



Authority, youth: principles of military command that resonate with the expectations of new generations of authority

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Authority and youth are two terms that seem to be contradictory today. Far from being a clumsiness, this association makes it possible to address the demands of the new generations vis-à-vis those in authority. Through a psychological approach to these expectations, the author proposes to consider military authority as a possible response.

It seems easier to know what authority is not than to define what it is. This is all the more difficult as we are daily confronted with authority since it is an inescapable and normal aspect of any organization. Thus, our definition is generally more related to our bad experiences. Commonly associated with the notion of power or domination, authority is distinguished by the necessary legitimacy that accompanies it. Without recognition and acceptance, authority is only power. Yet this illegitimacy is at the heart of the "crisis" of authority in our modern societies.

Evolving in an environment in which manifestations of authority may be considered deficient or even non-existent, young people today are waiting for values to which the principles of military command seem to be adapted.

While the end of authority announced by some authors does not seem likely, there is nevertheless an undeniable trend towards the negotiation of authority, particularly on the part of the new generations. For all that, this new vision of authority should not be analysed as a rejection but as a specific search situated between two extreme forms of laxity and authoritarianism. In this context, military authority, usually assimilated to an archaic practice, conveys principles of great topicality.

Towards a "negotiated" and delegitimized authority

The decade 2000 was marked by a renewed interest in the concept of authority, particularly because of a certain ostentatious attitude of denial on the part of young

people. Indeed, the economic and social crisis of the 1970s destabilized socialization processes and thus the relationship to authority among young people.

First of all, massive unemployment transformed the paternal identity built around work. Beyond the narcissistic wound it causes, the experience of unemployment has consequences for family balance, more particularly for the roles of family members. Parents, and particularly the father, the natural representative of authority, no longer have the aura that allows them to assume this function. Popular circles are all the more marked by this change as they are faced with the gradual disappearance of other forms of social recognition as a result of the persistent socio-economic crisis. As Salid Bouamama points out, "unrecognized in the family, the child in many working-class neighbourhoods is also denied a place in school and then in the world of work" [1].

Moreover, the post-1968 societal vision based on an egalitarian paradigm also has direct effects on authority. Etty Buzyn notes that "today, children are put on a pedestal. Parents who are mostly from the May-68 generation are much more permissive. Before we imposed, now we propose". 2] Now, parental authority is fundamental to a child's autonomy and responsibility by setting a framework and rules for life. The child's learning of authority in the family setting is no longer guaranteed. This phenomenon is all the more amplified by the break-up of the family unit (divorce, reconstitution, etc.). This change gradually causes children to question and then question authority.

If the family, the first experience of social bond, is the crucible of this deep "crisis" of legitimacy of authority, the child or teenager does not find more reference points within the school environment. The school should also be a framework for learning about authority. Unfortunately, teachers are also faced with the problem of asserting their authority either through lack of skills or lack of resources. This situation is greatly aggravated by the fact that many parents do not recognize or defend this authority for fear of conflict with their offspring.

Finally, our modernity is undergoing a flagrant shrinking of space and time as a result of exponential technological change. Human relations have, like other products, become a consumable. Thus, the multiplication of social networks such as Facebook[3] makes it possible to multiply "friends" without meeting them physically or even knowing them. The ease with which users accept, refuse or reject a person is a perfect illustration of the transience and lack of interest in the relationship. But authority requires a commitment to the relationship and therefore to its duration. Authority relationships are thus made more fragile.

Situations of absence or lack of authority, whether in the family or school environment, or even at work, lead to a certain lack of understanding of the relationship of authority for the young people who experience them. In this context, young people have become accustomed to negotiating and questioning the legitimacy of those in authority, whoever they may be.

A particular expectation of the new generation

Yet the search for authority by youth has never been stronger. In a 2010 survey of parents and children aged 15 to 24, 79% of young people reported a positive sense of authority, while only 66% of parents gave this response. Children are moreover more than six out of

ten to judge this authority insufficient in the family and school spheres [4].

