



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

South Africa at the Dawn of 2019

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: Escapism; Exodus and Expropriation

Participants started by discussing world events beyond the boundaries of South Africa, as a form of escapism and defence against what is happening in the here-and-now. Pleasant experiences during the summer holidays abroad were compared to the problems at home. The wish was for 'the establishment of a new country' within our country with reference to the sentiments of a specific 'white' community in the Western Cape Province suggesting their independence. The racial split in the country runs deep. This was evident in the explicit discussions from the start of the event, as well as the references to it being the 'elephant in the room'. One participant stated that he feels like an expat in his own country and "does not feel welcome here anymore".

The global trend of self-medication and specifically the legalisation and use of cannabis in South Africa elicited much discussion. The many healing properties of the herb was discussed, as if it is an antidote and vehicle to escape the current preoccupation with politics and corrupt power. It was mentioned that the split between the poor and the privileged can become smaller as both groups may benefit from the herb, through different applications thereof. The paradox in cannabis was described as a herb which 'shrinks the brain' but also 'cures illnesses'.

The perceived inability of the country to "move with the times" and outgrow the sufferings of the past was described as a 'stuckness'. South Africa was compared to countries such as Saudi Arabia where change and transformation are seen as significant -

such as the allowance of women as divers of vehicles and the public consumption of alcohol. A recurring question was 'What is this lethargy in South Africa about?' Optimism was described as a way to cope with new revelations of corruption and the widening circle of money laundering amongst business people with strong ties to the previous president. The majority of the participants were pre-occupied with thoughts of 'places out there' that could possibly be safer and more child-friendly than in South Africa.

The ongoing and unresolved 'land expropriation without compensation' debate was a preoccupation. Space for all countrymen to live and work in peace was a topic that referred back to the inequities of the past. Little meaningful progress was made in the past but also through all the current plans and government talks. It creates animosity between races and deepens the racial split.

Theme 2: Information saturation paralysis

Participants discussed social media as an information overload and the effects thereof on the psyche. Privacy and the protection of personal data become a preoccupation as individuals and families need to be more aware of the type of information shared on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Fears of what information is already in the 'cloud' and who has access to stories and pictures of participants and their children, was a major concern. The need for increased privacy in an era of constant surveillance was linked to the need to withdraw from information sharing devices. The withdrawal from too many 'followers' and eyes and ears that watch and track the daily activities of participants were expressed in the statement that 'the voice was silenced'. It reflects the need for negotiations for a new secluded identity which is protected from the open access to all other global citizens. Fake news, fake identities and fake relationships are evident in daily living while the reclaiming of privacy is a preoccupation.

Theme 3: A Game of Thrones and Dragons

Participants reflected on who is the real voice in the political arena of South Africa – the power associated with corruption and state capture of the previous regime that seems to be haunting the country, or that of President Ramaphosa who voices rational steps away from corruption. The situation gets more complex in the advent of the national election in May, where all the political parties are playing their confronting games. 'Mother Russia' as an authority in the mind was evident in the discussion as well as what it personifies - from a beautiful and harmless leader in art and ballet, to a mighty political power with evil intentions, the mother of dragons for the rest of the world.

Making and performing art and dance was suggested as expressions of the need to just be and express beauty and creativity, as well as permissible ways of expressing, managing and resolving the anxiety-creating ambiguities created by our current political, identity and other struggles.

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.

Theme 1: Escapism; Exodus and Expropriation

Analysis 1: Many citizens share fantasies of escapism to other 'spaces'. As a defence, this manifests in citizens' preoccupations of living in South Africa. The paradox of cannabis as something that could be harmful but also healing reflects the ambiguities of embracing the unknown towards the healing of a nation. These include the acceptance of our differences and otherness, of understanding and inviting 'the other' that was seen in the past as 'dangerous' and 'a taboo' to engage with. Similar to experiences in the previous year, what is happening 'out there' was more evident in the discussions at first, than what is happening 'in here', with a greater intensity than last year.

Hypothesis 1: Citizens relate more to their positive impressions and experiences of other countries indicating their flight responses to a 'far and away' space - away from the present political uncertainties (especially before the general election in May) and corruption, rather than to keep fighting for their rights and quality of life.

Theme 2: Information saturation paralysis

Analysis 2: Being comfortable with increasing complexities and high levels of information sharing is difficult for participants to cope with. A need to distinguish between what is real and what is fake is realised yet exactly how is not clear.

Hypothesis 2: An overexposure to information and personal information of citizens may lead to more 'stuckness' and a sense of paralysis. A heightened idealisation of exclusivity and need for privacy may contribute to this.

Theme 3: A Game of Thrones and Dragons

Analysis 3: The ambiguity between what is good and what is evil, what is safe and what is not, and who is the hero in the game, are reflected in the projections of countries as personalities and child fantasies as our own realities.

Hypothesis 3: Citizens' impressions of 'against or for' me and 'what is mine' reflects their preoccupation with existential risk. Working within the play or in the dance is a fantasy and a defence to cope with the conflictual situations of living in South Africa.

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