



DETECTING CONFLICTIVE CULTURAL FACTORS IN COMPLEX SCENARIOS OF INTERVENTION: MILITARY AND LOCAL ACTORS IN INTERACTION

Marién Durán and Antonio Ávalos¹

Granada University/ Madrid Autonomous University

Abstract:

The integration of cultural elements into the operational planning process is a complex task that requires practical and theoretical tools for a wide comprehension of the context to help solve the problem. This article shows the results of an empirical research which presents conflicting cultural factors as the starting point for the construction of *mediating structures*. The main result of our research is a partial cognitive structure, a system of ideas, represented in a template listing the basic conflictive factors at the tactical level that military could find in the development of their tasks. The template is also a valuable aid to design military training curricula and to be applied to any post-conflict stability operation in complex environments resulting from irregular or asymmetric conflicts.

Keywords : military forces, cultural competence; conflicting cultural factors; peacekeeping, local actors, post-conflict stability operations.

Titulo en Español: “La detección de factores culturales de conflicto en escenarios complejos de intervención: actores locales y militares en interacción”

Resumen:

La integración de elementos culturales en el proceso de planeamiento operacional, constituye una tarea compleja que requiere de herramientas prácticas y teóricas para una amplia comprensión del contexto que ayude a resolver los problemas. En este sentido, este artículo muestra los resultados de una investigación empírica que presenta los factores culturales conflictivos como el punto de partida para la construcción de “estructuras mediadoras”. El principal resultado de nuestra investigación es una estructura cognitiva parcial, un sistema de ideas representado en una plantilla, que recoge los factores conflictivos básicos que podrían encontrarse los militares en el desarrollo de sus tareas a nivel táctico. Esta plantilla, es también una importante ayuda para diseñar el entrenamiento curricular y aplicarse a cualquier operación de estabilización posconflicto en entornos complejos que resultan de las guerras irregulares o asimétricas.

Palabras clave: fuerzas militares, competencia cultural, factores culturales conflictivos, Operaciones de Paz, actores locales, operaciones de estabilización posconflicto.

Copyright © UNISCI, 2016.

Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores, y no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.

¹ Marién Durán es Profesora Dra. en el Departamento de Ciencia Política y de la Administración de la Universidad de Granada. Antonio Ávalos es Investigador del Taller Estudios Internacionales del Mediterráneo de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

E-mails: mduranc@ugr.es y antonio.avalos@gmail.com

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rev_RUNI.2016.n41.52672



1. Introduction: Culture in Asymmetric Conflicts²

In today's world, as conflicts have become increasingly complex, changing and difficult to sort out old models are unable to account for them. The new conflicts correlate with secessions, genocides, interethnic confrontations, civil wars, etc., as well as the appearance of fragile states.³ Furthermore, a prominent and common feature of many of those conflicts is the inequalities of the parties, which according to Mary Kaldor are based on identity issues rather than on ideologies or geopolitics as was characteristic in old wars.⁴ Amid such a context, international missions are designed to further peace, stability or post-conflict reconstruction operations. In order to carry out the mission, having a sound knowledge of the different identities and cultures involved in the conflict becomes a critical factor⁵. Religion, ethnicity, and identity—among others—are new concepts in the military sphere of countries that have deployed forces to participate in international peace or post-conflict reconstruction operations.

These concepts, which are closely related to cultural issues or cultural concept, should be useful to integrate into the operational planning process, both at the strategic and the tactical level, in order to de-escalate tensions between local actors and the international military forces involved.

But culture, as a concept, has many definitions. We prefer however Clifford Geertz's concept of culture as a "system of conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life..". Culture affects a complex entanglement of experiences, values and expectations that may vary within the very same cultural environment. Furthermore, culture reveals epistemological paradigms, i.e., it manifests itself through cultural models that help interpret the world where people live their lives.⁶ As Geertz states⁷, the only way to study culture is by

² The research on which this article is based was conducted during 2009 and 2010 as part of a major project called Multinational Experiment 6 (MNE-6) "Cross-Cultural Awareness", funded by Armed Forces Transformation Unit (UTRAFAS), the Spanish Training and Doctrine Command (MADOC) and the University of Granada within a multinational context with fourteen intervening allied countries. It is also important to outline that the military has remarked in some others research projects the importance of experience about local cultures as well as the significance of the knowledge acquired through the mission-oriented training. Those projects are "Lessons learnt in asymmetric warfare" (2011) and "Officer and Commander in Asymmetric Warfare Operations" (2015), both developed under the framework of the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS). The first one was funded by the Instituto Catalán Internacional para la Paz (ICIP) and the second one financed by the Mixed Centre University of Granada and TRADOC (CEMIX). The result obtained in these projects has also been enlightening with respect to the variables on cultural issues: both officers, NCOs and troops, consider cultural issues as critical to the performance of the mission. Therefore they underline the importance of a pre-deployment training on these matters. See the report: *Lessons Learned from asymmetric wars*, coordinated by Rafael Martínez and with the participation of Dr. Duran, published by the ICIP, 2012. The second project "Officer and Commander in asymmetric warfare operations (2015), that has been coordinated by Dr. Duran. Currently it is in its final drafting phase and, as mentioned, the results reinforce the ones already obtained.

³ Hobsbawn, Eric (2008): *Essays on Globalization, Democracy and Terrorism*, London, Little, Brown.

⁴ Kaldor, Mary (1999): *New and Old Wars, Organized Violence in a Globalized Era*, Stanford CA, Stanford University Press.

⁵ In fact, although the empirical basis of this study comes from the project "Cross-Cultural Awareness", several researches conducted later on have highlighted the importance of taking into account the cultural factor. In addition those works have obtained some similar results in terms of interaction with local population and leaders. Among them we have the research project "Lessons of asymmetric wars" (2010-2011) and "Officer and Commander in Asymmetric Warfare Operations" (2014-2015). This is the ratio to investigate out of the Spanish perspective

⁶ M. Durán et. al, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3.

⁷ C. Geertz (1997): *La interpretación de las culturas*, Barcelona, Gedisa Editorial, pp. 19-40.



investigating each human behavior within the cultural context they belong to, through experience and also by means of observation of the researcher¹.

