

## Global Dynamics at the Dawn of 2005

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On or about 12 January 2005, under the guidance and coordination of OPUS, Listening Posts aimed at providing a snapshot of the societal dynamics of each country at the dawn of 2005 were held in fifteen different countries around the world (Australia, Bulgaria, Chile, Finland, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, USA, and Britain – two reports). These were all reported in a similar format (see ‘Britain and the World at the Dawn of 2003’ in *Organisational & Social Dynamics* 3(1): 165–169), researched and analysed by the authors, to produce this Global Report.

The authors self-defined their task as follows. To research and analyse the National Reports with a view to:

- (a) Identifying common themes arising within the thirteen Reports;
- (b) To explore relationships between themes and to reduce these down to major or dominant themes;
- (c) To collate supporting information from the Reports for analysis of these themes; and
- (d) To formulate hypotheses arising there from.

For the sake of brevity this Report will only document the major interrelated themes identified, followed by an analysis and hypotheses regarding each.

### THEME 1. MONUMENTAL SOCIAL CHANGE

For some while now the world has experienced an unprecedented and revolutionary social change that has shown no signs of relenting. Rather, the pace and intensity of change appears to be deepening and intensifying. The nature of the change is so all-encompassing that it

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has been referred to as 'death of a way of life'. Largely inspired and driven by globalization it has left individuals, and those responsible for the management, leadership, and administration of political, economic, and social institutions in a state of bewilderment. They are seemingly unable to make sense of this 'new way of life'. So far-reaching is the change that in many instances individuals and groups simply have no previous knowledge as points of reference, and therefore no language to express their experiences. It is as if they are on a journey without a map or language to guide them. Or, as the Italian Listening Post suggested, 'The metaphor of being on a journey at sea was put forward to describe the experience of having left the security of a well known port and being in the middle of the ocean, not yet at the new destination that, incidentally, we do not know'.

Not surprisingly, current global dynamics are mainly concerned with the anxiety, frustration, anger, rage, and feelings of hopelessness arising from loss and failure to cope with a 'new way of life'. All National Reports strongly identified with the notion that social change was of such intensity that it was experienced as bewilderment. This is a complicated and complex situation however, we have identified four distinct ways that societies respond and react to the anxieties arising from the changes experienced and these are documented below as sub-themes. Although formulated as four distinct sub-themes it should be borne in mind that they share the same basic foundation – they all emanate out of the monumental social change that is occurring across the world.

#### **SUB-THEME (A) HELPLESSNESS AND POWERLESSNESS: WITHDRAWAL FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL**

*Analysis:* Faced with the extreme anxiety arising out of the circumstances described above, members of society throughout the world are left with an inability to make sense of what is going on. It seems clear that globalization is experienced as playing a highly significant part in all national matters, leading to feelings of bewilderment in the face of complexity. In many of the reports, these experiences were associated with a desire to withdraw to family and neighbourhood. Issues such as the war in Iraq and multi-nationals all have an immense impact on national elections and other activities, as does the fear of global warming, AIDS and other natural phenomena. The following is a selection of the way this event is experienced in the various countries:

*Australia:* The theme of impotence and helplessness came up in many ways throughout the discussion of preoccupations but was first named in a discussion about the recent Australian and US elections.

There was some feeling that in a global context the café latte set; of liberal intellectuals was a minority under threat – and that this was where some of the fear came in. There was a sense of ‘irrelevance’ of this group. First in that they were not listened to in the political process, but secondly because they are such a small group in the broader scope of the world’s population. Yet it is this group that is most represented in the listening post process. Impotence and powerlessness was felt in regard to the events in Iraq but also in terms of the economic and environmental issues currently faced in western democracy.

The theme of global versus local was expressed through discussions of (i) how much the elections were affected by global issues (e.g., Iraq) or specifically local issues (interest rates) and (ii) how global issues seemed to swamp our capacity to have an individual effect. It was linked to the theme of powerlessness insofar as many global issues seemed impossible to influence.

*Britain:* The confusion surrounding social rules has left us not knowing what to think, and not knowing how to act. The feelings of rage and helplessness are unbearable and are projected into others.

The tsunami has demonstrated that our elaborate defences, both physical and psychological, can be violently destroyed by uncontrollable natural forces. These extreme circumstances have resulted in a variety of flight mechanisms being mobilized. For example, the wish to escape from the city to the country, and a retreat into introspection and away from action, can be seen as manifestations of flight responses as experienced by members.

There was a general feeling and expression of impotence and a resulting dependency. It was suggested that we abrogate our responsibility in several ways. We seek dependency in God and other religious beliefs. We seek dependency in scientists. For example Einstein was quoted as saying ‘there’s nothing wrong with not knowing’. When dependency fails, when God fails to protect us, we then seek to blame God for not living up to our omnipotent phantasy.

Because our world is experienced in such a negative manner, members of society are left with strong feelings of impotence and this in turn leads to a yearning for dependency in the shape of the good, nurturing and loving mother. The Asian disaster serves as a reminder of that impotency and that dependency and relatedness to a phantasied omnipotent being is frequently an illusion. Members of society are left struggling to make sense of our world but that struggle is of the greatest value.

*Bulgaria:* Some of the participants experience shame from the unclean physical surrounding in the town, coupled with feelings of vulnerability and, at times, helplessness.

Emigration is still a problem. It leads to personal losses, although there is a considerable flow of money back into the country from those working abroad.

The facilitated movement of all creates new sorts of obstacles. The world becomes accessible to be reached and travelled around, but this separates us (from our children, for example). New faces are rushing into our well-known spaces.

