



Youth and National Resilience

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

A large part of French youth is plagued by multiple problems of societal origin. In this constraining context, they can nevertheless show great resilience and enthusiasm. National defence is legitimate to support the youth in this effort through traditional recruitment in the active forces supplemented by the reserve forces. Civic service is also a promising avenue. However, for the author of these lines, nothing will be possible without "a re-founding act of our educational system".

France is very fortunate to have young people who are still motivated by civic commitment, young people who are promising, engaging and dynamic, far from the clichés of mad individualism that are used to describe them. More than 300,000 young people under the age of 25 apply every year to join a civic service or a defence and security profession. Unfortunately, due to a lack of positions, three quarters of them will not be selected and will be disappointed not to be able to be useful to society. This craze is also weakened by a weakening link between society and its army and, more broadly, by the loss of sight of a common societal destiny.

It would be in the state's interest to respond to this desire to be useful to the community, however, because this desire is threatened and declining. This duty is not only a moral duty to its young citizens or a societal duty to facilitate living together, but in a world where protean and new threats continue to emerge, it is an incredible opportunity to be seized to develop the nation's capacity for resilience.

This requires not only responding to the desire of young adults to invest for the benefit of society, but above all encouraging it by reviewing the principles guiding the elementary education system.

Since this article was written in November 2014 and following the attacks in France in January and November 2015, many measures have been taken to respond to the desire of young adults to invest. Nevertheless, in order to be fully effective, these measures cannot avoid an in-depth revision of the objectives of the elementary school cycle.

The education of children at the age of the construction of the social individual (6-12 years old) must integrate the whole solid philosophical and psychological basis on which a future adult in a battered society will be able to bounce back. Since civic service and the suspension of military service no longer make it possible to ensure the cohesion of young French people on a massive scale, it is imperative that in France national education takes over and provides children with the ability to meet the challenges of tomorrow and to find their place in society. Without this, the resilience and cohesion of our society are in danger.

An appeal of the uniform that still endures

Young Frenchmen still show a notable desire to get involved in a uniformed trade. With possible multi-candidatures, about 150,000 young people, mostly between 18 and 25 years of age, applied last year for a job in defence or public security.

In our society where well-being is king, where money is the consumer's greatest asset, where social networks and attachment to friends and family are strong, fewer than in our society, where money is king, where social networks and attachment to friends and family are strong, less than one young person in 30 is still ready to give up his comfort and habits to live a military life, an exceptional life, far from his own, a life with constraints of availability, risks, physical and psychological investment.

We could be satisfied with this and praise the courage of these candidates for the uniformed trades; on the contrary, we should be concerned about this percentage, because this craze will not last. This enthusiasm is not necessarily already present in our neighbouring countries. The United Kingdom is developing a military reserve with financial resources ten times greater than ours. Thus, in 2014, the budget for the British Army reserve is £200 million (about 250 million euros) compared to £35 million for the French Army. Training and employment opportunities are far greater than ours. Yet, despite expensive communication campaigns, recruitment agencies are struggling to find candidates.

In France, the enthusiasm and will are still there, but it's still a political choice.

Love won't last forever: who are you, uniform?

We're not immune to a lack of interest among young people in state defence and security forces. Threats of a break in the youth/army bond are developing insidiously. Firstly, young people's family environment is becoming more and more distant from the military world. Young adults have parents, some of whom no longer have military service. In a few years, they will be in the majority. They will no longer hear at family meals the memories of the social mix they have experienced and the training they have received.

Wars seem ancient, and the emotional distance from events does not encourage a massive adherence to the duty to remember.

Military deserts are multiplying on French territory. And, even more worrying for the young target, this military desertification also affects the cultural sphere, such as the cinema. Thus, between 2010 and 2014, some twenty Anglo-Saxon films have had the armies as their main theme, as opposed to two French films. Today, the visibility of uniformed professions on screens is mainly achieved through recruitment communications and, in the current economic climate, through information reports during operational missions. These reductions in the armies' territorial and cultural footprint are all factors that distort the link between the citizen and the armies.

Culture of powerlessness and not culture of peace

Moreover, there is frequently confusion in society between the will for peace and the guarantee of peace. We all wish to live in a world at peace, many of us believing that humanistic virtues will protect the nation from any threat. This is forgetting that peace is won in blood and is constantly threatened. If we can fervently wish for a more altruistic and peaceful world, we must also analyse with lucidity the current threats and the geopolitical reality of the world. The remoteness of theatres of operations makes threats less palpable. The sense of security wrongly develops as does the aversion to death.