4] In fact, to build themselves psychologically in order to exist by themselves and assert themselves, young people need to endure authority as much as they need to measure themselves against it. A gap in authority is a gap in limits, which nevertheless secure and allow psychological development. Without authority, the child feels a certain anxiety of abandonment and real distress. Jean-Luc Aubert, a psychologist specializing in children and adolescents, explains that "in a period of very anxiety-provoking transformations, adolescents are looking for people who reassure them, who accompany them. It is a structuring that helps in the search for identity". Among others, some psychologists such as D. W. Winnicott equate the occurrence of petty delinquency during adolescence with a call to a framework, to reference points, to the setting of limits [5]. 5] This call for authority is also echoed by parents, as Jean-Luc Aubert points out: "For the past three or four years, we have been returning to a certain authoritarianism. The idea, born in May 1968, of an egalitarian education based on dialogue has been abandoned because it is too difficult to put in place".

Nevertheless, young people's need for authority should not be confused with a desire for autocracy. The expectations of the new generations in this area are different. In a study by the Armed Youth Commission in 2007 on young people's expectations of authority, it was found that the expectations of young people in this area are different. that young people mainly want respect, equal treatment and an exemplary role model for the person in authority [6]. These principles of equality and exemplarity obviously call for other principles such as responsibility and delegation as formulated by St. John Bosco: "The man in authority is a man who knows how to delegate, certainly, but this delegation is not a taking of power so that everything is done by our subordinates, in short, by our 'people'! When we have authority over someone, we are, in a certain way, responsible for them. Responsibility is a foundation of authority" [7]. 7] But also that of recognition, which, according to the psychologist Ariane Bilheran, allows us to gather instead of dividing and which consists in recognizing the merits of each person independently of titles and honors.

8] This search, which is akin to a pursuit of identity, is only intended to help people find a legitimate social place. However, beyond the context in which authority is situated, the expectations are of a relational level whose focus is the holder of authority, or leader.

Military command: an appropriate form of authority

The relationship of authority has been regularly studied by psychologists. Some have even endeavoured to characterize the good leader. For example, in 1978, Roger Mucchielli, a psycho-sociologist and educational psychologist, summarized the functions of a leader with four verbs: to organize, animate, inform and train[9]. 9] In a more recent approach to the question of the crisis of authority, Ariane Bilheran gives her definition of a good leader who, "in short, knows how to show prudence and boldness, to assert the recognition of each person and to set an example. He submits to the law he gives to others, and makes equality a concept derived from freedom... It allows us to be free....It allows to establish as much as possible the conditions for the autonomy of each person (thus development of potentialities), within a collective functioning devoted to a common ideal. Finally, we could also add that the good leader knows the virtues of speech and manifests himself as an orator more than as a sophist (he doesn't use language to manipulate, but to elevate thought)" [10].

For the military community, these notions are at the basis of the exercise of authority, of command which is the object of doctrine and teaching. Thus, in 2003, in a context of professionalization, the Chief of Staff of the French Army reaffirms the principles and foundations of the exercise of command in the Army as stated by General Lagarde in 1980. This text determines the individual qualities and the institutional procedures indispensable to the command of men aiming at "the responsibility, the valorization of individuals as well as the creation of a deep satisfaction of serving in order to achieve a freely consented discipline" [11]. In concrete terms, the values shared within the military institution in this field are exigency, competence, decisiveness, humanity, justice and trust.

Thus, according to *L'exercice du commandement dans l'armée de terre, commandement et fraternité* [12], the military commander must be demanding both with regard to himself and his subordinates. Equivalent to the notion of exemplarity, the requirement induces trust. A trust that he gains and shares. The relationship of authority then becomes a human interaction of interdependence. It is therefore imbued with humanity. For, even if this relationship is intrinsically unequal because of hierarchical positioning, it is based on the principle of equal treatment. The military leader must be fair when he sanctions or rewards. While the term sanction echoes that of discipline, which in this case is military discipline, it must be remembered that every authority is accompanied by a power to enforce the rules of the context in which that authority operates. Finally, demonstrating a certain technical competence while knowing how to value the skills of those around him, the military commander makes decisions that attest to his sense of responsibility. All of these individual qualities are necessarily part of an approach based on information, participation and support[13].