Under the conditions of non-integrated past and present, increased mobility and movement provoke the need for not only observing but also for coordination with the Other and for action. The individual is struggling with the challenge to respond to the change with some action. This brings feelings of dependency on some external sources of authority. The mediating ('Ego') functions appear too weak to provide the individual with reality testing reliable enough to allow him/her to be able to choose personal itinerary/career in harmony with the surrounding environment.

*Chile:* Members had difficulties in considering themselves as citizens of Chilean society. These difficulties are linked to the vagueness and ambiguity of people's relation to society and to what happens in the country. In everyday life, they have a fragmented, anonymous, and impersonal connection to society, with the exception of their links with persons and groups that are close to them, such as family, partners, job colleagues, and friends. It is evident to them that relations between groups in society are tinged by the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, through which order and stability are searched for.

The disappearance of the benefactor state, the impotence of unions to protect people, and the mercantilist orientation of managers in organizations, are evidences of a society that harasses and mistreats its children. People feel destitute, consumption and enjoyment are offered like an ephemeral temporary option that helps to compensate for the feelings of destitution, abandonment, and the cruelty of a mother and father who do not take care or protect. Guilt does not allow the liberation of that system of political domination which penetrates with force in people's psyches.

*Finland:* Breaking the illusion of immortality has resulted in a realization that uncertainty of life has become a reality, and has narrowed the gap between birth and death. The question of how to cope with limits and giving things up has come to the forefront. Feelings of obscurity, and a difficulty in grasping what is going on in society.

Fear is caused by things that are beyond our control. Fear of one's own dark side: you do not see things that you feel are too difficult. The understanding of issues and phenomena has formed a protective wall against cynicism, but now it is being tested. Depression and cynicism as methods of coping.

A common characteristic for the natural tsunami and 'tsunamis' caused by human beings is the experience of anxiety when losing control over one's life, of being exposed to an uncontrollable power. This also happens when market forces mix up our plans or when a computer software programme 'crashes'. The amount of anxiety is related to the size of the part of our life that 'crashes' with these 'tsunamis'.

*Germany:* Another point was the question of constructive strategy in the face of the daily flooding. Flooding is a metaphor for the feeling of constriction in everyday life as expressed above. However, it obliges us to take concrete action in contrast to the natural catastrophe. It would be desirable and essential for the readiness to participate in an active process of change to be rekindled as in the 1960s and 1970s.

*Holland:* In the past you felt that 'you were going somewhere': for instance, to a better world both materially and non-materially. Impotence has replaced the sense of being able to make a contribution. The world has become too complex to have a clear view of it for adequate actions. The many opinions of what is going on add to this confusion. One solution seems to be to break off contact with other people.

The economic recession and the government policy to cut down on the social welfare state have increased the fear of losing acquired rights. The inequality in the world and the participation in international collaborations see to it that problems cannot be kept outside the nation's borders (Europe, Iraq, immigrants). The government is accused of not providing sufficient safeguards to make sure that life can be continued the way it is.

The social and economic changes in the world that are experienced to be dramatic and the question about one's personal contribution to this situation do not make it easy for people to observe and understand the world. They search for and distrust new frameworks of interpretation. Seeking out the space where both the positive and the negative sides of society are investigated is like walking along the edge of an abyss. Discussions threaten to increase the distance between one another. People quickly want out of this confusing and sometimes painful situation, yet they lack the means. Learning to deal with 'not knowing the answer' could prove fruitful in the long term.

*Ireland:* The idea of 'the citizen' is new here and there is confusion between citizenship and nationality. We have yet to come to terms with the opportunities to be an active citizen. The government is running behind people, instead of leading. We are more acutely aware of being a citizen of the world and, at the same time, there is a sense of helplessness to take up this role. It feels as if the ways of participating as a citizen are narrow and constrained – or do we ourselves narrow the concept of citizen to the political dimension? We are wondering what is the connection between being an Irish citizen and being an EU citizen and asking 'citizens of where?'

Some of these forces (shaping who we are) are global ones and there is an unease about how aware we are about the long term consequences of accepting – being greedy for – the benefits of these developments without having, or taking, time to consider what might be lost. There is concern about our eager compliance in reshaping ourselves – changing our identity – to suit global corporations. The speed at which these developments have happened and at which they change makes them even more difficult to grasp.

There is a fear of being swamped, overwhelmed. . . . This includes the fear that we are clashing with the environment and that the particular experience – of women, of the old, of the poor, of rural life – will be overpowered by global influence. At a personal level, this is experienced as a fear about where I am, where I fit in this new reality. There is a sense of not knowing, of helplessness and of hopelessness.

*Israel:* The perceived weakness of local structures, whether religious, political, or national leads to the feeling of exposure, lack of differentiation, and a lack of protection. Nothing is unequivocal: neither scientific progress nor a ‘return to the primitive’ offers a clear solution to the prevention of disaster.

A dominant feeling was the continuing sense of being overwhelmed and compliant, and yet seeking for a way to assert our individuality.

*Italy:* There is a perception of increasing uncertainty in our society and this seems to lead to the request for more security.

*Serbia:* Feeling of hopelessness and despair in front of the impotent institutions incapable to resolve the problems in society. Lack of professional interest and general incapability for planning the future came to the fore.

Feelings of helplessness were also present. This feeling was beautifully presented by one female member in the group, who said, ‘What do I have to do to become a potent member of the Society?’ Feelings of helplessness and despair changed with the feelings of anger and rage that changes in society are too slow. Then all of us became very angry with European politicians who are keeping us like Red Indians in a reservation.

Members talked of how ‘to give birth to new life’, and this is part of a process in which past, present, and future are rediscovered and rethought. The issue seems to be how to conciliate tradition with innovation. Old identities are no longer capable of helping this process and we need to reformulate our identities in ways that are more appropriate to the current societal dynamics.

