

SOME CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS REGARDING INDOCTRINATION

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Abstract: *The paper presents and analyses two facets of a controversial educational reality, emphasising the presence of this duality also in the military education. A lot of scholars argue that indoctrination is a reprehensible psycho-pedagogical action, because an indoctrinated person is no longer able to think independently. This is the exact opposite of education and ideals of education, which aim to endow people with rationality, autonomy and cultural openness. Other scholars, even some of those mentioned, admit that education necessarily involves a certain dose of indoctrination of young people, in order to ensure the preservation of the values of communities and organizations. In order to be able to function as a unit and fulfill its missions, the military institutions turn to indoctrination to some extent, proposing and imposing values and desirable ways of behaving on its people. This controversial educational practice must be made aware and kept under control in order to prevent major deviations.*

Keywords: indoctrination, education, military

1. Introduction

Indoctrination is defined as the process of inoculating ideas, attitudes, cognitive strategies or professional methodologies. Charlene Tan and Hairon Salleh define indoctrination as the intention, process, and/or outcome of "the paralysis of intellectual capacity so that an indoctrinated person becomes unable to justify his beliefs and consider alternatives in an autonomous and rational manner"[1]. According to the authors mentioned, an indoctrinated person can be considered intellectually incapacitated for at least three reasons. First, the person attaches himself to beliefs or values without the need for adequate motivation or rational justification for doing so. Second, an indoctrinated person lacks the rational foundations on which his beliefs are based and is unable to justify those beliefs. In other words, such a person

is unable to critically analyse the extent to which his or her beliefs are honourable or worthy of respect. Third, the inability and unwillingness of an indoctrinated person to consider alternative approaches indicates that those beliefs are dogmatic. Therefore, indoctrination is reprehensible because an indoctrinated person is no longer able to think independently. This is exactly the opposite of education and educational ideals to endow people with rationality, autonomy and cultural openness.

Constantin Cucoș considers indoctrination as "a form of manipulation and clandestine persuasion, of conditioning knowledge without the awareness by the subjects concerned of the action to which they are subjected"[2]. Indoctrination aims to get people to give up reason, to suppress their critical spirit, to be guided by prejudices, to adopt "ready-made" ideas, opinions and

attitudes, to let themselves be carried away by the wave, accepting some ideas and values which he would normally, if he had fully understood, have rejected.

The precise boundary between education and indoctrination is often at the discretion of the person making the analysis or assessment. Some scholars distinguish indoctrination from education based on the fact that, unlike an educated person who understands what he is learning, the indoctrinated person is expected not to question and critically examine the doctrine he has learned. Although the psychosocial phenomenon of indoctrination is closely related to that of socialization, the term indoctrination is often used pejoratively and with negative connotations (in the context of expressing political opinions, theology, religious dogma, anti-religious or military beliefs), while socialization does not convey any specific value or connotation.

2. Analysis of the components of indoctrination

2.1. Characteristics of the targets of indoctrination

It is expected that the success of an indoctrination process will largely depend on the personality features of the target and the context of the target-person. In this regard, psychologists have come to the conclusion that "there are very few individuals who are constantly very easy or very difficult to be influenced" [3], as Ștefan Boncu says. However, it is considered that certain characteristics of the target-person, combined with certain characteristics of the context, lead to a greater or lesser influence.

Cacioppo, Petty, and Morris [4] found that people differ from each other depending on how much they like or dislike engaging in cognitive activities that require effort and concentration. Those who get high scores on the need for cognition like to solve difficult problems and analyse situations carefully, so that they can more easily receive a message that contains a lot of

information. Because they will focus on the content of the message in a situation of persuasion, they will better resist indoctrination. Conversely, subjects who have a low score on the need for cognitive effort will not carefully analyse the message, so they may be easily influenced by certain traits of the source of influence (for example, that the source is very likeable or very authoritarian). The level of resistance to indoctrination of this category of people is lower.

Apart from personality traits, in a situation of influence, the expectations of the target people become very important. The mere fact that the target person is aware of someone's intention to change their thoughts and attitudes leads to a reaction of resistance and he will actively resist to this attempt, in order to maintain his freedom of thought and action.

