



## South Africa at the dawn of 2018 Report of a Listening Post held in Pretoria in January 2018

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### **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.*

The first preoccupation mentioned was about “becoming more and more aware of fragmentation in our society”, a “brokenness” which also manifests as “we had a loss in our family due to suicide”. There is “a lack of wholeness in the South African political situation”. The political tension in the current ruling party was described as “a deep rift, separating those who are ‘in’ from those who are ‘out’”. “A lack of direction” causes a high level of anxiety – “do we know where we are going?”. One participant laughed and said, “if you want to go north, (just) point the car north”. The new ANC leadership was described as “hopeful”, “filled with expectation” and “anticipation”, but also as “the calm before the storm”.

The state of the educational system was described as “of great concern”, especially “the low literacy rate amongst the youth”. “Many are struggling to read and write” which “causes so much uncertainty about the future leadership in South Africa”. In terms of action, the youngest participant said, “we are not going to wait for others to do this, we are going to do it ourselves”. “There is an unwillingness to allow for generational shifts in leadership”.

The “time people spend on social media” and “the strong sense of online entrepreneurship” indicate technological advancements in our society. It is clear that “society uses these to their benefit”. On the other hand “the digital environment has a negative effect” – there is a growing tolerance for the digitization of human interaction which “re-defines connectedness”, especially “amongst the youth”. Citizens fear the emergence of robots as possible “colleagues” or “assistants” in the workplace. This “brings more of what we don’t need”. “Algorithms are not human” - “artificial intelligence seem to be taking over all other kinds of intelligences”. Overall, participants experience these tendencies

as fearful and de-humanising.

Political and economic scandals, allegations of corruption and state capture in both public and private entities surfacing at the moment, cause uncertainty - "the house of stone (the Steinhoff organisation) came tumbling down". Some citizens knew about this for a long time but could not address it because of fear. One participant asked, "how could we have been so blind?". Citizens are disillusionment in leaders and long established and trusted businesses. On this a question was asked, "what do we do with our shame?".

Time, electronic and social media were used as explanation for the above. In the "fast-paced corporate world members do not have enough time for reflection and discussion on what is happening in their environments". "Fast and impersonal e-mail communication has replaced face-to-face connection", "leading to a de-humanised workplace". Moreover, "people use e-mails as excuse - it provides a paper trail on decisions and communication". On the other hand, this also indicates the "paranoid environment" we live in.

Experiences of living in South Africa "23 years into democracy" "is scary". "1994 represented a political earthquake" resulting in positive change and the start of Mandela's "concept of a rainbow nation" - yet looking back, this now seems fake. "We moved from hopefulness to something bastardised". This situation causes vulnerability and fear amongst citizens especially in terms of future employment. In the split some citizens perceived themselves as "out" and others as "in", implying some are more employable than others.

## **PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

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

### **Fast shifts**

The experience of living in South Africa has moved significantly over a short period of time. Citizens are reminded of Mandela's rainbow nation which represented euphoria, integrity, cohesion and hope. This now feels like a distant fantasy. Presently, old and respected institutions such as the presidency, government and some private corporates are fraught with state capture, corruption and poor financial management. As a result, citizens experience instability, panic, despair, fragmentation, lack of direction and hopelessness. Their trust in these important societal institutions have crumbled. Presently, the hope is placed on the new ANC president to clean up the mess and save the country and its integrity and reputation. But this trust is weak as citizens fear repetitions of previous regimes.

### **Failing leadership**

Leadership in especially politics, economy, education and some big private corporations, have failed citizens. The people, the press and the courts reveal the magnitude of state capture, corruption and the reasons for being downgraded to

economic junk status. Even in the face of the emerging truth, leaders (supported by the keepers) continue their wrongdoings, try to cover up corruption and deny responsibility for participating in major crimes. In terms of race, state capture is mainly associated with the Black government whereas the Steinhoff stock exchange debacle is linked to white businessmen. This means that corrupt leaders are not split in terms of race. Therefore Black and White followers are united in their loss of respect for and disappointment, anger and rage towards leaders. One significant response is to rely on self-leadership and self-authorisation in this leaderless society.

### **Fear of being taken over by the digital world**

Citizens are preoccupied by the enormous and fast growth in technology, electronics and social media, and its anticipated negative effect on their quality of private and work life as well as relationships.

### **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.*

### **Id, ego and superego dynamics**

The collective id is acting out a systemic script of narcissistic entitlement, arrogance and greed. The superego represented by the constitution and the courts, is trying to bring order, justice and reparation of the damage. Citizens act as if they represent the ego caught between the forces of good and evil, knowing what their society can be about (the rainbow nation dream) versus not knowing how to deal with the present unknown of state capture and corruption. It seems as if citizens project their own shadow onto the politicians and corporate leaders to avoid becoming aware of their own tendencies towards corruption and unethical behaviour.

### **The naked king**

Citizens struggle to cope with the 'naked truth' about state capture, corruption and unethical behaviour. The leaders stand as the 'naked king' without shame, continuing with power games, denial and the charade of entitlement. This leaves citizens without direction or authorisation to influence the system in any direction. Presently, they just have to bear their frustration, anger and rage.

## **Projection of the shadow**

Citizens' strong negative reaction towards the growing impact of artificial intelligence (as an unstoppable world phenomenon) seems to be a projection of their fear and rage about the overwhelming economic chaos and poor leadership. This serves at least as an outlet and coping mechanism for the present.

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