We need a new paradigm that is centred on a new ability to be creative, but our creativity is blocked because acknowledging that we are experiencing fragmented times implies acknowledging that our identities are fragmented

as well and we have to learn to manage the politics of identities, and such politics is inside our own minds, before projecting it in the external world. This is at the core of how to be a reflective citizen nowadays.

*Spain:* Immigration, the European Constitution, reductions in the welfare state, have raised doubts about the nature of society.

Below the fight against violence as a way to achieve political goals, it seems to be unthinkable to find a balance between what is local and what is globalization. It is as bad just to look at your belly as it is to erase any differences.

*USA:* Private versus public sphere: participants feel acutely aware of national and global events, and yet are pulling back from public involvement to focus on what's closer to home – what can be touched.

Hope versus despair: participants feel despair when contemplating the implications of the presidential election results. Those in the older generations expressed more despair, while the youngest expressed more hope. There were a number of references to death – on a personal level, as well as a political one – recognition of one's mortality, as well as seeing the death of cherished programmes and ideals.

The outcome of the November elections, and the impact that will have in terms of national policy, weigh heavily on participants' minds. A number of members have re-focused on issues that are closer to home. As one member put it, 'I feel impotent in a way that I am not used to feeling. So, I attempt to work in small concentric circles around me – rather than the big stuff. I feel drained. There's still altruism, but it's focused in a different place.' And another: 'My attention is not as intense as before – if I have to apportion energies, my valence is much more on family responsibilities and more local – that's where I can have more impact. I can stay current with the larger picture, but I can't impact it as much.'

*Hypothesis:* Because of the intense anxiety arising out of the 'loss of a way of life' and attempts to make sense of and adapt to a 'new way of life', the impact leaves individuals throughout the world feeling confused, guilty, vulnerable, and despairing. As society becomes more difficult to understand throughout the world, so we find our ability to think about the meaning of social processes is diminished. There is a sense of not knowing where we fit in to this new and ever-shifting reality. As a result we seek to defend ourselves from the anxieties associated with this uncertainty by retreating into the local – neighbourhood, friends, and family – where we hope we can make sense of reality and act effectively. In so far as this is a flight mechanism it will not be successful, and will inhibit the need to develop new ways of reflecting, new ways of being creative and active in the world.

### SUB-THEME (B) THE SEARCH FOR SCAPEGOATS AND SAVIOURS

*Analysis:* Faced with the extreme anxiety arising out of the circumstances described above, members of societies around the world make use of familiar and known objects such as the old and young; and male and female; and unknown objects such as immigrants, fundamentalists, and other 'different' people to help them cope with the discomfort experienced. Because this anxiety is evoked at a deep level, members of society feel overwhelmed, and this arouses paranoid-schizoid defensive behaviour. They do so either by creating scapegoats who are used as vehicles for bad projections; or by creating saviours who are used as vehicles for good projections. In some cases, such as the young, they may be used for both purposes.

There is a natural envy of youth which, coupled with doubts in the older generation about the sort of legacy they will leave, makes young people a ready vehicle for projections. In one respect, the young are at an advantage as they are able to have some understanding of current dynamics. They have less previous internalized knowledge and feelings and are therefore more able to assimilate new information. This is not the case with the older generation, who are much less likely to make sense of current dynamics. They have a great deal of internalized information and feelings and therefore if they are to make sense of this new information there is an inevitable and considerable loss.

It would appear that faced with a highly challenging and seemingly inexplicable environment we seek explanations in knowledge that we can have a degree of certainty will be shared by others. We revert to notions of the family and more especially to notions of male and female roles in society and question whether political correctness has in some way been responsible for the circumstances leading to 'not knowing'. We also indulge in blaming the unknown other: those such as immigrants, fundamentalists, 'them', 'different' people, are all blamed and used as convenient scapegoats for our discomfort and 'not knowing'. The following is a selection of the way this sub-theme is experienced in the various countries:

*Australia:* A member began by talking of the difficulties for young people getting housing in the current economic situation. This was linked to a feeling that younger people often resented what they saw as the easy time had by the baby boomer generation. We asked 'was it easier then?' The member who raised the issue also spoke of going to housing auctions where increasingly the buyers were immigrants from South East Asia, China and India. . . . There seemed a small ray of hope that we might find a different yet creative way of communicating, as was done, for example, by young people



on the internet. It was hard to sustain the hope however . . . One hypothesis put forward was about resentment by younger people of the baby boomers for having it easier – especially financially. There was not full agreement with this. A question arose: to the extent that this is the case, was this just a manifestation of typical generational resentments or something specific to our time?

*Britain:* The tsunami disaster has generated feelings of despair and helplessness amongst some members, but in others there was a wish to act positively or to look for hope. This was at first considered as the optimism of youth and the pessimism of maturity, but it was then acknowledged that both sets of feelings were present in all members . . . One member noted that outrage and cynicism were ways of defending ourselves against the power of our own rage, which we had located in others. At the same time, rage was held in check by feelings of impotence and confusion.

*Bulgaria:* The new generation (30–40 years old) is more eagerly recognized as contributing to the local communities' development. . . . Some of the traditional inter-generational relationships change. For the present generation a father can be recognized through his son instead of the traditional reverse. . . . The parental role is facing new challenges. Sometimes it brings feelings of helplessness, especially in regards to some social challenges, not so much in the 'space' between the child and the parent ('I cannot help my daughter to cope with the world outside') . . . Some of the female participants shared their concern about the 'man' in the context of the traditional vision about him.

*Chile:* There are opposite justifications according to the previous positions: democracy and dictatorship; oppression of women and children, and freedom and respect; poverty and equal distribution of wealth; exploitation and justice; diseases and access to health systems; ignorance and education. Within this debate there was also a polarization between generations, the younger and the older. The latest perceive themselves as guardians of important values, watching with horror how young people are exposed to the loss of ethical principles, leading to chaos and destruction. In this sense, it is believed that older people are protectors of the moral legacy for the young generations and the perpetuation of society. However, younger people in the group show rebellion to older people's guardianship, feeling capable of being autonomous and injecting revitalizing new values to the society.