2.2. Characteristics of the indoctrination messages

Ruxandra Rășcanu considers that "the persuasive impact of communication goes through four processes at the conscious level of the target-person: attention, understanding, acceptance, retention"[5], and finally, the effect is observed in his behaviour. People are more easily influenced by their peers, who have similar attitudes and behaviours, but they are also influenced by those with traits and behaviours different from their own, insofar as they are the ones they would like to have (complementarity generating attractiveness). The author considers that "the message becomes more persuasive if it is associated with positive emotions at the receptor level. It is possible to become effective even if it is associated with negative emotions, obtaining as an effect the modification of the behaviours of the individuals in the desired sense, by inducing the fear"[6]. The more the quality of the arguments contained in the message generates more favourable and positive ideas among the audience, the greater the effect of persuasion, and the greater the

attitudinal and behavioural changes. Thus, one can reach even the maximum level of persuasion: propaganda and indoctrination.

2.1. Characteristics of influencers

The studies carried out on this subject show that the reaction to the message transmitted by a source that has the intention of influencing depends more on the characteristics of the source than the content and the meaning of the message. In this respect, three aspects were concerns of psychologists: the credibility of the communicator, the physical qualities and charm of the communicator, and his intentions.

In various organizational environments, the people with the greatest power of influence are obviously the leaders, in various positions within the organization. What makes a military leader effective in influencing his subordinates is not limited to being a good speaker. Di McLanachan finds that people "are more strongly influenced by the type of person who implements what he says, in other words, people look for a match between the message they receive and the person who transmits and supports that message"[7].

To the question of what makes a person efficient in the process of influencing others, Ștefan Boncu offers two complementary answers:

a) *the credibility of the person* (to be competent and trustworthy). Regarding this aspect, Ștefan Boncu states: "If the target believes that a competent source has something to gain through influence, he/she no longer trusts the source. Therefore, people are strongly impressed by sources that seem to argue against their own interests. Likewise, they are more easily influenced when they think they have heard a persuasive message by chance"[8].

b) *The attractiveness of the person*. The same author states: "The nicer, more attractive a source is, the more personal charm he/she has, the more influence he/she will gain. Therefore, the natural intention of anyone who wants to influence is to be

sympathetic, to make the target nurture positive feelings towards his person. Individuals are attracted to those who are similar to them or who are physically attractive - and these characteristics of the source can also contribute to the success of the message"[9].

3. The controversy over the presence of indoctrination in education

Indoctrination and education are conceptually linked, and in the literature there is disagreement about the exact nature of the relationship between them. „The difference between education and indoctrination is first ethical and only secondarily epistemological”[10].

It is quite controversial to admit that indoctrination, with all the negative connotations of the concept, is necessary and can play an important role in an adequate education, especially in the early stages, in childhood. Moreover, Michael Lopez [11] considers that the role of indoctrination is essential in the educational process at all ages, as institutional education has among its most important objectives the development of young people's ability to integrate and be actively involved in the community they belong to. For education to achieve this goal, young people must be initiated into the values of the community, which gives them, when they grow up, the premises for acquiring a viable and authentic social identity. No matter what community the young people belong to and no matter what the values of that community are, they are imposed on young people usually in the family, from an early age, when neither their explanation nor their understanding by children is possible. These values are induced to people from outside the family, through the psychosocial mechanisms of the groups they belong to, being taken per se, without awareness [12]. The community inevitably offers a cultural context through which it perpetuates its values over generations. Thus, education for community integration

does not give individuals a choice between ideas, behaviours, values, but imposes certain behaviour as the only accepted. Therefore, the authors draw attention to the fact that a certain degree of indoctrination appears as implicit in the parent-child educational relationship and has an essential role in the formation of stable social communities that share common values.

If we analyse it from this point of view, education necessarily involves a certain dose of indoctrination of young people, thus becoming a potentially dangerous tool. When it becomes an attribute of the education system, which tries to standardize and align people's attitudes, indoctrination makes it possible for abuses to occur precisely from those who should protect and guide the development of young people. The purpose of educational institutions is not to develop the potential of each individual in a unique and personal direction, but to transform individuals according to a standard model, so that they best fit the profile assumed at the institutional level, and the graduate to become like the matrix. But there are obvious differences between them. Unlike education, which is done "openly", in plain sight, indoctrination is hidden, masked. To state explicitly about a person that he is trying to indoctrinate you makes it impossible to even perform that act secretly, by concealing, camouflaging the intention. The subject on whom the indoctrination takes place is not aware that he/she is the target of such an action. Therefore, it is imperative that educated people understand the difference between the knowledge that is taught to them (accompanied by scientific arguments and logical demonstrations) and the beliefs that are inoculated (by ways that escape the conscious control of the person, using the affective-attitudinal register). "The great difference between knowledge and belief is the truth" [13] says Max Hocutt in a paper focusing on the relationship between

education and indoctrination. The same idea is supported by Horst Siegel [14]. Although the truth is necessary, it is not enough to be presented by the educator only at the declarative level, and evidence is needed to prove and support it. The person who is educated must have access to more sources of information, to listen to more opinions, especially about controversial issues. The student must not be intoxicated with a single ideology, but it is indicated that he/she should be able to relate, through knowledge, to a multitude of aspects. The fact that he will later adopt a certain point of view or an ideology to be guided by is a personal choice, made after taking into account all the knowledge to which he had access. By meeting these requirements, education has important ethical determinations.