While the threats are multiple, diffuse and unpredictable, France is also forced to make savings and defence is hard hit. Yet, as Loïc Garnier, the Comptroller General of the national police force, the coordinator of the fight against terrorism in France and former head of the criminal investigation department, wrote in *Le Parisien* in September 2014 - and the future proved him right: "The risk is high, yes. Today, we are no longer wondering if there will be an attack in France, but when'.

This is what Colonels Givre and Le Nen said in their book "War issues" "The exceptional period of peace in which we have been living for three generations could be nothing more than a wake of arms.... Our message is clear: let us still have the courage to face the war and let us prepare tirelessly to do so. This is the price we must pay for the peace, security and prosperity of our children. It is the price of our freedom".

In this respect, the current government, by deciding to maintain 18,500 posts and to increase the defence budget by 3.8 billion euros by 2019, has for the first time since professionalisation delivered a strong message about the importance of national defence.

On the need to develop the resilience of young people

That is why, in the face of the crises encountered (economic, military, environmental, etc.), it is important to develop the resilience of the members of society. This requires formalized procedures and a particular organization. It also requires society to develop fraternity, a sense of belonging and common destiny and to encourage the individual strengthening of certain values and skills.

This has been one of the major positive points of the national service to know how to

strengthen societal resilience through increased cohesion and the transmission of solid life skills. National service has crystallised many criticisms, some of which are justified. What a relief it was for many when military service was suspended in 1998! Fourteen years later, however, 62% of those questioned in an IFOP survey in 2012, regardless of their political sympathy, regretted compulsory military service. By interrupting the lives of young adults for a few months, military service provided an escape route for them, allowing them to experience the social mix and to learn how to find their place in society.

"The army provides a diverse social space, which is increasingly rare in our individualistic society," says Elyamine Settoul, a researcher at the [European Institute in Florence and a lecturer at Sciences-Po Paris](#). "The French people are waiting for this social mix, for a collective project carried by this institution, just as the school has been able to be.

Today, when national service is suspended, how can French youth cope with exceptional events if they are not prepared for them?

To develop this societal resilience, it is necessary to act on two targets: young adult volunteers and the education of children aged 6 to 12. It is the combination of these two levels of action that will durably strengthen the resilience of young French people.

We must not disappoint the collective interest of young adults.

"Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand." (Chinese proverb)

Every year, 20,000 young people are integrated into France's defence and security service but, conversely, 130,000 are disappointed not to have access to it. That is why it is important not to change the policy of recruiting both active and reserve personnel.

In May 2014, the Higher Council of the Military Reserve recalled the importance to be attached to the ratio of reservists: 30% from former military personnel and 70% from the civilian world for young people under 35 years of age, less immediately profitable for the army, but contributing to a resilient vision of society. The Army also responds to the collective interest of young people through the RSMA and RSMV, the experimentation of which will begin in September 2015, volunteer contracts, defence classes and national education-defence partnerships...

It is also possible to promote the involvement of young people in the life of society through a new effort on civic service, which offers young adults the opportunity to engage in missions of solidarity, sports supervision or environmental defence. The current government, following the January attacks, has rightly decided to strengthen this civic service scheme, grasping the crucial importance of responding to young people's desire to get involved in society (150,000 civic services compared with 35,000 in 2014).

Being trained in responsibility, autonomy and lucidity about the values to be protected in our society is not the prerogative of armies, police or civic service.

This can be taken up by the national education system, with the idea under consideration of being able to offer a "volunteer" option in the baccalaureate or the granting of ECTS

credits to volunteer students. This proposal is included in the 2015 report "Recognising, valuing and encouraging youth involvement" by Patrick Kanner, Minister of the City, Youth and Sports.

For example, long stays abroad, such as the Erasmus scheme, very positively reinforce young people's ability to adapt and to see difficulties as challenges to be overcome. As Gérard Chaliand invites us to do this in a somewhat utopian way, or one that is difficult to implement in this period of budgetary restrictions, this could be achieved by creating an adventure grant: "We would get out of our social problems better if only young adults trained in this way could do something about them. For a long time, all age groups were summoned to do a year's military service. Convening young people now for a national service of world discovery would represent what I call progress" [1].

1] While it is a political necessity to provide facilities for young adults who wish to be involved in community service, it is also a political necessity to provide a means for young adults to be involved in the community.

At the same time, children must be encouraged to become aware of the collective, of society, and enable them to develop the foundations of what constitutes resilience, i.e. skills, but also an individual understanding of their place in society and in the world, and the responsibilities that go with it.

Restoring meaning to national education

The importance of education in resilience has already been studied by Monique Castillo, who emphasized the contribution of Françoise Dolto at a conference in 2012 at the Military School. Nevertheless, it is necessary to be able to integrate these contributions from modern psychology into pedagogical practices.