*Finland:* At the same time it revealed how (a) people have collectively taken advantage of the opportunities presented by science and technology to strengthen the illusion of omnipotence (= ability to control life) and (b) people have had an unnatural attitude towards death and the feeling of helplessness . . . It seems that the more science and technology progress the more dependent are we on them. The stronger the unrealistic trust in their ability to control life, the weaker the people's ability to face life and their

limits in a realistic way. This phenomenon appears in the avoidance of death and helplessness. We strive to get rid of them quickly . . . Fierce competition marks the culture of our society. From the point of view of an individual, this kind of 'development' translates into a compulsive need to act in a selfish way, make it on your own and succeed in competition.

*Germany:* Another point was the question of constructive strategy in the face of the daily flooding. Flooding is a metaphor for the feeling of constriction in everyday life as expressed above. However, it obliges us to take concrete action in contrast to the natural catastrophe. It would be desirable and essential for the readiness to participate in an active process of change to be rekindled as in the 1960s and 1970s.

*Holland:* The future is discussed by means of children's upbringing. Do the children give us hope for a better world? Opinions differ on this. On the one hand children seem to be less socially committed; is it a lack of focus, hope and ambition? . . . Perhaps the children are the outstanding example of people becoming skilled in dealing with large amounts of information? Are they indeed capable (through the computer) of having meaningful contact with others? Do they make sensible choices while modelling their own lives and, consequently, social life? . . . The world economy is changing drastically. Labour is leaving the Netherlands for India and China. People from the new European member states take over jobs from the Dutch. Having a job is once again less taken for granted. The Netherlands has appeased its conscience and new generations must wake up.

*Ireland:* Irish adolescents have a crisis of expectation, we look at young people and fear for them. However, there was a robustly hopeful reflection on the capacities, courage and emotional skills of young people, the support they offer each other, the strength of their friendships and their good analysis and understanding. . . . There is a sense of young people being at ease with these forces, knowing the language of global phenomena, feeling confident of their place in this new world. Young people feel part of this world. . . . World, societal and national upheavals have aroused fears of displacement and replacement. Our focus on and fears for the next generation reflect both our dependency on it to understand, cope with and survive these changes and our fear that they will fail in this task and so will not provide support and defence for our increasing vulnerability. This leads to a breakdown of internal defences and increased anxiety which is enacted in an increasingly fractured and disconnected society.

*Israel:* The theme of the tsunami, both literally and figuratively: the feeling of being swept up and drowned in noise and powerful forces of unidentifiable origin, a kind of 'divine terrorism'. The perceived weakness of local structures, whether religious, political or national leads to the feeling of exposure, lack of differentiation and a lack of protection. Nothing is unequivocal: neither scientific progress nor a 'return to the primitive' offers a clear solution to the prevention of disaster.

*Italy:* Members talked of how to regenerate and how 'to give birth to new life', and this is part of a process in which past, present, and future are rediscovered and rethought. The issue seems to be on how to conciliate tradition with innovation, how to cope with 'not knowing how and when crossing the sea'. Old identities are no longer capable of helping this process and we need to reformulate our identities in ways that are more appropriate with the current societal dynamics.

*Serbia:* The next theme was talking about good old times. The youngest group member reminded us older ones that his generation is the last one remembering those good old times and that we have to think about this fact. . . . For all these themes fear of national socialistic and ultra right-wing parties was common. . . . Theme of transition then provoked feelings of fear of growing old as well as fears of illness and the idea that only if strong and healthy can we succeed in transition. . . . Then again we switched to 'good old times' when the salaries were good and when we did not need visas to travel across Europe. Then all of us became very angry with European politicians that are keeping us like Red Indians in a reservation.

*Spain:* The pressure of immigration constrains society to give responses to a problem that we have also created in those countries where we exploited their resources but haven't helped them to develop. . . . Immigration also raises the question of which society we want to live in. The answer now is one that is willing to protect our wealth and security; we have decided that some persons are illegal and have no rights.

*Sweden:* The transformation of the welfare state was related to the generation that is approaching retirement and the structure of society as well as the structure of the population might directly influence personal well-being. . . . It has become more and more difficult to deny the problem of providing for this demanding generation in Swedish society. Some hope was found in the younger generations striving to bridge the boundaries of generations. . . . Equality between men and women has changed the balance within the family. The family's dependency on society might have contributed to a passivity that suppresses debate in society. . . . The tendency to demonize male violence and idealize female violence allow both men and women to decline responsibility and transform important issues about the relation between the sexes into entertainment.

*USA:* Participants feel despair when contemplating the implications of the presidential election results. Those in the older generations expressed more despair, while the youngest generation expressed more hope. . . . How will the baby boomer generation react to changes in social security, which the president promises to overhaul? I have to face the unpleasant reality that everything I stand for has been violated. But children will continue to pour into schools, and I have to do what I can.

*Hypothesis:* Because of the intense anxiety arising out of the 'loss of a way of life' and attempts to make sense of and adapt to a 'new way of life', throughout the world members of societies experience massive anxiety that is evoked at a deep and primitive level; they feel overwhelmed and this arouses paranoid-schizoid defensive behaviour. As a result members of societies engage in splitting by creating good and bad objects as vehicles for their projections. Known and familiar objects in the shape of young and old, male and female are more likely to be used for positive projections; and the unknown other in the shape of immigrants, fundamentalist, and 'different' others is more likely to be used as a repository for negative projections. The nature of projections is to idealize and create good objects that will prove to be saviours; or to denigrate and create bad objects that can be used as scapegoats for all ills.

