

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Israel and the World at the Dawn of 2016 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 are invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part is concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that relates to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants. Participants are invited to share their preoccupations and experiences as citizens of Australia, and to explore these from their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities.

Background

We are happy to summarize this year's Israel Listening Post. There were 15 participants and we thought it would be more intimate and "together" to work in one group. Half of the participants were Ofek members and the other half of the members, general public which contributed to the character of the discussion and its diversity. And yet, as a participant pointed out, most participants shared a rather homogenous background.

The primary task

To provide a „snapshot“ of Israel (through Israeli society) at the dawn of 2016 by expressing associations and formulating hypotheses regarding the current situation of Israeli society.

Opening discussion: thoughts, feelings, associations

This part was generally pessimistic in the associations and material that was brought up by participants. Participants shared grave worries and desperation in relation to the current situation in Israel. It's as if a catastrophe is at our door step. There is a sense of silencing and fear especially on the left side of the political arena. Society is engaged in a violent dialogue with very little tolerance towards one another. One of the dilemmas is the way I can personally take action or avoid taking any action. Some of the participants described their personal doing such as working as a teacher in an Israeli Arabic school, working with

“youth at risk” or arranging a meeting with “Breaking the silence” an Israeli group that collects soldiers’ evidence for IDF wrong doing, despite massive opposition. There was also a discussion of who we want to save: us personally? Israel? The world? Should we leave Israel and emigrate or stay? Efforts were mentioned to keep one’s private circle of wellbeing as separated as possible from the public scene. Looking for evidence under the “light post” and the Babel Post (Tower) were mentioned.

Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim is to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

The main themes discussed were:

Silencing, Intimidation, Exclusion – There is a sense of fear and distress in all parts of Israeli society. Also a growing phenomenon of exclusion of certain parts of society (depending on their political agenda). Citizens that speak up their view may be silenced violently by opponents. Participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable to talk here about joint Israeli Jewish-Arab constructive projects.

Another expression of silencing is the refusal to bear/hold complexity – with its consequences for ones’ own identity, polarization, tribal separation, and passivity.

A conflict of identity and belonging – relates directly to the above. Citizens ask themselves: Is this a place I want to live in? Some decide to stay, some leave (Canada was mentioned in a few instances as a destination). Are we on a downward road back to the Jewish identity before World War II?

Polarization - The current situation in Israel involves a high level of violence in the dialogue taking place between left and right. The Left tags the Right as non-democratic, anti-peace, fascist; the Right tags the Left as traitors, anti-Jewish/Israel. The scene is loaded with violent expressions and from time to time – actions.

The Babel Tower – Where people talk but no communication is possible. Society is therefore fragmented almost as if it were a collection of tribes.

Activism – Passivism - Nano-activism? One asks what I can do to cope with the situation that the Israeli society is currently experiencing. One option is to sit in the living room and complain. Another option is to actively engage in something that supports my ideological agenda. A third option is to engage in personal, limited, projects that may have

an effect, Nano-activism with Nano-effect.

Part 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members are working with the information resulting from Parts 1 and 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 are 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.

Israel being mostly a post-traumatic society (the Holocaust, the expulsion or forced migration of eastern Jews from their countries of origin, the expulsion or forced migration of original Palestinian inhabitants) relationships and relatedness among its parts (tribes?) carry the weight of traumata and wars.

A dangerous equilibrium seems to be prevailing in society; the tensions and conflicts serve all sides and create a standstill that all sides may covertly benefit from: The Right "holds" nationalism, Judaism, extremism; the Left "holds" liberalism, democracy, peacemaking. The clash between the two continues while both seem to attach themselves to a sort of unholy equilibrium.

This equilibrium builds on systemic symmetric relationships between poles that keep a dialectical balance between anxiety and violence which is passive and destructive at the same time.

In the prevailing unholy equilibrium, action is almost impossible, non-action is fueled by fear, exclusion and silencing while action is substituted by activity in the social internet networks; dialogue substituted by screaming and contact by violent behaviors that hurt.

The only functional way that remains is through the mobilization of defense mechanisms, as for example, nano-activism that helps preserve the split between private wellbeing and public distress; keeps complexity away, and translates the impossibility of understanding (Babel) into the preservation of no-change.

Convenor: Silvia Silberman