whole. Consequently, they tend to project and externalize upon the work sphere those demands that they are continuously feeling. The reaction against a reality that not satisfy people's dependency needs, and which also actively fosters competition between them, is the fragmentation of the experience. These conditions prevent people from appropriating their particular way of being in the world. In this context, the image of an "unsatisfied animal" portrayed a chronic malaise of the existence that limits the gratifying elements that work can produce (access to consumption goods, to power, to knowledge, etc.). Some members depicted the experience of a deficient and incomplete whole by saying that the group lacked, for instance, the presence of a "work-man", who would have made it more diverse and complete. By recognizing the homogeneity of its members (mainly young professionals, most of them psychologists), the group contrasts some of their ideals with their present reality. From that process members feel a state of basic fault that cannot be overcome with their own resources. The image of complete representation and wide diversity implies high levels of demand for the group, which polarized itself as a result. These demands of wholeness and diversity illustrate some member's desire for including others within a social network that enables responsible development of the whole society. In this situation, a controversy around a modern highway that crosses the city from the richest to the poorest neighborhoods represents group's difficulties to integrate different aspects of the experience at an individual and a group level. Individualism and competence emerge as means to face a fragile and weak social network. Nevertheless, through those means the group comes into contact with guilt, since members know that many people cannot get access to basic levels of satisfaction (they cannot use the modern highway, and therefore, they can only see it from distance). In short, work reality is characterized by individuals as truculent and

aggressive, leaving them stripped from their aspirations of a complete and full experience. By that means they project out negative aspects of the experience, thus leaving the individual as a passive receptor of a heavy load that cannot withstand, and which can only face through polarization and alienation.

4. Presidential election and genre

The participants of the Listening Post manifested interest and concerns with the very close presidential election that occurred the 15th of January. The election considered the participation of two candidates, one man that represented the political and economical right, and a woman that identified an alliance of center and left political parties. It was an ideological dispute between a traditional stance, close to the conservative Catholic Church, historically associated with the past Pinochet dictatorship, and a posture that meant a continuity of the present government. It was the first time in the history of Chile that a woman candidate had the first option to become Head of State. This fact, joined with the high probability the woman could be president, were understood as expression of the changes and transformations in Chilean society. Moreover, the participants believed to have a woman as president would mean a big cultural change in the country because they expected she could exercise a new sort of leadership and government, inspired in his feminine condition. The women and some men attending to the Listening Post were particularly enthusiast, the woman as president would govern with a new style, based on affects, consideration, participation and dialogue. They had the illusion a new society could be built, more human, equal, fair and with solidarity. Some men were skeptical to those changes and they undervalued the importance of the presidential election in its implications for the improvement of the society.

On the other side attendants to the Listening Post paid attention to feminine and masculine roles in association with the election. It was said women are exposed to high social demands having to fulfill multiple roles, as landladies, mothers and effective providers for satisfying the needs of family. Many times the demands are coming from external sources but frequently the demands are also coming from the internal world of women. It is recognized the machismo now is more elaborated, the demands of men on women are subtle and buried. This issue is reflected in the political campaign. The man candidate is an entrepreneur very rich and success, he used a discourse that spoke of potency, productivity and knowledge to make things work and real. On the contrary the woman candidate had a discourse based on holding, trust and emphasis on building relationships among people and community. The two candidates had very different central ideas at their political discourses. The masculine candidate used the phrase: "We want more and we can" while the feminine candidate said: "I am with you". This polarity reveals two dialectics form of understanding the relationships between the masculine and the feminine. They are two versions of management of social relationships and solving problems in Chilean society.

Hypothesis

The female candidate is the focus of idealizations by the group of participants attending to the Listening Post. Her feminine condition arouse desires to have a president that gives maternity to society, protect and take care of people, making reparations to the hard and disciplinary forms men have or have had to exercise leadership and government in contemporary societies. The individuals are under the illusion the woman candidate will make possible warm and appreciative attachments, with love, generous

breasts, capable to feed multitudes who are eager of containment, to be received, nurtured by a maternal figure. Idealizations and illusions are mechanisms that serve to have feelings of temporal enjoyment and repression of the fact, that independent who may be the president of Chile, everybody will have to face with work and personal responsibility the normal vicissitudes of everyday life in a very competitive society.

The group of participants deals with the feminine and the masculine as polar categories. Both categories are lived as separated, antagonistic dimensions of being and the same is reflected in the public electoral competition. The masculine characteristics of the male candidate, representative of the right, were assumed to be transferred to his followers in a magic way, his wealthy, entrepreneurship and effective capacity to solve problems. On the other hand, the idealization of the woman candidate makes in her followers the illusion that Chilean society will have a big transformation just as result of having a female president. Both proposals imply very polar and idealized visions, it makes difficult to integrate experiences under the lens of polarity and to consolidate with consistency and realism the resources already available in individuals and groups. The own capacities and resources of the feminine and masculine conditions are lived in an antagonistic form, denying the potentialities of combination, what gives place to stigmatization and undervalued of the other, feminine or masculine. The eventual arrival to the presidency by the woman may mean not only the formation of a new paradigm in the relationships between men and women but also may cause profound and dialectical confrontations between the feminine and the masculine parts inside the internal psychic world of persons independent of which sex they have.

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