#### **SUB-THEME (C) INCAPACITATED POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

*Analysis:* Faced with the extreme anxiety arising out of the circumstances described above, those responsible for the management, leadership, and administration of political, economic, and social institutions throughout the world are in a state of bewilderment. They are seemingly unable to make sense of this 'new way of life'. So far-reaching are the changes that in many instances individuals and groups simply have no previous knowledge, and therefore no language, to express their experiences. A result is that institutions are not just failing, they are incapable of dealing with today's changed needs.

One of the ways that institutional leaders deal with 'not knowing' is to develop simplistic initiatives and to trumpet them as a sort of 'cover up' for what is really happening. The other side of this is the way that members of society engage in serious 'splitting' and the use of mainly negative projections into institutions as a defence against not being able to understand. Faced with the difficulty of 'not knowing' what the real problem is but also being the recipient of massive projections to 'do something', a frequent and totally inappropriate response is for politicians and other social leaders to impose 'tick-a-box' controls. The following is a selection of the way this sub-theme is experienced in the various countries:

*Australia:* 'There was, however, agreement from both genders about the dishonesty of the government prior to the elections. This was seen as a 'grip on power kept by lies'. Disgust was expressed about things done in our name as a result of the war on terrorism – Abu Graab prison, and the torture of suspects for example.

*Britain:* There was a feeling among members that we need new social institutions to help us manage or contain these feelings. . . . In considering how we have managed our own smaller scale disasters, such as the flooding in Carlisle and the recent pumping of sewage into the Thames, we began to think about how the government micro-manages risk, and how we have handed over this responsibility to the authorities. . . . The government was over-regulating because citizens were not to be trusted to take appropriate responsibility.

*Bulgaria:* The revolt against the management inconsistency and the promises not kept is modest and mainly imaginative (*'I was considering leaving my litter in front of the Mayor's house'*). Civil campaigns of seeking public responsibility from the public authorities brings experience of incompetence (*'I am not intelligent enough for this stuff'*) and feelings of a lack of civil representation (*'In what organization of civil representation should citizens recognize their needs and hopes so as not to be more and more situations' observers?' . . . 'I don't have local roots, I am a root on my own. And that exhausts me'*); of being not understood (*'I have the feeling that you can receive some understanding only when the Other is in some powerful position: an intellectual, a therapist, a media person etc.'*), and of distortion of your own image.

*Chile:* The Chilean society has suffered the influence of sudden and fast changes that weaken relationships between citizens and organizations. These ties had usually served as a means to give security and protection to citizens. Chile is a society in transition from a traditional culture strongly influenced by the Catholic Church's morality, the military government, and the central role of family. . . . Deep down, the anxieties of individuals are connected to the fact that identities have lost their social references, which were fed for long time on stable relationships between individuals and organizations. Due to the unsteadiness of those ties, individuals feel anger and treason because of the despair they confront and because they have to wrestle on their own against the effects of unsuccessful dependence.

*Finland:* Different experiences of cultures in the field of, for example, control over one's life (Western life must be controlled in order to be safe).

*Germany:* The stereotyped patterns of black and white polarity declaring strict contrasting categories are out of date and have lost their coherency for our sense of direction. The complexity of the world has increased. It is essential to recognize this fact instead of wasting energy by creating stricter control mechanisms. We will then be able to understand the necessity as human beings to develop adequate mechanisms and structures with both emotional and intellectual aspects in a perpetually changing situation. . . . Constriction through managerial bureaucracy, i.e., increasing paperwork fragmenting processes and procedure that had previously been constructive, life reduced to a checklist, loss of direction in the face of overwhelming mountains of firsthand data, processed data, e-mails, journalistic products.

*Holland:* People feel that the media largely influence what is important and what is not . . . It seems that authority has served its turn in the Netherlands. It is gradually becoming more difficult to fill public positions. These officials are constantly exposed to criticism and are called to account in an inflammatory and disrespectful manner. The words 'character assassination' are used in this context . . . Politicians go to any length to try to keep the civilians satisfied and to make them believe that they are heard and that their needs are taken care of. Even politicians bounce along with the hype of the day; short-term policy prevails.

*Ireland:* The very poor relationships Irish politicians have with the citizenship; the success and leadership of the ban on smoking and the tax on plastic bags and, at the same time, the very poor political leadership and courage. . . . The old realities are gone and new and changed values, measures, and priorities have replaced them. The new institutions and structures do not provide the containing function of past structures. Without this reliable containing function of societal structures, our internal anxieties increase and we experience external threats as out of control. Increased fear, mistrust and sense of helplessness results. . . . Being a citizen of the EU brings a raft of legislation which impacts on the potential influence of the individual (especially at work). We are wondering what is the connection between being an Irish citizen and being an EU citizen and asking 'citizens of where?'

*Israel:* There is a constant oscillation between the search for a large, nurturing, unifying, containing, safety-promoting body, and resistance and aversion to such a possibility, arising from the disillusionment and disappointment with such bodies – religions and their representatives, governments and super-powers – which lie, appropriate, and abuse, and whose ability to promote any kind of dialogue is limited. This oscillation is exacerbated by the disappearance of clear-cut binarism on all levels of existence. The paranoid-schizoid defences (splitting and projection) are no longer effective.

*Italy:* Several references were made to withdrawing from the open space of society, both as individuals (as one member said 'being alone doesn't require negotiation and engagement') and as institutions such as school, church, local authorities, etc. It seems that nobody and none is willing and prepared to share responsibility for the situation we are experiencing and for creating forms of engagement with the current societal processes. The societal fabric is perceived as torn and traditional relations (e.g., children-parents; young-adult) and institutions (schools, churches, NHS, government) seem unable to provide any shelter and security, so the wish for somebody taking responsibility is unmet. . . . Changing everything several times in short period is not change, it is avoiding to create 'deep analysis and open space'. . . . One of the strategies institutions and organizations use for coping with fast and unpredictable changes is to look for

more efficiency, to members it looks like a race to keep up with the increasing uncertainty. It is as if the increasing uncertainty should be matched by an increasing speed of activities and processes both as the individual is concerned as well as the organization.