As stated by Maren Tomforde, in this sort of conflicts and peacekeeping missions “the lack of cultural knowledge can be substantially disruptive and contribute to the failure of a mission”.⁸ So, the culture permeates all the levels of the international mission, both its essence and its character as well as the mandates or decision-making processes. However, although there have been efforts to integrate those elements in these missions, particularly the USA did serious work in promoting an integrative approach, it cannot be asserted that they are really integral parts of the operational procedures, as is illustrated in case of Afghanistan. Somalia serves as a paradigmatic case.⁹ As Saïd Haddad expounded, “[t]he disaster experienced by Canadian troops in Somalia demonstrates how a poorly prepared military force with regard to intercultural issues can fail in their mission.”¹⁰

In this sense and in these contexts some authors affirm that the combat roles start becoming secondary tasks¹¹ and supplementary skills, such as negotiation, communication, tactical skills, cultural training, administration and management capacity, empathy and flexibility turn into paramount¹² and begin to convert into a priority. This reality implies the need for specific knowledge on local culture, local languages, sociopolitical understanding of the terrain and a civil-military training on relationships¹³. In fact, this critical question was pointed out by Mary Kaldor in an interview in 2008: “A crucial and recurring problem for those who intervene, even those with the best of intentions, says Kaldor, is the psychological distance and the cultural barriers between the so-called internationals and the local population”.¹⁴

But even though it is not a new issue, scenarios such as Afghanistan have pointed out the necessity of a deep treatment of this question. The concern about the influence of cultural differences in international conflicts dates back to the seventies. Edmund S. Glenn, Robert H. Johnson, Paul R. Kimmel and Bryant Wedge tried to design a cognitive interaction model based on the Theory of Games to analyze culture in international conflicts. The main conclusion was that the use of “common sense” (defined as “the unconscious extrapolation to other cultures of assumptions generally accepted in the culture of the extrapolator”¹⁵) did not

⁸Tomforde, Maren: “Introduction: The Distinctive Role of Culture in Peacekeeping,” *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 17, n° 4 (2010), pp.450-456, p. 450.

⁹ See, for example Duffey, Tamara: “Cultural issues in contemporary peacekeeping,” *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 7, n°1 (2000), pp. 142-168.

¹⁰Saïd Haddad: “Teaching Diversity and Multicultural Competence to French Peacekeepers,” *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 17, n° 4 (2010), pp. 566-577, p. 568. This statement is based on the result of a survey conducted with Canadian forces deployed to Somalia: D. J. Winslow, *Le régiment aéroporté du Canada en Somalie. Une enquête socio-culturelle [The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia. A Socio-cultural Investigation]* (Ottawa: Commission d'enquête sur le déploiement des Forces canadiennes en Somalie [Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces in Somalia], 1997).

¹¹ Ruffa, Chiara; Dandeker Christopher and Vennesson, Pascal: “Soldiers drawn into politics? The influence of tactics in civil–military relations”, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 24, issue 2 (2013), pp. 322-334.

¹² Rubinstein, Robert; Keller, Diana M. and Scherger, Michael E.: “Culture and Interoperability in Integrated Missions”, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 15, n° 4 (2008), pp.540-555.

¹³ McD Sookermany, Anders: “What Is a Skillful Soldier? An Epistemological Foundation for Understanding Military Skill Acquisition in (Post) Modernized Armed Forces”, *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 38, n° 4 (October 2012), pp. 582-603.

¹⁴ Tren, M., “The international community makes a terrible mess wherever it goes”.
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/01/mary.kaldor.interview>,

¹⁵ Glenn, E. S., Johnson, R. H., Kimmel, P. R. and Wedge, B., “A cognitive interaction model to analyze culture conflict in international relations”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 14, n° 35 (1970): pp. 35-48.



assure a solution to the conflicts that may arise between the parties. Therefore, it was necessary to design a model which would make a distinction between conflicts of interest and conflicts of understanding so as to separate the conceptual frameworks where each of them was unfolding. Their research was conducted to analyze the conflicts between political entities, mainly in asymmetric conflicts. The availability of a mediating structure was proposed in order to facilitate the resolution of conflicts as well as to identify the type of conflict. These authors hold that a mediating structure is “a system of ideas (a partial cognitive structure) either actually or potentially shared by the parties to the conflict; the mediating structure affects the self-images of the parties.”¹⁶ However, when referring to asymmetric conflicts and the situation of international forces deployed to a peace, stability, or post-conflict reconstruction mission, conflicts arise between the international forces and the local population, both at the collective and individual level, which exerts an influence upon each other. It would be, consequently, necessary to find the proper mediating structures, whose content and symbolic representation may vary. Experience has driven to the employment of different methods: cultural advisors (CULAD) and human terrain systems in the USA army and red & green teaming as a proposal in some Nordic countries. All of them rely on the definition of a system of ideas which should reveal common and conflicting aspects or features of the actors involved. Nonetheless, such methods are not always widely accepted and are under discussion.¹⁷ The purpose of the present study is to provide a system of ideas which facilitates the identification of those aspects with regard to culture; it is what we call conflictive cultural factors.

Thus, one of the key milestones which have progressively affected stability and post-conflict reconstruction operations has been the forces' awareness of and competence on cultural issues. Cross-Cultural Awareness refers to the ability to be aware of people's perceptions relating to experiences, beliefs, values, concepts, and expectations within a given cultural context as well as of their impact. Therefore, this instrumental concept becomes the core concept to be developed in the realm of relationships between members with different cultural backgrounds. The knowledge about each other's culture and of one's own culture provides the necessary tools to resolve current and potential conflicts.¹⁸ According to Remi M. Hajjar, cultural competence is defined as “the knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral repertoire and skill sets that military members require to accomplish all given tasks and missions involving cultural diversity”.¹⁹ Additionally, Hajjar argues that cultural competence consists of two key components, a general one that facilitates the adaptation to new environments, and a specific one that is required to resolve issues relating to cultural diversity when carrying out tasks in environments lacking cultural unity. The former one affects the previous training for military members deploying to international missions, whereas the specific component belongs to the tactical level domain. The conflictive cultural factors are present in both components and should be thoroughly considered when designing general training programs for military forces and when resolving conflicts during the unfolding of a mission.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷ For example, there are ethical considerations at stake concerning the employment of Human Terrain Systems, as described by Zehfuss, Maja: “Culturally sensitive war? The Human Terrain System and the seduction of ethics” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 43, nº 175 (2012), pp. 175-190.

¹⁸ Durán, Marién and Ávalos, Antonio (2013): *Culturas cruzadas en conflicto, militares y poblaciones locales en misiones internacionales: Afganistán y Líbano*, [*Cross Cultures in Conflict, Military and Local Populations in International Missions: Afghanistan and Lebanon*], Granada, Editorial Universidad de Granada, Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Hajjar, Remi M. “A New Angle on the U.S. Military's Emphasis on Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: Connecting In-Ranks' Cultural Diversity to Cross-Cultural Competence,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 36, nº 2 (2010): 247-263, 249.



The contribution of a sound training that involves cross-cultural awareness should pursue the achievement of cultural competence by military members, which must be adapted to the mission’s needs and the tasks to be executed. The purpose is to prevent what Jaz Azari, Christopher Dandeker and Neil Greenberg call *cultural stress*, which “operates where military personnel overseas interact with indigenous populations to achieve their mission objectives”.²⁰ The *cultural stress* derives from cultural as well as linguistic differences. Such differences shape the conflictive cultural factors which must be considered to design training curricula for the armed forces. It goes without saying that individual psychological factors, which are difficult to assess, may also affect the successful achievement of the required cultural competence which paves the way for the interaction between locals and military personnel. The main objective is to build up *valid relationships*, which create opportunities for future successful interactions and, as a result, make mission success more likely.²¹ The valid relationships generate a feedback cycle that will increasingly make future interactions easier and communication more fluid. Similarly, distortions arising from cultural differences will be progressively eliminated, i.e., unexpected effects, and in the best case scenario synergy among the actors will develop. The *valid relationships* result from the combination of skills (gained through education, continuous and previous training for the mission, and experience) and capacities (which define the subject’s psychological profile). Four types of military subjects can be identified in relation to the likelihood of obtaining *valid relationships* from their personal skills and capacities—such likelihood will increase according to their expertise (knowledge and/or experience).

Table 1. Valid relationships

Intervening individual across interactions	WITH capacities	WITHOUT capacities
WITH skills	Very likely valid relationship	Likely valid relationship (objective)
WITHOUT skills	Likely valid relationship (subjective)	Unlikely valid relationship

Source: By authors.

Valid relationships are objective when they result from gained skills, whereas subjective ones derive from the subject’s personal capacities. Consequently, a sound general training will help facilitate that subjects overcome the *cultural stress*, as well as their psychological limitations (cultural prejudices).²²

In asymmetric conflict scenarios, the local population is a key element for the achievement of the mission’s goals. So, in order to be able to create *valid relationships* Peacekeepers have to adjust to local cultures and adopt inoffensive standards of behaviour to realize the mission aims and avoid stereotyping and misjudgement of other people’s behaviour. In other words, for the peacekeepers, and also for those planning the operation, an understanding of cultural variances is an indispensable and compelling precondition for

²⁰ Azari, Jaz, Dandeker, Christopher and Greenberg, Neil: “Cultural Stress: How Interactions With and Among Foreign Populations Affect Military Personnel,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 36, nº 2 (2010): pp. 585-603, 599.

²¹ Durán and Ávalos, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-127.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 107-127.



success. A culturally diverse and culturally sensitive approach to peacekeeping issues such as mission conceptions, mandates and cultures is needed, as well as culturally aware peacekeepers.²³

Whether hostile, neutral or friendly, people are the *center of gravity* on which the operational planning process and the campaign design must focus. It will also determine the operations the opposing and the coalition forces will execute. The joint doctrine has recently revealed that irregular wars are closely linked to winning a war of ideas and perceptions. The fight takes place in an environment amongst people and the results are determined by their perceptions and the support they may provide.

The interactions between the military forces and the local population in international missions may provoke problems due to a lack of cultural knowledge or misinterpretations of local customs or cultural usages.²⁴ In order to prevent such a situation a sound knowledge which enables the understanding of the different cultural dynamics, behaviors, attitudes and emotions of the local population is required to predict their reactions.

Notwithstanding, the level of cultural knowledge required at the different echelons of command, levels of responsibility or position in the Staff may vary. If, in the case of a private, knowing how to avoid misunderstandings or offensive behavior towards the population may be enough, an officer should possess a sounder and deeper knowledge which may involve being able to interact with key local leaders (key leader engagement—KLE—) or know how to integrate the cultural factors into the military decision making process.

Previous experiences have revealed the lack of appropriate cultural knowledge or its weakness on the part of military forces. Among a number of factors, the weaknesses are due to insufficient time for cultural training since the forces may have been deployed to different scenarios in a short period of time; during the relief of forces, time constraints hamper the transfer of information; lack of knowledge of the local language (reliance on interpreters); and short tours of duty (4-6 months).²⁵ These conditions are not the most favorable ones for military personnel to become aware that concepts such as family, marriage, loyalty or honor are highly complex concepts which need not be understood or perceived by other peoples in the same way they do.

On the whole, military forces lack appropriate instruments to manage several situations involving daily interaction with local communities, i.e., tools which enable them to gain the required awareness, understanding, and cultural competence in order to be able to predict future reactions and avoid potential conflicts. Owing to that shortage of knowledge about the socio-cultural structure of the area of operations, military members serving in positions which imply regular and frequent interaction with the local population tend to individually find information by the own means. This research aims at preventing deviations which such a procedure may provoke and provides a template that enables the ordering of basic knowledge about the cultural elements that may negatively affect the relationships with the local population. To that end, the conflictive cultural factors collection process is presented, which extracts the data from the cultural elements that the actors perceive may hamper their relationships. Finally, the result shows a template which may serve as the basis

²³ Tomforde, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

²⁴ Rubinstein, *et. al, op. cit.*, p. 550.

²⁵ Azari et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 583-603.



for any particular mission in order to complement the content on each conflictive cultural factor in a complex operational environment.

2. Research Focus

This article presents the results of a study whose objective is the detection of conflictive cultural factors that are deriving from the perceptions of the individuals engaged in peace, stability and post-conflict reconstruction operations at the tactical level in asymmetric conflicts. Such perceptions may stem from individual prejudices or previous experiences and can be either positive or negative. The cultural elements that are surveyed in order to detect conflictive cultural factors are those affecting the relationships established by military members when executing tasks that necessarily involve contact between the military forces and the local population. The detection of the conflictive cultural factors aims at both, facilitating the creation of specific resources for the operational environment and the use of *ad hoc* tools that conveniently integrate cultural issues into the planning process.

To our study purpose, experience and research of some case studies has been pinnacle. We need to know those concrete cultural factors which are important for the interaction in some specific contexts. So, the purpose is to operationalise the concept of culture just to obtain the cultural factors influencing the interaction and the communication with the population. It implies the identification of relevant cultural aspects that exert an influence on military operations and help us understand the attitudes towards life and the effects of the decisions against the socio-cultural structure of the operational environment. Therefore, the operational culture will allow service members, along with the coalition members and other partners, to employ the knowledge about a foreign culture to serve different purposes such as understand socio-cultural actions, influence the adversary and the local population, legitimise the coalition's actions and prevent conflicts. In this sense our contribution is significant in the way we provide an operationalization of culture based in the practical experience but founded in a concept of culture that could be practical and theoretical: we propose a useful model for detecting conflictive cultural factors and in the theoretical arena we have used the concept of valid relations as we have seen before.

3. Method and Techniques

Our initial two research questions are:

*How can we improve military functions and activities to become more culturally effective?
What is the impact of Cultural Awareness on Commanders, Staff and soldiers?*

In order to answer these questions, our main objective was to detect the cultural factors that could impact or enter into a conflict between the mission operational environment and local populations in the course of post-conflict stabilization operations at the tactical level in the framework of irregular warfare or asymmetric conflict.

With the aim of meeting the research objectives, our field work was designed for the missions in Afghanistan and Lebanon. We picked out those case studies due to the fact that the local culture of both scenarios is pretty much different from the one of the mission components, and also because both missions are meaningful for Spanish Army owing to the period of time it has been involved.

The field work was mainly conducted through semi-structured interviews and two focus groups which included Spanish military personnel deployed on missions in these countries. The military that have been in Afghanistan were interviewed in Spain. The *in situ*



field work was carried out in Lebanon. Interviewees were Spanish military personnel (mainly CIMIC, Public Information and PSYOPS personnel) posted at the Spanish base *Miguel de Cervantes* in charge of the relationships with local actors, political officials, local religious representatives, NGOs and other international organizations' personnel. We also interviewed United Nations Personnel, local and international NGOs, local leaders (political and religious leaders). All of them were present in the operational area of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.²⁶ In total seventy-five interviews and two focus group were conducted. Total time for interviews was 123 hours.

The most important issue to work out prior to start working was to come up with a tool to obtain the conflictive cultural factors. In this respect, it has been significant the researchers' experience and intuition. A global semi-structured interview was devised for the militaries. The interview designed is a result of crossing the cultural dimensions with the military activities carried out in the theater of operations. It was based on the matrix shown on Table 4. However, while conducting interviews, some important conflictive cultural factors were also obtained asking directly to the interviewees about those cultural issues relevant for the mission, it means, what they deemed to be the most relevant traits of the local culture causing frictions or tensions. In this way we could have a double-check to detect and elaborate the final list of conflictive cultural factors to keep in mind.

The cultural elements noted by the military personnel in the interviews and discussions groups have been numerous and varied, which shows their relevancy for the military forces' routines. The day-to-day interaction with local actors, which is the main task for many military members, becomes a constant flow of information about new topics that sometimes impress or have an impact on military actors. This is particularly true for CIMIC members, who are the channel of communication between the civil population, the local authorities, the international organizations, the NGOs and the military contingent in order to make inform decisions at the tactical level.²⁷ Such interactions have provided knowledge and experience about the local cultures. This has made it possible to construct a typology of relevant cultural elements according to their nature.

4. Detection of Cultural Factors

As we already explained the conflicting cultural factors were isolated by two ways. The first one by asking directly to our interviewees and the second method through a matrix designed for our semi-structured interviews.

4.1 Detection of cultural factors: asking directly to our interviewees.

After conducting our direct question (in the context of the semi-structured interview), we analyze interviewees' answers.²⁸ The elements we found after the discourse analysis can be grouped into four categories which are related to the cultural dimensions tackled in our research:

- political concepts
- social concepts
- economic concepts
- historical concepts and concepts related to the belief system.

²⁶ A total of 48 interviews were done. See. M. Durán and A. Ávalos.

²⁷ Jenkins, Larry: "A CIMIC contribution to assessing progress and Peace Support Operations," *International Peacekeeping*, Vol 10, nº 3 (2003), pp. 121-136.

²⁸ To analyze the discourse it was used the software application NVivo8.



They can be explicitly grouped as shown below (Table 2). The table shows the cultural elements obtained from our research. These elements are the most mentioned by respondents and they conform a comprehensive typology that could be standard in anthropology.

Table 2. Classification of cultural elements according to their nature.

(The columns are not interrelated)

<i>Political concepts</i>	<i>Social concepts</i>	<i>Economic concepts</i>	<i>Historical concepts and concepts related to the belief system</i>
Legal / Illegal	Family	Education	Symbols
Law	Family life	Literacy	Religion (fatality)
Power	Respect to elderly	Transactional costs	Values and norms
Governance	Age	Needs	Time (historical) / time management
Government	Gender	Extrapolation (knowledge transfer)	Individual / Collective-individual / Group-Community
Leadership	Marriage (initiation and rites of passage)	Public goods	Tradition (customs)
Legitimacy	Sexuality	Social capital	Tradition / Discourse
Representation	Honor	Employment	Respect/Recognition/Credibility/Reliability
Security	Loyalty	Knowledge transfer (technical, scientific, industrial)	Status / role
Conflict	Amity / enmity;	Social services	Role of military uniforms
Insurgency / Subversion	Social control	Corruption	Impact of bearing or not arms
Sense of belonging to a community / nation	Social change / evolution	Development	Hierarchical position within the military structure
Education	Solidarity	Benefits	Perceptions about military culture
Literacy	Inward / outward	Poverty	Language (in terms of human interaction)
Needs	Networks	Agriculture	Peculiarities
Transactional costs	Respect/Recognition/Credibility/Reliability	Infrastructures	Religion (religious conflict, beliefs and religious practice)
Extrapolation (knowledge transfer)	Sincerity	Food	History
Public goods	Tribal fragmentation	Economy	Relevant historical figures
Social services	Stereotypes	Living conditions	Culture
Corruption	Role	Approach to work and duties	Art
Poverty	Motivations	Culture	Local traditions
Infrastructures	Approach to religion, tribe, women, and family affairs	Tradition (customs)	Respect to elderly
Culture	Culture	Values / norms	Local customs
Values and norms	Religion (religious conflict, beliefs and religious practice)	Art	
Respect/Recognition/Credibility/Reliability	Tradition (customs)	Respect/Recognition/Credibility/Reliability	
Individual / collective	Individual / Collective-individual / Group-Community	Attitudes	
Individual / group-community		Perceptions	
Tradition / Discourse			
Role of military uniforms			



Impact of bearing or not arms	Education	Local festivals
Hierarchical position within the military structure	Literacy	Way of thinking
Perceptions about military culture	Needs	Attitudes towards conflictive issues relating to Western culture
Special national features	Values and norms	Special national features
Religion (religious conflict, beliefs and religious practice)	Attitudes	Attitudes
Attitudes	Perceptions	Perceptions
Perceptions		

Source: By authors

The categories obtained and shown above are not new. They were used to find out which elements provoked conflict in the interaction with locals. The cultural difference in terms of interpreting each of the elements in the table becomes the main source of conflict. Such a difference may give rise to pseudo-conflicts of interest which, in fact, are conflicts of understanding that should have been previously resolved.

Under these circumstances, the role of the mediating structures is paramount to determine the type of conflict and the possible solutions. Notwithstanding, so as to extract the conflicting cultural factors we do need a complementary and more specific tool that is shown in the following section. This tool is really a new instrument to detect those factors.

4.2. Detection of cultural factors: matrix designing

It appears to be convenient for decisions makers to be able to assess and determine during the planning process which elements may affect or be affected by cultural issues in terms of content, meaning and suitability.

As previously mentioned, the common patterns relating to the basic conflictive elements we are trying to identify are what has been called cultural factors, which are closely linked to the cultural dimensions as well as to the activities executed by the military personnel in the operational environment.

The cultural aspects of the local society are paramount for a set of military activities. Both information strategies and campaigns, and any other activity in which the local population is involved or is intended to gain their support, must be based on the values, principles and mindset of the local society. Therefore, one of the tasks at the beginning of our research was to determine in which military activities the population is involved to a greater extent. A military activity is relevant when communication with the population is established or when it affects a cultural dimension.

In our study, we deem military activities or functions the ones considered to be directly relevant for the population since they involve an interaction between the military personnel



and the locals and are a source of experience for those in the operational environment.²⁹ Following the criteria mentioned four activities were chosen:

1. PSYOPS (Psychological Operations)
2. CIMIC (Civil-Military Co-operation)
3. PI (Public Information)
4. KLE (Key Leader Engagement).

These activities are relevant for the unfolding of the mission as they provide information about the operational environment and about the perceptions of the influence exerted by the process being executed in order to implement the mandate over the local population. Consequently, these activities describe a privileged contact between both parties and other cultural groups and may be the best source for obtaining results as far as cross-cultural awareness is concerned. On the one hand, the activities project an image of the military personnel and of the mission; on the other, the actions and reactions of the local population also produce an image that the military personnel in contact will perceive. It goes without saying that there exist channels of information that transfer the experiences of both parties.

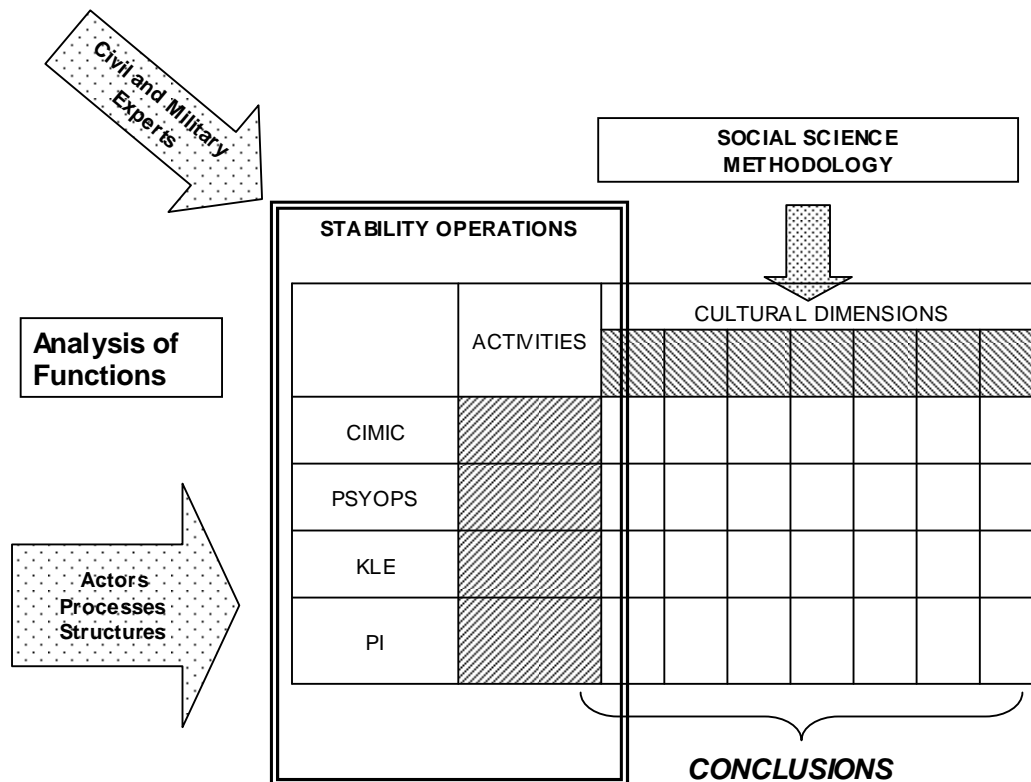
The content will be highly dependent on the fact that the relationship established has been a valid one.

