

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITH APPLICABILITY IN THE MILITARY OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *The article delves into the evolution of perspectives on cultural anthropology and its significance within the military operational environment. It emphasizes the importance of understanding and incorporating cultural elements into the planning and execution of military operations, particularly by analyzing interactions among diverse cultures in conflict zones. The study advocates for an interdisciplinary approach, merging anthropological insights into security strategies and military interventions. Ultimately, it outlines pathways for operationalizing culture and applying these concepts practically in operational settings to enhance the efficacy of military endeavors and foster dialogue and cooperation amidst globalization and cultural diversity.*

Keywords: cultural anthropology, military anthropology, military operational environment, cultural operationalization, NATO missions

1. Introduction

The study of cultural anthropology in military contexts has gained significance in understanding the social and cultural factors that influence military actions and operations. Military anthropology emphasizes the importance of understanding the local contexts in which military forces operate [1]. It underscores the need for military personnel to develop cultural competencies to enhance cooperation during stability operations [2]. Additionally, anthropology contributes to military education by analyzing social and cultural concerns related to armed forces, war, and national security [3]. The interaction between culturally distant societies during war underscores the complexity of different norms and ideas regarding the conduct of military force [4]. Improving the cultural capacity of the army for future operations involves assessing and influencing

sociocultural systems to function efficiently in diverse environments [5].

Military anthropology focuses on analyzing social and cultural concerns related to armed forces, war, and national security. It examines how experiences and interpretations of war, conflict, and violence are incorporated into broader symbolic contexts, affecting military organizations and societies. Anthropologists study processes of militarization, including discursive shifts in societal beliefs, the creation of hierarchies, and the mobilization of civilian institutions for war. The mission of anthropologists is to assist military forces in understanding the cultural context and accurately interpreting the gestures, actions, and communication codes of the local population in theaters of operations.

2. Research Methodology

This paper aims, based on specialized literature, to conduct empirical research on cultural anthropology with applicability in the military operational environment, based on observation and analysis. The objectives of the paper aim to understand the complexity and development of perspectives on cultural anthropology with applicability in the military operational environment. The need for improving cultural capacity is highlighted through the operationalization of culture within the military environment by integrating cultural understanding into the planning, preparation, and conduct of military operations.

3. Development of Perspectives on Cultural Anthropology with Applicability in the Military Operational Environment

The study of cultural anthropology brings to the forefront a profound understanding of various cultures and how people interact within them. This understanding can have significant applicability in the military and operational environment, especially in operations conducted in diverse cultural contexts or in encounters with local populations in conflict zones or humanitarian missions. The development of the following perspectives in which cultural anthropology can bring value and efficiency in the operational military environment are as follows (see Figure 1):



Figure 1: *Developing perspectives on cultural anthropology with applicability to the military operational environment*
(Source: Authors)

3.1. Cultural Understanding of the Operational Area

Anthropologists can provide essential information about the traditions, values, social norms, and power structures of a specific region. This knowledge can contribute to a more efficient adaptation of military strategies and tactics to the specific cultural context. Understanding the cultural dynamics of the operational area is necessary for the success of military missions involving multinational forces. This entails recognizing the impact of cultural differences on communication,

cooperation, and overall effectiveness during missions [6]. Knowledge plays a key role in understanding sociocultural behavior, including interpreting cause and effect and the shared mental models of different cultural groups [7]. Operationalizing culture is essential for pre-deployment training, emphasizing the need to integrate cultural awareness into military planning and decision-making processes [8]. In the context of counterinsurgency operations, a deep understanding of the local culture is vital for the efficient execution of the mission, as demonstrated

by the establishment of the Human Terrain System to enhance cultural competence at the tactical and operational levels [9]. Cultural understanding must be based on respect as a fundamental moral value for military personnel. Respect requires trust, cohesion, morale, and unit effectiveness. This moral value is earned, not forcefully imposed, and is based on understanding other people, requiring time for acquaintance. Respect is reciprocal [10].

A comprehensive understanding of the cultural context within the operational area is paramount for the successful execution of actions. This comprehension entails thorough investigation and analysis of the region's specific cultural elements, encompassing traditions, customs, values, social structures, power dynamics, and cultural sensitivities. It is crucial to delve into the historical and cultural evolution of the region, considering the historical, religious, ethnic, and political influences that have shaped its current cultural identity. Anthropologists delve into social norms, behavioral rules, and interpersonal dynamics unique to each culture. This knowledge is pivotal for grasping social interactions and avoiding actions that may be perceived as disrespectful or inappropriate. Identifying power structures, community leaders, and internal dynamics within social groups is essential for understanding key influencers and evaluating their potential impact on military or operational endeavors.

Recognizing the fundamental cultural values and specific sensitivities of the local population, including concepts such as honor, respect for authority, religious traditions, and cultural taboos, significantly influences how military or operational actions are perceived and received. Analyzing economic structures and available resources in the region provides crucial insights into how the population sustains their livelihoods and identifies specific vulnerabilities or needs within the community. A deep understanding of these

cultural aspects enables military or operational command to adjust their strategies and tactics appropriately, ensuring efficient and respectful interactions with the local population and the promotion of objectives aligned with the specific cultural context of the operational area.

3.2. Intercultural Communication and Negotiation

Anthropological knowledge enhances communication and negotiation skills with members of local communities. Understanding cultural sensitivities facilitates the establishment of trust and cooperation, essential in operational contexts. Intercultural communication and negotiation are crucial in today's globalized world. Understanding cultural differences is key to successful international negotiations [11][12]. Cultural norms and social identities play a significant role in shaping intercultural interactions [13]. In the context of business negotiations, cultural factors greatly influence this process, involving various cultural backgrounds [14]. Efficient intercultural communication is essential for building relationships and achieving successful outcomes in negotiations, emphasizing the importance of respecting and understanding the cultural context of all parties involved.

Anthropological knowledge can significantly enhance these intercultural communication and negotiation skills in several ways. Anthropologists can assist in identifying and understanding the cultural sensitivities specific to a community. This is necessary to avoid cultural mistakes that could harm relationships or escalate tensions. Anthropological knowledge guides the adaptation of language, gestures, and behavior in accordance with the cultural norms and values of the local community. All of these contribute to establishing effective communication and creating an atmosphere of mutual trust. Anthropological knowledge can be instrumental in managing intercultural

conflicts and promoting reconciliation and sustainable solutions. Understanding the causes and dynamics of cultural conflicts facilitates finding solutions that take into account the sensitivities and interests of all parties involved. Through respectful and culturally adapted approaches, military personnel and operators can build trusted relationships and cooperation with members of local communities. These relationships are essential for garnering community support or facilitating collaboration in achieving established objectives.

In conclusion, anthropological knowledge plays an essential role in improving intercultural communication and negotiation skills in military and operational contexts, thereby contributing to the successful accomplishment of missions and objectives.

3.3. