

# BRENNUS 4.0

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## Taking onboard interculturality and rendering it operational

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Interculturality is hardly a new subject. However, no dictionary definition for the term exists. A clear definition is yet to emerge and be applied on a conscious and voluntary basis.

War amidst populations, the indigenization of troops and the identification of the population as the center of gravity are not only successive stages in military history. They also reveal the need and the level of “intelligence” required for this intercultural factor to be taken into account in the areas of both tactics and military strategy.

Unbeknownst to them, the fictional character, Monsieur Jourdain (*le Bourgeois gentilhomme*: Molière), as well as the historical figures, Marshals Gallieni and Lyautey were all forerunners in the practice of interculturality, without putting any name to it. Why not leave it at that? Why add an extra layer to an already particularly complex environment? Is interculturality really a factor of operational superiority? It only takes a quick overview to see that these days, it is a factor that cannot be ignored.

The market for interculturality is booming. Interculturality is a rapidly expanding sector. Numerous universities in France now offer high-level training: intercultural management MA, *Paris Dauphine* university, Intercultural commu-

nication and project engineering MA, *Paris 3* university (la Sorbonne), Intercultural communication MA, *ISIT* (Paris Intercultural School). The internet is awash with consulting firms and training institutions. This skyrocketing offer is merely a response to an all-time peak in demand. Every business, regardless of its size or sector, has come to recognize how important it is to consider intercultural factors.

To begin with, the aim of interculturality was to understand the “other” in order to secure increased sales. Now, the goal is to buy better and work more effectively in a multinational and multicultural environment and to collaborate better with a more diverse range of partners. The question is no longer merely one of dialogue between two cultures. The aim is to facilitate exchanges between actors from several different backgrounds. This new area of interest is not exclusive to the corporate world. The Ministries of Health and Education have also grasped that interculturality is a crucial factor for handling an evolving French society. Students’ and patients’ cultural origins can no longer be treated as secondary factors. Globalization is now a part of everyday life and is the source of a growing need for intercultural practice.





And yet, interculturality existed as a practice long before anyone tried to put a name to it. For some people, it simply came as second nature. But not everyone can be so skilled in this respect. We do not all share the same capacity for openness.

The Americans immediately grasped the importance of interculturality. The example of the U.S Department of Defense is very interesting. Interculturality is taught via various innovative channels, such as the American civilian-military program “Culture Gear” that proposes online simulation tools with perception-related scenarios.

The U.S DoD is aware that each individual has their own inherent ability in this domain, so they also run tests to select candidates with high potential and turn down others. This process can seem somewhat surprising. It also raises the question of the credibility of intercultural measuring tools. Interculturality training is therefore not just a passing trend but a real need expressed in several forms. New information and communication technologies certainly offer us possibilities that have yet to be explored. Is the French military just struggling to catch up?

*EMSOME* is the direct descendent of organizations that had been preparing French troops for overseas services since 1901. The “*Bureau technique des troupes coloniales*” became the “*Centre militaire d’information et de documentation sur l’outre-mer et l’étranger*”, which became the “*Ecole militaire de spécialisation pour l’OME*”, which, in July 2016, became the “*Etat-major spécialisé pour l’outre-mer et l’étranger*”. *EMSOME* has its own particular place in the Army “*Au contact*” model. As the headquarters supervising the 11 Army units stationed overseas, *EMSOME* has also maintained its status as a historical training school. It is no exaggeration to view it as a “school of interculturality”. *EMSOME* is at the heart of every mission: training, organic command and, more recently, the Army hub for operational military partnership (*CPMO*). Interculturality is the cement, the very DNA of each component of *EMSOME*.

More than 17,000 trainees are prepared for service outside of metropolitan France every year. *EMSOME* trains all Army personnel deployed for short periods (overseas operations or

short term missions), or stationed outside metropolitan France or abroad (long term missions, adapted military service, defense and security cooperation, permanent positions abroad). It also prepares the families involved (spouses and teenagers), as well as some military personnel from armed forces, directorates and services other than our own, as well as Gendarmes. Staff from other ministries also rely on *EMSOME* expertise on quite a regular basis. Preparation to leave metropolitan France is based on three pillars: firstly “knowledge”, or providing trainees with theoretical information on their new location’s human and geographic environment: its standards, laws and history. Secondly, “knowhow” and “know-how-to-be”: attitudes, customs, or various behaviors to either adopt or avoid. The goal of the relatively short training course is to awaken trainees’ curiosity. It also queries trainees’ aptitude for adapting to a drastically different environment. The practice of interculturality is formed across these three pillars. The concept ties into exchanges and interactions with people or groups from different cultures. An open mind, awareness, humility and grounding are the guiding principles.