Training and experience enable the individual to experience traumatic events and feel "equipped" to deal with them. He feels able to act with the feeling of having a real chance of survival.

The preparation of the citizen should make it possible to develop a sense of responsibility that leads to an active attitude during the crisis.

Moreover, it should make it possible to bounce back after the crisis event (attack, economic downgrading, natural disaster, etc.).

Reactivity is made possible through education. This "tool" is a corpus of values that can be found in military training and which explains the success of the training courses at the Saint-Cyr military schools for the benefit of the grandes écoles and companies: self-confidence, responsibility, collaboration and cooperation, respect for rules, exemplary teachers, identification of each person's role in the group, understanding of the fundamental problem encountered and its stakes, solidarity and respect for others in their differences, methodology in the conduct of action.... This can also include first aid training, as mentioned in the 2013 report of the Armed Youth Commission on resilience.

If certain skills can be developed in adults, it is only on the basis of a behavioural base acquired very early on, during the construction of the social individual, between the ages

of 6 and 12. This foundation naturally benefits from the quality of parental education. Nevertheless, school has a major role to play since, in the classroom, the child is much more than a child, he is a pupil, just as an individual in society is much more than an individual, he is a citizen. The collective will of the nation to form involved, resilient, responsive future citizens must guide the national education system.

However, the implementation of life skills is done through action and by setting an example, and certainly not through theoretical lectures on civic education or civic morality.

The conception of national education is today truncated because it is mainly oriented towards learning delivered during oral courses. It loses sight of the desired end state: to teach children to become autonomous, self-confident and successful adults. Resilience is based on values that are no longer those conveyed in today's pedagogy.

These founding values of resilience are as follows:

- Empowerment of the child from an early age;
- development of responsibility through more mature freedoms;
- methodology and a sense of organization in action;
- situational intelligence and decisiveness;
- imagination and creativity: positioning of man as an actor of change in an interdependent world;
- collaborative work, empathy;
- valuing work and effort for one's own progress and not for external factors (grades, teacher, parental pleasure, reward);
- development of self-esteem so as not to fear the unknown and adversity.

However, without a fundamental reform of our education system, the resilience and cohesion of our society are at risk.

It might therefore be salutary to draw inspiration from Maria Montessori, who developed an approach based on these key values that could be widely used in national education. This would require overcoming the ideological and partisan tension surrounding the term "national". In her scientific pedagogy, the period 6-12 years is the sensitive period for the construction of social personality.

Very visionary, she also says that we must not raise our children for today's world. That world will not exist when they grow up. The priority must therefore be to help children to cultivate their creative and adaptive faculties. It restores the credibility of reasoned discipline. "This is what the Montessori approach has been doing since 1907, but it is only

in the last generation that its full potential has been glimpsed and that it has been possible for the Montessori approach to be applied to children. It began to develop everywhere on the planet where democracy reigned," explains Benoit Dubuc in the book "Pedagogy. Theories and practice from antiquity to the present day».

Elementary school teachers have the academic background (BAC+5) and, for many, the desire to move in that direction. The majority of participants in Montessori training are teachers in search of a philosophical density, a meaning to give to their practice. But the individual motivation of school teachers cannot replace a collective vision in which the school has a crucial role to play, both in the transmission of knowledge and in preparing young people for their civic and professional integration into society and the world, the responsibilities that await them and the meaning that they embody.

The importance of a collective and political vision of resilience

Promoting resilience among young people requires a strong political will based on an overhaul of the expectations of the education system, particularly at the primary level, and on investment by the State and the armed forces to support the desire of young adults to become involved in society, in our society. There is an urgent need to give young people the intellectual and behavioural capacity to react appropriately to a crisis in a world that is changing at exponential speed. It might seem impossible in times of crisis to invest differently in youth, but the awareness of a community of destiny must prevail.

[1] Patrice Franceschi "The Monkey's Eye" , 2013 - Points (p.214)

A sub-contract officer, integrated in 2004 into the active army, Commander Aurore LEVASSEUR served as communication officer and head of a recruitment, reconversion and personnel condition office at the 7th Alpine ^{Hunter} Battalion from 2001 to 2007. Head of the personnel management office and director of human resources for the 28th geographical group from 2007 to 2010, she then commanded the Le Mans Armed Forces Information and Recruitment Centre until 2014, which enabled her to work with French youth on a daily basis and to carry out multiple projects related to national education. She then served at the Delegation of Army Reserves and is currently a trainee officer of the 23rd class of the ^{War} School.

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