*Serbia:* Lack of professional interest and general incapability for planning the future came to the fore.

*South Africa:* Government policies in South Africa contribute to the moving around syndrome with the Community Service programmes and redeployment of professionals to the rural areas. This is extremely disruptive to family life. The inability to preserve boundaries is also seen in the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa, which is rampant.

*Spain:* There is a loss of confidence in the institutions, such as justice, health organizations, educational, non-profit organizations . . . at the end it seems that every one works for economical and political interests, especially those of the more powerful ones. . . . There is a loss of confidence in the politic and the politicians. . . . The loss of confidence in the institutions and politicians has to do with the perception that the state and the government have lost their power and there are some lobbies that really control them. . . . Mass media are partial and support one of the alternatives and can't criticize enterprises or government because they are part of the business. Newspapers need adverts and the support of the system (the government or other political institutions with holdings in enterprises that support them). . . . One of the hypotheses is that if there is a climate of fear it is easier to polarize the public opinion. Polarization facilitates the use of the power resulting from the management of 10 million votes. . . . There aren't any visionary politicians and there aren't any real leaders. Leaders go to the enterprises and intellectuals have retired from the politic scene.

*Sweden:* Even before the tsunami, Swedish citizens were beginning to notice that the institutions in the Swedish society no longer had the stability that they expected. The disconnection between power and responsibility that had emerged earlier in many ways was now profound and concrete. The denial of human vulnerability both in relation to the forces of nature and to human destructiveness might have contributed to this. . . . The media's 'chatting' about the victims of the tsunami was characterized as a modern form of weepers. The genuine empathy was destroyed by the process in media and weepers were seen as a form of female violence. Generally, both the male and female perspective on the world has become superficial, which is symbolized by docu-soap operas and the place they have in media.

*USA:* Our individual pulling back from public life is reflected/paralleled in the larger political debate. The unspoken debate in political discourse is about our responsibility to our individual selves versus our collective responsibility to each other.

*Hypothesis:* Because of the intense anxiety arising out of the 'loss of a way of life' and attempts to make sense of and adapt to a 'new way of life', those responsible for the management, leadership, and administration of political, economic and social institutions throughout the world find it impossible to know with any certainty what is going on; there is no 'right' response when faced with such complexity. At the same time, politicians and policy makers are forced to act, as people put projections of competence into them, thereby rendering themselves infantilized and impotent. Leaders who take on the projected expectations of omnipotence and omniscience in the paranoid-schizoid position fail to go through the proper process of honest consultation, instead taking the path of power by stealth. They also devise a proliferation of catch-all measures of accountability as a defence against the risk associated with uncertainty. A result is that the controls not only diminish risk but also lock out creative potential: the capacity for thought and deliberation, the toleration of difference and exploration in the face of change. This is seen as an abuse of authority by the Government appointed Regulators and Inspectors, who ignore the formal authority of the managers they are regulating or inspecting. This results in a distrust of current leaders.

#### **SUB-THEME (D) DISINTEGRATION OF SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALISTIC RETREAT**

*Analysis:* Faced with the extreme anxiety arising out of the circumstances described above, and especially dynamics arising out of globalization, members of societies throughout the world have experienced serious affects on social relationships. Economic migration has had the effect of massive movement of large sections of the population throughout the world. This has had an effect on both the host nation and the families of those who are left in the country of departure. Changes in work practices and other social changes have had the effect of weakening family stability. At a different level, many are in a position of not being able to communicate with others because we can no longer be sure that other individual members or groups in society share 'taken for granted' views. A result is that rather than get into difficulty when we attempt to test our reality with these others we retreat into individualistic action. The following is a selection of the way this sub-theme is experienced in the various countries:

*Australia:* A story of meeting neighbours through 'walking the dog' seemed to resonate and others then described how they were able to connect to other people through their dogs. Another talked of connection through



children. This seemed to imply either a difficulty with direct communication and connection, or the use of pets and children as transitional communication objects (writer's term). The feeling was that we live in an increasingly disconnected society, with many people living isolated lives.

*Britain:* These extreme circumstances have resulted in a variety of flight mechanisms being mobilized. For example, the wish to escape from the city to the country, and a retreat into introspection and away from action can be seen as manifestations of flight responses.

*Bulgaria:* The facilitated movement of all creates new sorts of obstacles. The world becomes accessible to be reached and travelled around, but this separates us (from our children, for example). New faces are rushing into our well-known spaces: 'This is no longer my district' as two of the participants have said. At the same time liberalization of ownership and of participation help some others feel more in a position of owners of their surroundings ('At last, after some 15 years living here, I have the feeling that this town is also mine').

*Chile:* People are resistant to integrate in their minds those aspects that contradict and challenge their particular points of view. Thinking could bring about anxiety because it is an act that entails being aware of differences, facing responsibilities, and taking part in society. People defend themselves from these demands by fragmenting and reducing society to very small spaces and to close social links through which they can share similar perspectives, putting aside what seems to be different. In other words, the Listening Post makes evident people's anxieties and defences that are elicited in the process of taking on the role of Chilean citizens. In this way, society is defensively used as a receptacle for individual projections against anxiety.