To combat indoctrination does not mean to support an education without any doctrine, but to propose a doctrine that liberates thought, from the perspective of acquiring the spiritual autonomy of the learners.

3. The indoctrination carried out by military leaders

An indoctrinating organizational culture is a closed tradition that supports, prescribes and allows its members to adopt a monolithic and uniform ideology, according to Tan and Salleh [15]. Insisting that it has a monopoly on the truth, the organization opposes its members learning from other traditions, censors alternative worldviews and does not want to adapt to changing times and places. In this process, the indoctrinating organization undermines the social contexts that would allow its members to develop independent thinking and eventually become agents of moral change.

In the training of the military, the three indicators of indoctrination mentioned by Mihaela Momanu [16] can be noticed: indoctrination as intention, as the training content and as the teaching method which is used. The education achieved through the

personal example of the officer is situated by Michael Croce [17] also in the sphere of indoctrination. However, experts believe it is important to distinguish between indoctrination and so-called "brainwashing." The latter is an extreme form of indoctrination, which often involves coercive measures, while the former consists only in a deliberate attempt to influence a person or group of persons in order to reduce their capacity for critical analysis. It is also important to note that indoctrination is not an "all or nothing" phenomenon (i.e. categorical approaches such as: a person is either indoctrinated or not are not appropriate), but rather there are different degrees of indoctrination. This phenomenon can occur in connection with any content and context, including the field of education.

The issue of indoctrination is relevant in the context of leadership because leadership refers primarily to influence, as stated by Bush and Glover [18]. A leader exerts so much influence over one or more followers, so that the latter could later share the goals assumed by the group and fulfill a common task in an educational setting. However, leaders should not resort to indoctrinating subordinate staff for several important reasons. First, indoctrinated people, therefore lacking a healthy exercise in independent, rational, and autonomous thinking, do not have the power to sufficiently understand, internalize, and justify the direction, vision, and goals proposed by leaders. Second, living in an organizational environment with indoctrination tendencies, people can engage in silent resistance if they feel that they do not have enough space to express rational thoughts, fuelling job dissatisfaction.

According to social psychologists, the activity of influencing a person (or group of people) is ultimately aimed at triggering a behaviour. We have in view two main types of social activities in which there is a strong influence: leadership and education. In the

military environment, it is intended to provide information and to determine the acquisition of psychosocial skills that help the student, in the future, to increase his or her influence. As we live in a world of influence, it is desirable that our knowledge and skills should make young officers more attentive and less vulnerable to the influences around them. Probably, the training of future officers in terms of influencing their subordinates will increase their discernment in the production of their influence and will help them to handle it more safely in social life.

If the issue of indoctrination is deepened as a process of manipulation, the question of the ethics and legitimacy of a person's attempt to divert the attention of the target persons in order to hide his true intentions can be raised. Manipulation is considered by Stefan Buzărnescu [19] as an action to determine a social actor (person, group, community) to think and act in a way compatible with the interests of the initiator and not with their own interests, by using persuasion techniques that intentionally distorts the truth, leaving the impression of freedom of thought and decision.

In this way the harmful effect of indoctrination, as a result of the inconsistency or incompatibility between the values imposed from the outside, by the person, group or organization indoctrinating and the existing values of the indoctrinated person stands out. As a result of this phenomenon, indoctrinated people lose their authenticity, their own identity, in favour of taking over ideas, values and behaviours that are not their own.

4. Final remarks

In the process of transforming young civilians into the military, many researchers agreed that the military system has a strong impact on the attitudes and values of members of these professions. There are certainly many aspects that demonstrate the existence of a military culture of its own (for example, in sociological surveys, the

military has proven to be much more conservative than the civilian population). Within this military culture, values such as conformity, obedience, uniformity, freedom or unconditional service to the country's interests are insistently promoted.

Thus, through indoctrination, the military institution proposes and imposes desirable ways of behaving. The military institution demands from all its members the observance of the norms as imperative

obligations from which you cannot deviate without harming its combative capacity. All these values instilled by the military organizational culture do nothing but unite under one umbrella a considerable number of people with the same values and behavioural norms. Only in this way can they function as a single mechanism, consisting of thousands and thousands of parts.

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