



Chile at the dawn of 2018

Report of a Listening Post held in Santiago on 10 January 2018

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

Theme 1: Identities in despair and petrified fear in the collective political memory.

The group expressed the bleakness they experienced vis-à-vis the result of the presidential election (December, 2017), in which the right wing candidate was elected, by an ample majority of votes, to govern the country during the next four years. This despair is partly explained by the fact that people adhering to the political left and center-left ideologies had the expectation, or practically the certainty, that the candidate representing those political currents would be the new President of the Republic, defeating the right-wing candidate and providing ideological continuity to the Government currently in power in Chile. This result occurred subsequent to the first election round, where none of the most voted candidates obtained the absolute majority required to become President, which made it imperative to have a second election round between the two highest majorities. In these circumstances, left and center-left political sectors took for granted that the majority of the citizens would vote for the candidate representative of those political forces, who would defeat the right wing's candidate. The second election round resulted in the majority of voters leaning towards the right wing candidate, who is currently the Republic's President-elect.

With such a harsh election result, the group experienced the loss of realizing that there is a majority of Chileans who feel politically represented by conservative forces, who are interested in their own well-being, in earning money and having

access to consumer goods. Democracy worked flawlessly, making it clear that the ideological redemption of the left has declined in its ability to represent and mobilize significant Chilean sectors.

The desolation of the group vis-à-vis the election results was associated with the experiences of fear referring to the collective political memory of the Coup and Military Dictatorship. The individuals verbalized how the recent election processes triggered memories that brought back situations of ideological indoctrination and extreme violence between conservatives and revolutionaries that put the country on the brink of civil war. Furthermore, there were the traumatizing events during the Military Dictatorship, the State's terrorism with killings, arrests, disappearances and exiles, all of them events that were very complex to integrate into an impartial collective political memory to repair society. Fear of the past was stoked by right wing sectors during the recent political campaign, portending for Chile a future similar to that of current Venezuela, thus encouraged voting for their candidate and discard voting for the pro-government candidate.

The aforementioned bleakness also had consequences in that it corroded the assurances and protections of personal identities. The triumph of the right-wing candidate as President-elect was felt by individuals not supporting the candidate, as a threat that broke, destabilized, the concept of what one is, or believes to be. Uncertainties arose, not only at an individual level, but also with respect to what Chilean society is, and to where the election of the new president will lead. Fear was expressed regarding the fascist precedents of the political right in power, their ability to devise ideological projects with efficient popular penetration to allow a strong political control.

In the group there were only a couple of voices of older men who expressed dissent with the experience of desolation and its effects of fear that predominated in the audience. Those voices not only showed their dissent with the majority of the group, but they also conveyed optimism with the election's result, believing that the President-elect might be a vital boost to renew economic development and the population's well-being.

Theme 2: Shifting of political vigor in youth and idealizations

Associated to the previous topic, the group addressed the challenges posed by the urgent transformations needed by Chilean society, reforming institutions and exercising new political leaderships. A collective force is required, one able to bring new innovative airs to the ancient political institution with its vices and corruptions.

In this respect, the thoughts of a young participant expressed it quite well: "there is a need to lose the fear to organize, to think in groups, to deliberate and decide collectively in order to generate social changes. We no longer think that the individual can save himself, we need a leader that will show changes, because we have the hope that something will happen, but in the end we experience the

disappointment of focusing only in our work and our private worlds". Furthermore, a young woman expressed the merit of Chile's current situation, which "shows a clearer, harsher reality, where the differences and inequalities shout out loud to be recognized, notwithstanding that fear and shame cover ears and mouth with respect to the occurrence of subversive and emancipating actions." It was mentioned that globalization has meant the rising of borders in society with its insertion in the world, but in Chile, however, internal borders have been formed and strengthened that isolate individuals, who form space ghettos in neighborhoods, in regions, to avoid contact with social sectors that may contaminate the well-being of elites, or come into contact with serious problems and violence affecting indigenous people in the South of the country.