13] Beyond the resistant clichés about the self-sufficiency of the hierarchical link as a basis for organization, military authority is intimately linked to trust and knowledge of the other, and is a clever balance between love and fear. To take up an interpretation of authority by Bruno Robbes, professor of schools, master trainer and lecturer at the University of Paris X - Nanterre, military authority could be summed up by: "to be authority, that is to say, to have the status of authority, to have authority as a person and to be authoritative in terms of capacity and competence" [14]. 14] These three aspects are, for the author, the "centre of gravity of the relationship of authority".

If it does not seem obvious to define military command as a form of humanizing authority, these precepts are not so far from the discourses of some psychologists, but also from the expectations of the new generation. "The authority that was self-evident now requires word, explanation, even negotiation, to gain the support of those over whom it is exercised" 12.

12In conclusion, at the basis of the human being, a singularly psychological and relational phenomenon, authority is today a central issue for young people. Confronted with what they consider to be failures of authority in their surrounding environments, whether family, school or institutional, young people are increasingly seeking a firm but understanding attitude, free of hostility and cruelty, marked by justice and example. This corresponds more or less to the definition of military command, a relationship of authority that undoubtedly fits into a specific cultural and historical framework.

Beyond the few aspects discussed in this article, which are deliberately specific and personal, this perspective on the relational principles of military command and the expectations in terms of authority of the new generations in this area invites us to reaffirm these precepts both within the military institution and towards the outside world. Within

the framework of a communication plan, they could be vectors of a new vision of the army by young people, whose authoritarian or even tyrannical image is still conveyed by certain media. Admittedly, because of the specific nature of the military commitment, this communication would only be a prelude and would certainly not be sufficient to attract vocations, but could modify certain prejudicial representations. Even if the majority of young people have a favourable attitude towards the army, certain tropisms remain. Thus, in an opinion study conducted by the IRSEM in November 2011, it emerges that "the inventory of the qualities that make a privileged 'good soldier'....combines the values of commitment with those of authority, and values individual qualities whose purpose and meaning remain dedicated to the collective. This altruistic interpretation of the military profession is found in the vision that young people have of the role and usefulness of the army" [15].

On the other hand, the practice and implementation of these principles must be a priority because they are part of the loyalty stakes.

1] Article "Youth, authority and conflict", Ville École Intégration magazine, March 1998.

2] [Etty Buzyn](#), psychoanalyst and author of "The Psychology of the World". I love you therefore I will not give in 2] Etty Buzyn, psychoanalyst and author of "Questions de parents", collection "Questions de parents" in Albin Michel 2009.

3] Facebook is an online [social networking](#) service that allows users to post content and exchange messages. It now has more than a billion users and is the second most visited website in the world.

4] CSA-APPEL-La Croix survey conducted with a sample of 659 parents and 319 youths aged 15 to 24, 24 years old on the occasion of a congress of the association of parents of free education students.

[5] «Aggression, guilt and reparation», Petite Bibliothèque Payot, Paris 1994.

6] "Les attentes des jeunes en matière d'autorité": Rapport du groupe de travail de la commission armée-jeunesse session 2007-2008.

7] Article "The return of authority", website of the priory of Saint John at Murat.

[8] «Authority», Éditions Armand Colin, Paris 2009.

[9] «Psychology of the relationship of authority», Éditions ESF, Paris 1978, p 61.

[10] «The authority», Éditions Armand Colin, Paris 2009, p 103.

11] "L'exercice du commandement dans l'armée de terre, commandement et fraternité", September 2003, p. 7.

12] "L'exercice du commandement dans l'armée de terre, commandement et fraternité", September 2003, pp. 17-25.

13] "L'exercice du commandement dans l'armée de terre, commandement et fraternité", September 2003, pp. 30-36.

14] Article "Les trois conceptions actuelles de l'autorité", revue Les Cahiers Pédagogiques, March 2006.

15] Opinion study "Les jeunes français et les armées: images, attentes, engagements", IRSEM, November 2011.

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