As stressed by the Army Chief of Staff in his introduction to the conference on interculturality on 28 November 2018, “the two main pitfalls to avoid are ethnocentrism and cultural relativism”. The first means always having a preference for the standards and values underpinning our own culture. This pitfall propels us toward trying to decipher and explain “the other” via our own operating system, our own framework, our own cultural software for understanding. The result is usually an ordered sequence of different cultures, with the position of each determined by our own perspective of “the other”. Without fail, the incorrect conclusion we come to is that our own culture comes out on top.

The other extreme, cultural relativism, only authorizes us to consider and understand the actions and beliefs of the “other” from the perspective of *his* own culture. Cultural relativism rules out any judgment of others, opening the door on accepting anything, including what is unacceptable. Ultimately, the main difficulty with interculturality is pitting our own measure of understanding of the “other” at the right level: somewhere between the French humanist reading of the world and one that is irresponsible and devoid of benchmarks. Interculturality can be considered as a particular dimension which complements the comprehensive approach. Interculturality is in a different field to the comprehensive approach. Nonetheless, it offers a new dimension, throwing into relief every sector that constitutes the comprehensive approach. This new dimension has its rightful place in military action.

Interculturality is one of the keys to success in military action. Although at a first glance it may not seem crucial, it guarantees more comprehensive effectiveness to give faster, even longer-lasting results .

This is the challenge for *EMSOME*: operationalizing how interculturality is taken onboard. These days, interculturality is no longer just a humanist approach. It is no longer limited to ensuring our families have a good experience of moving abroad. Now, it boosts our operational efficiency. It does this firstly by providing better interactions with our allies and partners in operations. Given that these days, practically no mission takes place on a strictly national basis, this makes sense. If, up until now, you had assumed that interculturality was something that only applied to our African partners, think about the cultural gap dividing us from our German partners, for example.

Our operational efficiency is also rendered more effective via our capacity to understand the host states of our operations and the populations in the midst of whom we operate. The deepest and most personal knowledge and understanding of our enemy – these “dark forces” – directly fuel our operational efficiency.

Let there be no doubt that some of our enemies today will be actors with whom we must cooperate in future. As such, a comprehensive intercultural approach from all actors would enable us to avoid causing offence in the future.

It is mandatory for this operationalization, or in other words, the tangible implementation of interculturality, to undergo a concept phase. *EMSOME* is at this stage. The concept of interculturality has always existed but it has never been made official. This is what drives *EMSOME* to achieve this end goal, taking into account both the positive and negative aspects of the concept. More specifically, the process develops methodological and pedagogical approaches via a comprehensive understanding of the issues at play. Over the past year, the works carried out have been based on analysis provided by universities, writers, researchers, teachers and French and foreign prominent figures. The annual conference on interculturality is the opportunity for everyone to offer their views on the topic and, most importantly, to share ideas, research and lessons learned.

Under the authority of Joint Staff, *EMSOME* organizes “training of UN trainers” for foreign senior officers. This is another concrete example of how *EMSOME* is extending the action it takes. Finally, the training of future leaders in operations by the Army Center for the operational military partnership during “pre-deployment training” is the latest operating

mode to demonstrate *EMSOME*’s contribution to interculturality operationalization.

An operational research committee at the Army Command and General Staff School has started work on the first draft of a doctrine document to enable us to formalize the Army’s ambition in this area, as put forward by *EMSOME*.

Interculturality is not a fake or non-subject. Taking the cultural environment into account is a pressing issue. It is a vast topic which will continue to apply in future. *EMSOME* is committed to this issue and determined to provide the greatest benefit to forces deployed in operation. Day after day, *EMSOME*’s expertise in particular territories and environments, both physical and human, is consolidated by its organic authority over the 11 Army formations stationed outside of metropolitan France and abroad, its long history as a training school overseas and the backing from the Army center for operational military partnerships. The annual conference and forward planning contributes furthermore towards this expertise, making *EMSOME* a genuine school for interculturality in support of French Army operations.