On the other hand, the tremendous and unfair economic inequality existing in Chile was denounced. This inequality positions the country, in the Latin American context, as the country with the greatest differences in income distribution, where the great majority of the population has wages close to US 500 and less, with people facing harsh predicaments to cover basic needs, usually requiring to enter the vicious circle of continued indebtedness. Life at work is portrayed as a source of abuse and suffering, working men and women are victims of abuse and ill-treatment. Occasionally, sensitive and empathetic Managers recognize and embrace the discomfort experienced by men and women at work, providing a space for compassionate listening to encourage the implementation of tasks. Considering this aspect, one of the participants to the event who works as a consultant in human resources, questions the sense of providing help to people at work, since it really consists in providing relief to the workers' exhausting emotional symptoms to allow continuity in the people's work functions, without touching the abusive and exploitative tendencies that often occur in the companies.

In this scenario of discomfort in society and at work, the group was encouraged to see that the possibilities of change are glimpsed in the political coalition of "Frente Amplio - FA" (Broad Front), which conglomerates various groups, social movements and small political parties made up by young leaders and participants who come together in an ideology of radical institutional transformations in Chile. The FA is characterized by its critical stance regarding political conventionalism, because of its commitment to the implementation of institutional changes that will actually solve complex discriminations, create solidary fabrics and provide well-being, in particular to the more vulnerable sectors. The FA has become a relevant source in the Chilean political scenario. In fact, in the first round of the presidential election process, it was, surprisingly, the third most voted association, obtaining in the election a considerable number of parliament members and its presidential candidate, a young woman, was quite close to contend access to the presidency with the right-wing candidate.

The existence of the FA encourages to place in it the hopes and expectations of deep changes in Chile, especially because it is made up by young leaders who embody social ideals not held by the traditional parties. This shows that in the

citizens there is an idealized shift in the authority of the young FA leaders to transform society. This shift is a threat in the sense that the FA may become involved in an elitist redemption that would dilute the commitment and participation of the citizenship. The idealization of the political ability of the FA, in its ideological purism and its political actions, may include the risk that the Group may lose the sense of reality required to engage in the complex Chilean political scenario, that it may encapsulate itself in its innovative ideology, without developing the skills to enable strategic negotiations with its political adversaries.

Theme 3: Migration rhetoric and anxieties caused by the diverse otherness

The group thinks about the issue of migration and its consequences for society. Initially, this reflection had a complacent rhetorical tone, highlighting how Chile should formulate and improve public policies to receive with appreciation and dignity the arrival of the significant migration flows that have taken place in recent years. The arrival of immigrants was mentioned as a contribution of human and cultural wealth, because they bring heterogeneity to the social composition of the country, as people and families of different races – blacks, Asians and citizens from various Latin American countries have been welcomed in Chile: Peruvian, Venezuelan, Argentinian, and Colombian. Value was given to the fact that immigrants may contribute to Chile's demographic growth, as its population has tended to grow very slowly. Likewise, the fact that these immigrant groups often consist of professionals is also valued, as they contribute to the enrichment of the labor force, helping to cover the deficit of experts, as in the case of public health. Furthermore, it is appreciated that immigrants bring the multicultural liveliness of musical rhythms, color, flavors and spontaneous joy that may contribute to change the Chilean character, which is somewhat opaque, silent, serious and colorless. It is anticipated that the Chile of today will be very different from the Chile of the future, to the extent that the effects of immigrants consolidate in society's demography and culture.

Gradually, the group leaves the appreciative rhetoric of migration and allows itself to recognize that the otherness of immigrants implies complexities for society and Chileans. It is mentioned that the encounter with foreigners is complex considering observable differences. Thus, sharing the Spanish language facilitates approaching them, even though one recognizes their different accents, which are differentiating and cause a certain distancing. The situation becomes more complex when the immigrants do not speak Spanish, in which case there arises a great gap preventing the occurrence of integration, rapprochement, mutual understanding and coexistence. The racial condition of African American immigrants, especially those coming from Haiti, is distinctively different because until a few years ago, there were very few colored people in the Chilean population. Along with these differences there are other, less apparent, such as beliefs, traditions, values and behaviors that come to light as interactions occur between immigrants and Chileans. In general, this otherness is reflected in reciprocal stereotypes and prejudices, where differences mark identities that often give rise to hateful, disqualifying, aggressive relations that seek to establish the superiority of ones while placing the others in an inferior status. In these

cases, the power available is central to domination, in which Chileans are especially privileged for being natural members of the country that receives foreigners.