On the other hand, we can find the cultural dimensions that feature the environment where the individuals live their lives and for which they have developed solutions that characterize their cultural model. Initially, a preliminary list of cultural dimensions was proposed in accordance with the typology made in table 2: history, belief system, social organization, political structure and economy.

In order to detect conflictive cultural factors, the development of the present research suggested as an original innovation, the creation of a methodological tool which should be as simple as possible but which relates the cultural dimensions of the operational environment with the relevant military activities, as described above. According to this, the conflictive cultural values result from crossing the cultural dimensions and the military functions, which are shown in the chart below.

²⁹ M. Durán *et al.*, *op. cit.*, chapter 4.

Table 3. Crossing of cultural dimensions and military functions or activities



Source: By authors

The chart shows the four basic military activities that directly involve contact with the local population. Intelligence operations are not included since they tend to be covert and utilise the conflictive cultural values in an instrumental fashion. The aim of intelligence operations is not to create overt *valid relationships* but to gather information. Obviously, some information gathered through intelligence operations can be pertinent and become part of the knowledge and experience which may help refine the instruments and tools that facilitate the development of relationships in other activities. In any case, that goes beyond the scope of the present study. Otherwise, the advantage of this chart rests on the availability and utility to use it in different case studies by combining the military functions deemed as important for a specific case scenario with the different cultural dimensions.

5. Our Results: Template for Conflictive Cultural Factors

The interviews, which were designed based on the crossings of the matrix proposed and were given to military personnel conducting the activities described above, served to analyze the interviewee’s experiences relating to their specific field work and to the cultural dimensions at the tactical level. The most outstanding situations showed difficulties of communication or inability to understand the intentions or actions of their interlocutors, i.e., conflicts of understanding. Interviews applied to military showed the most relevant frictions. Additionally, there were interviews given to religious and political leaders in Lebanon showed coincident opinions and issues as already manifested by the military personnel interviewed in Afghanistan. The conflicts were recurrent and five factors seemed to be causing them, particularly between the provincial reconstruction team (PRT) and the local population: corruption, honor, gender, legitimacy and discourse.



As already noted, the more distant the cultural basis and the experiences are from the local one, the more likely understanding conflicts will arise. In our study cases, the conflictivity related to the cultural elements repeated itself with both scenarios and with the different actors. The template is the result of two study cases, Afghanistan and Lebanon, and can be enhanced with the incorporation of new experiences from other environments; however, the basic conflicts are presented.

Table 4. Template of conflictive cultural factors.

<i>Don't touch issues</i>	<i>Main elements</i>	<i>Related to</i>
<p>Corruption</p> <p>Corrupt:</p> <p>from Latin corrumpere 'mar, bribe, destroy'</p> <p>1. willing to act dishonestly in return for money or personal gain.</p> <p>(Compact Oxford Dictionary)</p>	<p>Power/authority</p> <hr/> <p>Law</p>	<p>Networks of solidarity/Networks of selfishness</p> <p>Family/Tribe/Clan</p> <p>Gifts/Tithe (assistance into the kin group)</p> <p>Transactional costs/Benefits</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Loyalty</p> <hr/> <p>Legal / Illegal</p> <p>Individual good/Collective good</p> <p>Private good/Public good</p> <p>Transactional costs/Benefits</p> <p>State/Insurgency</p> <p>Social legitimacy on Public goods</p>
<p>Gender</p> <p>From old French gendre, from Latin genus 'birth, family, nation'.</p> <p>1 the state of being male or female (with reference to social or cultural differences).</p> <p>USAGE The words gender and sex both have the sense 'the state of being male or female', but they are typically used in slightly different ways: sex tends to refer to biological differences, while gender tends to refer to cultural or social ones.</p> <p>(Compact Oxford Dictionary)</p>	<p>Marriage position</p> <hr/> <p>Education/ Socioeconomic position</p>	<p>Marriage (single/divorced/married/widow)</p> <p>Family</p> <p>Religion/Tradition</p> <p>Social control</p> <p>Honor</p> <p>Sexuality/Reproduction</p> <p>Values/Norms</p> <p>Role</p> <hr/> <p>Social change</p> <p>Poverty</p>



<p>Legitimacy</p> <p>Legitimate from Latin legitimare ‘make legal’. 1 conforming to the law or to rules. (Compact Oxford Dictionary)</p>	<p>Tradition/Charisma</p> <hr/> <p>Law/ Rationality</p>	<p>Age Recognition/Prestige Networks/Family Honor Confidence Power/Authority/Leadership</p> <hr/> <p>Values/Norms Legal / Illegal Corruption Symbols Social services Sense of belonging Professionalism Private good/Public good</p>
<p>Discourse</p> <p>From Latin discursus ‘running to and from’, from discurrere ‘run away’. 1 written or spoken communication or debate. (Compact Oxford Dictionary)</p>	<p>Rational Narrative</p> <hr/> <p>Mythical Narrative</p>	<p>Power Law/Norms Transactional costs/Benefits Welfare Needs Hierarchy Credibility Solidarity Motivations Loyalty Employment/Development Education (...) Modernization</p> <hr/> <p>Authority Fatalism/Tradition/Religion Symbols Honor Respect/Recognition Sense of belonging Leadership Networks (...) Traditionalism</p>



<p>Honor</p> <p>from Latin honor. 1 high respect. 2 pride and pleasure from being shown respect. 3 a clear sense of what is morally right. 4 a person or thing that brings credit. 5 a thing conferred as a distinction.</p> <p>(Compact Oxford Dictionary)</p>	<p>Tradition</p>	<p>Religion/Tradition Family/Tribe/Clan Socioeconomic position Education Marriage Respect/Recognition Norms/Values Behaviour Age/Gender</p>
	<p>Confidence</p>	<p>Loyalty Solidarity Sincerity Networks</p>

Source: By authors from the qualitative analysis of interviews

The left column of the table includes the issues which must not be tackled without further information (what it has been called *don't touch issues*), i.e., the basic conflictive factors detected and a general definition of them. The central column shows the main elements of the factors. These elements may provoke conflicts of understanding. The right column presents the most important issues relating to the main elements.