*Finland:* Individuality; communality, and lack of it; need for help and safety. It seems that the more science and technology progress the more dependent we are on them. The stronger the unrealistic trust in their ability to control life, the weaker the people's ability to face life and their limits in a realistic way. This phenomenon appears in the avoidance of death and helplessness. We strive to get rid of them quickly . . . Fierce competition marks the culture of our society. From the point of view of an individual, this kind of 'development' translates into a compulsive need to act in a selfish way, make it on your own and succeed in competition.

*Holland:* The connection with fellow civilians is another theme. Society is becoming more and more disintegrated. There are few common and appealing goals available to hold Dutch society together. The issue of the Dutch identity is relevant to one person, whereas someone else feels that it is a characteristic of Dutch society. . . . Divorces among parents create

problematic contacts between children and parents. Life in neighbourhoods and districts is characterized by passive behaviour and lack of initiative.

*Ireland:* World, societal, and national upheavals have aroused fears of displacement and replacement. Our focus on, and fears for, the next generation reflect both our dependency on it to understand, cope with, and survive these changes and our fear that they will fail in this task and so will not provide support and defence for our increasing vulnerability. This leads to a breakdown of internal defences and increased anxiety, which is enacted in an increasingly fractured and disconnected society.

*Israel:* The perceived weakness of local structures, whether religious, political, or national leads to the feeling of exposure, lack of differentiation, and a lack of protection. Nothing is unequivocal: neither scientific progress nor a 'return to the primitive' offers a clear solution to the prevention of disaster. . . . A dominant feeling was the continuing sense of being overwhelmed and compliant, and yet seeking for a way to assert our individuality. . . . In times of such fears of erasure and annihilation – physical, psychic, and societal – the individual strives to maintain his or her unique identity. Should one resist, stand up and be counted, or become a recluse?

*Italy:* The members described this process as a situation in which 'there is too much silence or too much noise', both situations do not allow for thinking, listening, and sense making to take place. Loneliness (withdrawal) is then the outcome of the fear experienced as feeling in a void of sense making.

*Serbia:* The next theme that followed was about the wide and deep traumatization of the whole society. Conversation then turned towards increased depression in society as well as towards cruelty and selfishness, which are increasing.

*South Africa:* Families are a microcosm of the communities and countries in which we live. Unless there is containment within the family, the aggression and inability to deal with differences spirals out into the community, country, and between countries. This leads to anarchy, chaos, and war. In countries, containment needs to come from the leadership. The skill of containment needs to be taught and as therapists we need to be aware of it and work with it. Institutions in society are fragile and need preserving.

*Spain:* How we are so individualistic that there is no space for social commitment. It seems that social relationships have been substituted by work relationships and economically based links. Socially, ideologies are something bad and dangerous and a person that supports an ideology is seen as a 'demodé' idealist, out of our time, radical, dangerous, and out of the system. . . . There is a loss of confidence in the personal relationships, maybe because those relationships are linked to their work. . . . People become

aloof and distant from others and find security in smaller circles of relationships.

*USA:* The drawing inward does not feel like a narcissistic withdrawal, but rather a re-grouping. . . . We feel sufficiently daunted by the magnitude of what is going on in the political sphere that we attempt to work on issues that are closer to home, rather than 'the big stuff'. We combat our feelings of impotence by trying to make an impact where we feel we can. . . . We don't want to face the painful realities in our country: the war in Iraq, the president's re-election, the deep economic and political divisions in this country. We respond by pulling back from public life. We find hope by focusing on local issues, where it feels possible to have an impact.

*Hypothesis:* Because of the intense anxiety arising out of the 'loss of a way of life' and attempts to make sense to and adapt to a 'new way of life', this has aroused fears of personal safety and even annihilation in individual members of society. A result is that they have been increasingly driven towards taking an independent approach. However, our sense of self depends on validation of others and we cannot exist solely as independent beings, we can only be dependent if we are interdependent. A result is a breakdown of internal defences and increased internal anxiety, which is acted out with the result that society is experienced as a unintegrated environment.

## THEME 2. THE ASIAN TSUNAMI DISASTER.

*Analysis:* Nearly all National Reports directly or indirectly reflected this major natural disaster. At one level, it was such a tragic and massive social event that hardly anyone could be unaffected by it. At another level, this tragedy provided an outlet for many psychological experiences around the world, and for images that expressed responses to wider social processes. Faced with the extreme anxiety arising out of the circumstances described in Theme 1, above, feelings of being overwhelmed by bewildering societal changes, of social structures being swept away, of guilt and reparation were all connected to both the tsunami and global processes. The following is a selection of the way this event is experienced in the various countries:

*Australia:* It was felt that the generosity of response to this disaster was significantly due to it being a situation where people felt they could make a difference. Was this also unconsciously a displacement from guilt that came with the deep helplessness of being unable to influence man-made disasters?

Issues of truthfulness and honesty that had been so much in the public eye prior to the election have just disappeared in the wake of the tsunami news. One female member admitted to feeling some relief after the elections.

In addition to displaced guilt, the tsunami evoked deep primitive fears of vengeance by God, as evidenced through reference to the flood and the parting of the Red Sea: Noah and Moses. The biblical stories are about a God wreaking vengeance for the guilt of humans. Is it that we feel we are like the victims of the tsunami? 'There but for the grace of god, go I' is implied.

*Britain:* There was a sense of bewilderment and a search for meaning running through the discussion. There was a strong feeling of boundaries being broken, and of being 'swept along by the current'. These feelings were not immediately associated with the tsunami, but the disaster provided imagery to describe feelings about the current trends in society.

It was felt that because of the experience of trying to live with this awful world the Asian disaster had provided an opportunity to escape from the everyday unbearable thoughts and feelings and to engage in the excitement of the disaster and of the unbridled pleasure of being presented with a 'no blame' situation where we can be generous. A hope existed that this would lead to an owning of guilt and to resulting in reparation. Another member said, 'I've enjoyed it, I can watch and not feel any responsibility'. It was experienced as like the lifting of a dark veil permitting sunlight to enter our world again. But it was also appreciated that this was but an escape from the realities and extreme difficulties of everyday life.