The group detailed experiences of how Chileans take the role of punishers of immigrants, whether they are men or women, ill-treating them in daily coexistence, being rude and aggressive, humiliating and disqualifying foreigners. They are accused of having access to work and taking away job opportunities for Chileans, who should have the priority in case of eventual redundancies. Foreigners are abused and exploited in companies, where they receive lower wages than Chileans, due to their status as immigrants, often without employment contracts and thus excluding them from receiving welfare benefits. Chilean men and women aggressively protest against the access to health by immigrants, complaining that health care should be provided preferentially to Chileans and not to foreigners. Occasionally, facts come to light about the humiliating and shameful treatment of Chileans towards foreigners, and in this context, it was mentioned how a young Haitian worker was grossly insulted at his work place, being considered a "leper". The quality of welcome of immigrants is discriminatory: while Europeans and United States' citizens are received with appreciation and respect, those coming from Latin American countries are targets of questioning regarding their value and contribution to Chile. Those originating from Haiti, probably due to their being black, are the most vulnerable to receive the most extreme contempt and ill-treatment.

In general, the treatment given in Chile to immigrants is one of little appreciation of their qualities, it is hostile, unfriendly, lacking in respect and dignity, all of which makes integration and daily coexistence difficult. In everyday life, Chileans tend to impose on immigrants a political dominance that places them as second-class citizens. The foreigners' reaction is submission, searching for identity among their communities, confining themselves in exclusionary and marginal territorial spaces, to thus protect themselves, find and reinforce meanings that will make their projects of finding a new life in Chile sustainable.

Theme 4: Purge of discomfort and denial of pleasure

During the meeting, the participants realized that in the Listening Posts, in their yearly occurrence, as well as on this occasion, the discourse that has dominated is one focused repeatedly on the experiences of discomfort lived by the citizenship. This repetition produced a certain weariness, a hint of bitterness among the individuals, because there is no place to express optimism, joy and pleasure. Attending the Listening Post assumes that participants who already know the event must attend with a psychic format that leans to bring out experiences of conflict, discomfort and suffering. It is said that the format forces the use of a Cartesian thinking to set forth and analyze the regrets that have been experienced during last year.

This finding leads the people attending the meeting to wonder why participants do not bring experiences of satisfaction, joy and pleasure as members of Chilean

society, which have surely taken place to some extent in the individual and collective spheres. Having had professional achievements, positive facts of family life, or the joy that the professional football team has given in international competitions. Likewise, it was stated that all of them, to some extent, enjoy romantic encounters and relationships, friendship, and gourmet meetings with friends, or else, if resources are available, have access to consumer goods, travel abroad, get to know other countries during vacations or through travel opportunities provided by the job, or else experience the pleasure of educational improvement.

It was set forth that an opening up, a freedom for participants to communicate their pleasurable experiences, may enrich the learning of experiences from the perspective of their roles as citizens in this society. It was indicated that not all experiences in society are negative, on the contrary, there are probably many experiences that provide enjoyment and vitality. To exclude joy as part of the experiences, turns the Listening Post into a purging space where, unconsciously, a discourse is imposed in which prevail the dark, sad and painful stories. This validates the question of what is it that inhibits us to show in our conversations the good things that have occurred in our lives in Chilean society during 2017?

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants 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, participants 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.