As can be observed, using the table is relatively simple. If the military personnel, during their interaction with local actors when performing military activities such as CIMIC, KLE, PSYOPS, etc., can identify the elements in the table, it will be likely that problems may arise. So, they may turn to the main elements and to the *don't touch issues* involved in order to identify which problem is being dealt with. Consequently, it is easier for the PRT's commander to resort to the available tools and resources to make the best decision. Knowing the tools may facilitate the application of both palliative and preventive measures. The cultural elements are often an undesired disruptive element when trying to carry out certain actions. Taking the cultural values into consideration will provide added value to any activity that must be performed, for example, a quick impact project (QIP).

Thanks to the identification of the conflictive cultural factors in the operational environment, undesired conflicts will be prevented during the unfolding of the operation. That would represent the preventive function of the template. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that sensitiveness towards the cultural elements must be a component of the abilities developed by the military personnel during the training phase as well as of any capacities that may be enhanced, particularly the empathy.

In addition, the template may well serve to turn experiences in the operational environment into learning about basic cultural issues that can affect future actions as well as to systematize the lessons learned. When there is a conflict with the local population, it is paramount to identify the causes. In this case, the template can be used to provide a palliative function, which will allow to distinguish which of the originating factors have been cultural or not. If conflictive cultural factors are identified, the response to the problem becomes simpler and helps prevent future conflicts that are triggered by cultural issues.

However, not all the cultural elements are insurmountable obstacles. Some flexibility makes dialog possible. But it also entails that some of them, given their function of social



cohesion, have lesser flexibility. The decisions that can affect those cohesive elements must be thoroughly examined since the conflict may arise from actions whose planning process did not take those elements into consideration during the decision making process. In such cases, it is convenient to have the necessary information and advice to make the right decision.

The inflexible or quasi-inflexible cultural elements that must be considered for their likelihood to be conflictive in the theater of operations at the tactical level are the following ones.

Corruption: In our case, it refers to social, economic and political practices that are associated with a particular model of patronage and protection which may seem illegal, immoral or not ethical to a foreign observer but is endorsed by an ethnic group or community. What is their normal way of exchange and relations for locals, it could be interpreted as corruption for a foreigner. A significant example is the gift. It has been recurrent in the answers of our interviewees and it has been also perceived in a negative way. In societies such as Afghanistan, military has observed among the local populations the obligations to give and to receive. Locals usually wanted to give presents to Spanish Army members in order to receive some benefits in return. Reciprocity and exchange is a way of covering different necessities, that in the Western societies are provided by the welfare state, In this sense it is important to consider Marcel Mauss' book, *The gift, in which he* analyzes the exchanges in archaic societies. He sustained that "to give something creates an obligation on the receptor in the way that he will have to return it some moment, some day". The gift therefore "is not only a way for payment for services, but also a way to maintain a beneficial partnership"³⁰. Mauss considers that such exchanges are one of the earliest forms of economic and social solidarity to cooperation, protection and mutual assistance among individuals and communities³¹.

Gender: According to the World Health Organization, "gender refers to social concepts of roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that each society considers appropriate for men and women. The different roles and behaviors can generate gender inequalities, ie differences between men and women that systematically favor one of the two groups. In turn, these inequalities can create inequities between men and women with regard to both their health and their access to health care"³².

Thus, to talk about gender we are considering not only relational categories and classification of subjects in identity groups.

The different social constructions on the roles of man and woman can produce cultural clashes. In traditional societies, respecting the hierarchical positions of men and women in the family and in the social structures, their access to education, their social role, and their decision-making capacity is critical. Gender belongs to the realm of the creation of relationships between men and women and to their underlying power dynamics. Gender reveals the divides that have been built basing on sex. The distance between sexes can depend on other factors apart from biological differences. Gender attribution may also be an ascription regardless of the individual's sex. It has also been one of the most recurrent cultural elements observed by military. The roles reserved for women in this kind of society, so different from the roles of women in Western societies, who receive basic knowledge on this

³⁰ Maus, Marcel (1990): *The gift*, London, Routledge, pp. 71-73.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-73

³² World Health Organization (2015). Last entry on 20 July 2015. <http://www.who.int/topics/gender/es/>



issue. The physical role of women when a military entered a home, when a women had to be stopped at a check point on a family or while providing medical treatment, creates situations that might compromise the interaction between foreign military and local populations. Precisely the issue of health care for women was one of the most brought out in interviews³³.

Legitimacy: Recognizing the valid interlocutors among the local actors is not always an easy task. This is due to the fact that in a rational organization the power is dependent on laws rather than on a social structure, whereas the traditional ways of gaining authority are reliant on customs, traditions and social position. There are non-rational rules and norms which must be known to identify the legitimate actors since, regardless of the administrative structure imposed by the law, the social or moral authority may fall on people not appointed by the administration. In Max Weber definition, this is the traditional legitimacy, the legitimacy of the patriarchs or it could also be the charismatic legitimacy due to the qualities of the warlord or elected chief warriors³⁴

This fact is expressed in a very illustrated commentary of some militaries:
"The relationship with the leaders move between maintaining its prestige and power (make it clear that they are the bosses) while knowing that we can provide them with the things they need to try to persuade us to get them."

Local leaders are interested in normalizing relations with the contingent. This also gains legitimacy with its people. This can be used by staff of the mission to acquire greater capacity to legitimize local actors which would allow greater leeway to regulate relations.³⁵

Discourse: The discourse as interaction in the sense of intellectual tradition was studied mainly by Michel Foucault. Speeches produce discursive formations if there is unity and persistence of the issues. Foucault worked this notion in his book "Archaeology of Knowledge"³⁶. He started from the premise that the discursive formations are governed by rules that operate on the conscience of individuals. This means that the rules are not purely grammatical or logical guidelines but can define a system of conceptual possibilities that determine the limits of thought and language in a particular period and place. When "a regularity can be defined among objects, types of enunciation, concepts and thematic choices (an order, correlations, positions in operations, transformations), then we can affirm that it is a discursive formation"³⁷. Foucault applied the speech development in broad fields of knowledge such as medicine or economy. He even developed discourse's notion related to power and legitimacy. Foucault argued about the interaction of power and knowledge, the control and even the rituals of the discourse³⁸. In that way, if every human relation is a struggle and continuous negotiation to achieve power, the discourses maintaining in the mission should be carefully analyzed in order to avoid provocation or a clash of discourses. The goals of the mission, which are based upon a rational thinking style, and the local culture, which generates a discourse stuffed with mythical explanations for people's behaviors, attitudes and actions, may come into conflict. In fact, the local population may resort to mythical narratives to achieve particular and rational objectives by capitalizing on the

³³ Situations that military could face (i) families seeking health care for female members who had to be assisted by female health personnel; (ii) family members who do not seek care because this request can mean a stain on the family.

