



## Taking onboard interculturality and rendering it operational

BRENNUS 4.0

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Histoire & stratégie

Interculturality is hardly a new subject. However, a clear conceptualization of the term is yet to emerge and be applied on a conscious and voluntary basis. The successive stages in military history – war amidst populations, indigenization of troops and the identification of the population as the center of gravity – reveal the need for this intercultural factor to be taken into account in the areas of both tactics and military strategy.

Unbeknownst to them, Gallieni and Lyautey were all forerunners of the practice of interculturality. Today, is there a need for conceptualizing interculturality? Is it really a factor of operational superiority? It only takes a quick overview to see that it is indeed a factor that cannot be ignored.

As globalization is now part of everyday life, there is a growing need for intercultural practice in the corporate world as well as in the public sector. The market for interculturality is hence booming. Numerous universities in France, such as Dauphine or La Sorbonne, now offer high-level training in intercultural management. Every business has come to recognize how important it is to consider intercultural factors: understanding the “other” is indeed crucial to work more effectively in a multicultural environment, and to collaborate better with a diverse range of partners. The United States immediately grasped the importance of interculturality. In the U.S Department of Defense, interculturality is taught via various innovative channels, using new technologies. The U.S DoD even runs tests to select candidates with high intercultural skills and turn down others. Interculturality training is therefore not just a passing trend but a real need expressed in several forms. In France, EMSOME (“État-major spécialisé pour l’outre-mer et l’étranger”), which trains all Army personnel deployed outside metropolitan France or abroad, can truly be seen as a “school of interculturality”. It is the direct descendant of organizations that had been preparing French troops for overseas services since 1901 and has maintained its status as a historical training school. EMSOME remains at the heart of every mission: training, organic command and, more recently, the Army hub for operational military partnership (CPMO).

The training provided by EMSOME relies on three pillars. Firstly, “knowledge” of the trainee’s new location’s human and geographic environment. Secondly, “knowhow” and “know-how-to-be”: attitudes, behaviors to either adopt or avoid. The goal is to enhance the trainee’s aptitude for adapting to a drastically different environment. As stressed by the Army Chief of Staff in his introduction to a conference on interculturality on 28 November 2018, “the two main pitfalls to avoid ” in practicing interculturality are “ethnocentrism and cultural relativism”. Ethnocentrism propels us towards trying to decipher and explain “the other” via our own framework of values, while cultural relativism rules out any judgement of others, opening the door to accepting anything. Ultimately, interculturality implies finding the middle ground between these two extremes. Today, the challenge for EMSOME is to render operational how interculturality is taken onboard. Interculturality is no longer just a way for our soldiers to adapt to a new environment: it must boost our operational efficiency. It can do so firstly by providing better interactions with our European and African allies in operations, and secondly, by enhancing our capacity to understand our enemies, and the populations in the midst of whom we operate.

It is mandatory for the operationalization of interculturality to undergo a concept phase. EMSOME is currently at this stage, trying to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issues at play. Over the past year, various works were carried out to achieve this goal, based on analysis provided by universities, writers and researchers.

As we’ve seen, interculturality is a crucial topic, which will continue to matter in the future. EMSOME is committed to this issue, and its historical expertise has already benefited the forces deployed abroad. Day after day, it reinforces its expertise, seeking to fulfill completely its role as a “school of interculturality”.

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