Analysis and Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1

The bleakness expressed by the group results from an elaboration of the political losses that ravaged a significant "progressive" sector of Chilean society in the face of the failure to obtain the presidency of the Republic in the recent elections. The desolation is also connected with a loss in the sense that the elected President represents the more conservative political forces, which is experienced as a regression of the egalitarian social and economic progress of the country. For the group, in its depressive state, it is difficult to accept that the election result is the consequence of a democratic process following the rules of a political institution. On the contrary, there is a tendency to incur, defensively, in a paranoid demonization through which the new government is attributed ideological intentions that will damage the country's progress. Despair is also connected with a fear that is petrified in Chile's collective political memory, with the traumas associated to the Coup and the Military Dictatorship, a fear that supposedly influenced the outcome of the election because of the risk of a

recurrence of these traumas if the “progressive” candidate reached the Presidency. It is difficult for the group to consider the political reality of the election results, which indicate that a majority of Chileans voted in support of neoliberalism, for the safety, protection, and personal well-being, valuing individualism and consumption. The question of whether the citizens will be able to overcome distress in order to achieve a constructive approach with political reality, renewing and discovering new meanings to repair the traumatic petrification of the collective memory of the Dictatorship, remains in abeyance. This may be an opening to explore new identities, both individual and as a group, to contribute to a collaborative work between the conservative and “progressive” political sectors.

Hypothesis 2

With the despair caused by the election results and the election of a right-wing President, the group comes into contact with the anxieties resulting from not knowing which authority may be reliable to take on the radical institutional changes that the country needs. The answer to a reliable authority are the young political leaders of the “Frente Amplio” in whom the citizens collectively project the capacities and expertise required to implement transformations. This projection of the authority implies a collective defence against the anxieties of taking on individual responsibilities for the changes. The authority attributed to the FA is an idealization of its political competence, and at the same time a lack of knowledge of the limitations that the young leaders have to act strategically in the complex institutional world of Chilean politics. In order for the changes to actually be implemented, it is essential that individuals from every participation sphere, contribute, thoughtfully, collectively and coordinatedly in the new way of “doing things” in society.

Hypothesis 3

The vicissitudes of the relations between Chilean and immigrants refer to how relations between groups with different identities trigger anxieties, because all encounters, unconsciously, are threatening, generating paranoid ideas that lead to belligerence to control dominance. The political power that Chileans predominantly concentrate in their territory favours their projecting disdainful stereotypes and prejudices on immigrants, who, in their vulnerability, tolerate this with submission. Dominance by Chileans facilitates them to project their own unwanted aspects of their identities, on immigrants. Thus, immigrants become the “scapegoats” who internalize those projections, which makes it very difficult for them to think depressingly about the destructive contents communicated to them and be able to react from a constructive, protective perspective. Anonymously, these unconscious dynamics allow Chileans to form a “chauvinist”, arrogant self-image, and a precarious and undeserved narcissism that leaves them very satisfied. In order to advance towards constructive and respectful relations between Chileans and immigrants, it requires both sides to be able to communicate with mental attitudes that depressively accept the

reality of the difference in identities, in order to be able to establish collaborative relations that will bring reciprocal benefits. This change is one of monumental dimensions, as well as very slow, because it is a task that involves all of society. The essential role of advancing in the creation of institutions that provide respect, protection and coexistence between Chileans and immigrants, pertains to the Governments.

Hypothesis 4

The exclusion of conversations that consider the enjoyment and pleasure that participants have had in their roles as citizens, is an unconscious collective decision that happens and has occurred during the execution of successive Listening Posts in Chile. This exclusion of enjoyment and pleasure as a conversation topic is interpreted as the denial of these emotions and the circumstances that have provided them. That in the participants there would be an unconscious denial turned on by the guilt that may be caused by publicly exposing satisfaction experiences in an environment where it is assumed that it is politically correct to address discomforts and despair. Publicly exposing pleasurable experiences implies differentiating the individual from the context of the group, which probably inhibits and frightens showing the fortune of pleasure, which can cause fear of the envious, furious and punishing reactions of the group. Bringing this issue up for group discussion enabled the participants to begin to consider the vein of pleasure in their individual lives and understand how pleasure is an important agent of human development. This reflection also made it possible to understand that the Listening Posts are not necessarily nor exclusively purging spaces; what takes place in them depends exclusively on the personal authority of the participants.

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