³⁴ Weber, Max (1980), *El político y el científico*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, p. 85

³⁵ Durán, Ávalos, 2013.

³⁶ M. Foucault, Michel (2013): *Arqueología del conocimiento*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55

³⁸ Foucault, Michel (2002): *Un diálogo sobre el poder y otras conversaciones*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial.



personnel's lack of knowledge about their cultural system and their discursive formations. These are interesting achievements of this project that should be further analyze.

Honor: This is the most important issue. The main reason is that infringing upon an individual's honor, whether on purpose or not, will trigger a social reaction that may well neutralize all the preceding good actions and jeopardize mission success. Honor generally relies on two pillars: tradition and customs, and confidence (be it understood as propinquity and assurance regarding the actions from the corresponding actor).

Margaret Visser³⁹ observes that in an honor-based society "a person is what he or she is in the eyes of other people". The societies have their own codes of honor or systems and even more the traditional societies. These codes define or construct a set of rules or principles that govern a community, which demands an honorable behavior. In traditional societies, these systems are very rigid and its violation can result in death for whom breaking the rules. In this way, the militaries deployed in scenarios such as Afghanistan, where the codes are very severe, should pay attention at the way they treat people in general and leaders in particular. A good and valid relation with leaders will become pinnacle for the mission success.

These are the basic conflictive factors obtained through our research. However, the factor *ideology* deserves to be mentioned although it has not been included in the template. The reason why ideology should be taken into account and considered a conflictive cultural factor is that the interpretation of a given ideology may differ from the commonly accepted one. A mythical narrative can also be articulated in the form of an ideology, particularly narratives relating to religion. In the most traditional societies, ideology may simply become a tool of the mythical discourse. This means that traditional societies can learn to adapt to the rational discourse of international societies by resorting to ideological arguments to achieve their goals. So, in these societies, as in the cases studied, ideology may redirect to the factor "discourse".

Therefore, the sixth factor, ideology, will be dependent on the environment and will be determined by existing conflicting ideologies. Preparing the tools to provide adequate training is a relatively easy task if information about such ideologies is properly gathered. However, it is more difficult to know the impact of the ideologies on the operational environment. It will be necessary to discover if the discourse is affected or not by the ideologies, or if the latter ones are being exploited to defend from or oppose to other communities or ethnic groups (e.g., invaders and invaded). Thus, every instance deserves specific consideration to determine whether ideology must be included into the conflictive cultural factors. The difficulty to discern between ideology and discourse in the cases studied makes it useless to include it in the template as a conflictive cultural factor.

6. Conclusions

The list of cultural factors, which is the most outstanding result of the present research, can be taken into account for two main purposes: (i) designing general and specific training courses for the military; (ii) reconsidering theory framework related to these problems. For the first goal every conflictive factor meets the conditions to be developed at the general and specific level.

³⁹ Visser, Margaret (2002): *Beyond Fate*, House of Anansi Press.



At the general level, the conflictive cultural factors provide a basic framework to determine the differences between one's own culture and the host nation's culture. At the specific level, it helps develop basic manuals for future or potential scenarios or theater of operations where military forces may have to deploy. Likewise, it also facilitates the identification of the elements involved in a given conflict, which will allow commanders to establish basic criteria for action. The specific needs concerning the depth of the knowledge required to prevent or palliate a conflict originating off cultural issues shall be determined by the mission's commander.

The five conflictive cultural factors (six, if ideology is included) aid to build two practical tools. On the one hand, education and training can be adjusted to the mission's requirements, which will shorten the personnel's training time.⁴⁰ Each mission demands an adaptation by subject matter experts, which will provide the military personnel with basic skills to detect problems relating to the culture, i.e., the differences between their own cultural model and the culture or cultural models in the operational environment. On the other hand, the availability of a template adapted the mission and the specific operational environment will make it possible to conduct an *in situ* analysis of the problems, either *a priori* (preventive function) or *a posteriori* (palliative function), to improve and refine aspects of the military activities which involve direct contact with the local population. So, the commander will have at his disposal a basic tool to provide rapid responses. However, this tool does not suffice to effectively resolve conflicts of a larger scale. For that purpose, tools which provide deeper and more detailed information are needed. The template of conflictive cultural factors will precisely allow the commander to know when he must resort to more specific tools, typically cultural advisors.

The approach of the present research has focused on the tactical level; however, it can be extrapolated to the strategic level. The acknowledgement of cultural factors must be integrated into the education and training programs of military forces. It will also contribute to gather lessons learned during the deployments so as to refine the tools intended to integrate culture into the operational planning process.

In the theoretical domain, our main contribution to this paper can be considered what we have called the building of meaningful or valid relationships. To establish those valid relationships it is fundamental to take training on the cultural conflicting factors prior to the mission as well as to bear them in mind while operating in the theater of operations. By doing this, more legitimacy will be gained and more meaningful relationships will be obtained providing that the relationships where these factors appear are properly managed. In this sense a deeper review of all concepts is required, especially the one of legitimacy and cultural competency when applied to these type of scenarios.

⁴⁰ In fact, the acknowledgement of cultural differences and identities is important to build cohesive task forces and facilitates the integration of cross-cultural awareness, as noted by R.M. Hajjar in "A New Angle... The Armed Forces reflect the society they support. The problem resides on the institutional negationism, which breaks the possibility for individuals to develop attitudes favoring skills relating to cross-cultural awareness.