At a mainly unconscious level we are aware that we treat so-called Third World countries in an unfair and unequal manner. This provides society with a darker, more evil motivation for giving. Because of our feelings of guilt associated with this behaviour; and perhaps fear of reprisals by those countries, we seek to satisfy our guilt and fears by paying off those concerned.

*Finland:* Discussion focused mainly on the topic of the catastrophe in South Asia, raising questions of the unpredictability, uncertainty and changes in life. The tsunami was a metaphor for experiences of Finnish society: 'What kind of tsunamis can be seen in our times?' Feelings of sorrow, guilt and blame were associated with both the tsunami and aspects of society; in particular, God, nature, media, and the authorities were categorized together.'

The motives for helping were questioned. What helps, and am I any good at helping? The members formulated a hypothesis that the tsunami was a channel for people's own anxieties. You can feel powerful and good by projecting your own sense of helplessness into other people.

*Germany:* 'The tsunami seemed to become a symbol of the unavoidable flooding that has become an integral part of everyday life. Donations to charity that have broken all previous records may reveal the urgent need for exoneration by selling of indulgences, yet on the other hand the wish to perform actively in some capacity and not rely on governmental activity. In spite of the scepticism, there did appear to be a vague tide of optimism for no clear reason.

The tsunami is an ideal, all-embracing theme since it demonstrates the polarity of power and blameless powerlessness and simultaneously offers the possibility to offer constructive aid against one's personal feeling of futility and helplessness by a financial contribution. Like any and every all-embracing image it serves to distract us from disturbing facts.

*Holland:* The tsunami was regarded as a 'blessing in disguise'. Dutch society showed its good side. It showed that it could also bring forth something positive as a collective. The direct or indirect issue was if there was or wasn't hope for Dutch society? Could we and did we dare to discern this? Yet also: who was responsible?

The economic recession and the government policy to cut down on the social welfare state have increased the fear for losing acquired rights. The inequality in the world and the participation in international collaborations see to it that problems cannot be kept outside the nation's borders (Europe, Iraq, immigrants). The government is accused of not providing sufficient safeguards to make sure that life can be continued the way it is.

*Ireland:* Perhaps the massive donations by the Irish to, for example, the tsunami fund, is an expression of guilt about being affluent – we are trying to buy ourselves out of something. Perhaps we do have a problem believing good things about ourselves.

*Israel:* The theme of the tsunami, both literally and figuratively: the feeling of being swept up and drowned in noise and powerful forces of unidentifiable origin, a kind of 'divine terrorism'.

*Italy:* The tsunami has contributed to increasing the sense of a reality out of our control. It is not only society (e.g., 9/11) but also nature that is attacking us in a period of highly perceived vulnerability. When we are looking for more security we experience forces that destroy our wish. We are left with a devastating sense of hopelessness, and it is then that we discover our human side.

It seems that only tragedies are capable of creating a shared sense of humanity. It is as if when our existence is perceived under extreme threat that we can find the energy to mobilize action. We are capable collectively of engaging, in a sort of way, with the reality only when we feel strong emotions under huge pressure. This, however, is still a defensive reaction in which responsibility is placed outside our domain.

*Spain:* Our awareness is only shaken when there is a huge catastrophe, such as the tsunami in South East Asia, the earthquake of Bam, or hurricanes in the Caribbean. But what really shakes our conscience is the fear of the violence and terror of the radicalism and terrorism that have their roots in the inequity and omnipotence of the western world.

*Sweden:* Another power, media, was also explored. The picture of the disaster as well as the way to approach the victims became generalized and standardized. This had a negative influence on people's genuine feelings and involvement. Here, two ways of personal relation to the disaster were explored. It gave a renewed sense of hope and vitality by the discovery of people's willingness to help. It also obscured the perspective on the urgent structural problems that were surfacing in Swedish society before the disaster.

The tsunami provides an opportunity to escape the 'normal' and develop a feel-good factor from engaging in generosity to fellow humans. Is it the reverse (of generosity) that we are escaping from? It enables us to displace our own feelings of victimization on to the victims of the disaster. It enables us to act out our guilt. It provides an avoidance of complex and scary dynamics.

*Hypothesis:* The tsunami is both a disaster in the external world, and a metaphor for internal, unconscious experiences of wider global forces and how they impact on societies and individual citizens. In particular, feelings of being overwhelmed or flooded by rapid and bewildering social change, and resulting feelings of guilt and helplessness, have close associations with the overwhelming response to the tsunami. The opportunity to respond actively and positively to a known external disaster is in contrast to, and provides relief from, a growing sense of alienation and inner turmoil in the face of globalization and loss of familiar social reference points. The tsunami provides an opportunity to displace feelings of personal victimization on to victims of the disaster. In addition it would seem to provide an outlet for giving that can be benevolent but can also be seen as influenced by a darker, more evil motivation designed to cover our feelings of guilt by paying off those whom we have treated badly. Or at another, more primitive level, it may be seen as an attempt to pay off the gods for their anger at our actions.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Everything points to the possibility that current global dynamics will continue to intensify and deepen in the foreseeable future – or perhaps, to be more accurate, that should read unforeseeable future!

Given that there are few signs that individuals or those responsible for the management, leadership, and administration of political, economic, and social institutions currently have the ability to adopt the required reflective approach that will help to make sense of this still developing 'new way of life', there is not much hope of serious understanding. As referred to in some of the National Reports, 'the intellectuals' have disappeared from the public scene, they are not contributing and it would appear that they are as helpless as others. It would seem, then, that global dynamics will continue to be dominated by defences against anxiety

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*Publication of National Reports*

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