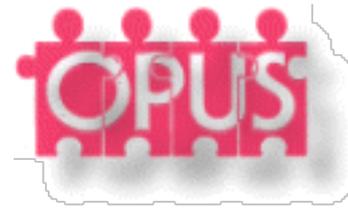


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

South Africa (2) 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.

The LP was planned to be held on the campus of the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria. Because of student riots (all over the country and at UNISA) the university was closed for a week because of the potential danger to staff, and property. Listening Post participants were informed the evening before that the event was moved to a nearby coffee shop. On the time boundary 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. The events in the news over the last few weeks and days in the country made for an immediate and intense sharing of frustration, anger and fear. Fifteen minutes into the event three participants travelling from Johannesburg arrived being held up by a traffic accident on the highway. The convenor stopped the conversation and repeated the invitation. Afterwards, the conversation continued with the same nervous energy as before.

Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

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.

Theme 1: Shifting and violation of boundaries

This theme contained many references to various boundaries in the country shifting, changing, being tampered with or being violated. The discussion started with one participant saying that citizenship equals responsibility, but that we do not see much of that at present in the country. Anger and frustration were expressed on the boundary between responsible citizens and irresponsible students who put the lives of others in danger and who cause millions of Rand in damages. Participants used the here-and-now space boundary of the Listening Post as an example – it was shifted from a quiet university room where one can think and reflect, to an open public space being shared with other citizens. Frustration was expressed about the LP participants who could not arrive before or on the LP time boundary. The above created a sense of not being in control of one's boundary management. The cause of the student riots was mentioned as a boundary violation. Strong anger was expressed about the students' #fees.must.fall slogan against universities and the government – especially about how the Minister of Higher Education and the President promised free education without consulting with universities or the minister of Finance. More tax money will have to be used for this 'sucking up to the youth in the year of local elections'. It was referred to as irresponsible leadership and poor financial boundary management. Participants then referred to the previous Cape Town students' #rhodes.must.fall slogan and the more recent public #Zuma.must.fall slogan. Participants expressed their amazement at the blatant use of power, entitlement, self-centeredness and lack of insight amongst high government officials. They referred to how the President (in December 2015) unexpectedly removed a respected Minister of Finance without consultation with his Cabinet, appointed someone 'from the backbench in Parliament' whom 'nobody knew' and a few days later removed the new minister and appointed a previous respected Finance Minister in the position. Frustration was expressed at the resulting dramatic fall of the worth of the ZARand and the country's financial rating. Participants described their experience of the boundary with the government as filled with suspicion and distrust. Other matters referred to were the surfacing of racism expressed in social media and the social persecution of suspects. Participants also referred to the current weather conditions - heat waves, drought, floods, poor harvests, and rising costs.

Analysis

The above attack on boundaries creates free-floating anxiety in the country in all spheres - politically, economically and socially. Survival anxiety is experienced in terms of the uncertain and unsafe political scenario where the political authorities seem to be promoting their own power and financial agendas leaving citizens to ensure their own safety and survival. The effect of the extreme weather conditions creates survival anxiety about not having a sustainable economic future to feed the poor, look after the homeless and assist those without jobs. Many citizens cope through physical flight by leaving the country for good, while those who can't afford it because of the state of the currency, escape through fantasy and dissociation. Paranoid anxiety manifests in the vagueness around political agendas, corruption and self-enrichment.

Hypothesis

All boundaries are pushed and seem to be near collapse causing high levels and different kinds of anxiety. History and its symbols are under attack, citizens are scared to be scape-goated as racist. Political leadership is experienced as irresponsible, absent and corrupt. Economic growth is very low, the currency is weakening and the drought is causing price increases and threatens survival amongst poor, homeless and jobless citizens. The youth and students are voicing the country's dissatisfaction on the boundary with the government and the drive to 'make things fall' or disintegrate. It seems that the authority figures are not listening or interested in taking up their roles as elected representatives, but are focussing on enriching themselves.

Theme 2: National identity under attack

Influenced by the mentioned experienced changes in boundaries, the atmosphere in the LP was 'nervous' - participants spoke fast and interrupted one another. They referred to an acute sense in the country of flux, fluidity, 'things flipping', shifting unexpectedly and fast, there are new and major issues almost every day, and that life feels like a bizarre pressure cooker that can explode at any time. One participant remarked that what was ignored for too long is now popping up in various ways. This matter was not explored further - maybe it was too threatening to be looked at. Then participants mentioned that the country went overboard with the idea of human rights - there are too many rights and irresponsibility has become fashionable. There is a serious lack of responsibility and accountability for one's thoughts and actions and value systems are challenged. Participants expressed being overwhelmed, helpless and shocked at what they see and hear in the daily news. Examples were given of irresponsibility in big

corporates, other organisations, government and in families. It was mentioned that the younger (including children) are challenging and manipulating the authority figures and parents and that the older ones seem helpless. Evidence was given of a young Malema (head of the EFF political party) challenging the president by shouting 'pay back the money' followed by the presidents' socially inappropriate behaviour (laughing at serious matters even in parliament), being accused of fraud and corruption and often disappearing during difficult times. One participant said that 'I feel like a refugee in my own country' and another remarked that 'we are self-imprisoned'.

Analysis

The national identity and its narrative became filled with fraud, corruption and irresponsibility. Citizens are ashamed of their leaders and they believe the rest of the world is laughing at us. Living inside is not funny but scary. There is a longing for Mandela as the now 'lost Messiah'. It was mentioned that Mandela represented the fantasy while Zuma's task could be to break the fantasy of the rainbow nation, bring the reality of struggle and inequality to the fore.

Hypothesis

The national identity is under attack. Citizens feel isolated, lost, volatile and pressured to the point of explosion. There is a yearning for rationality, togetherness as when we won the world cups and when Mandela acted as protector – or was that just a fantasy? We yearn for a new protector (or Messiah) in the face of a growing threat of disconnect, misunderstanding, racism and value difference. In families authority is lacking - fearful, angry and absent parents project power onto children who on the one hand seem confused and lost, and on the other hand, also empowered by their superior technological capabilities, seem to take on authority themselves by rebelling against their educators who threaten to withhold education.

Theme 3: Connectivity symbols imploding

Participants reflected on what is happening on the macro level, what that represents to them and how they are influenced by these. They expressed anger and intolerance towards government and how ineffectively it takes up its role in various matters related to connectivity. Service delivery is poor and often corrupt (in education, water affairs, electricity supply, the post office), while the government interferes politically in other organisations (the national airline, broadcasting) which leads to corrupt relationships and finances. References were made to social media and the powerful effect it has in the country's daily living.

Analysis

Communication between government and citizens seems to be on an all time low. As a possible reaction to this, social media are stepping in as a powerful bottom-up communication vehicle connecting people. But it is also dangerous where people are using these to express their thoughts about others and then easily get accused of racism.

Hypothesis

Connectivity symbols are imploding – e.g. the national airline, post office, electricity and water supply. Technology and social media as the new connectivity has become the national 'spokesperson' replacing the humanity of relationships, and those who cannot keep up with the rapidly advancing new technology become social refugees and fear extinction.

Convener: Frans Cilliers.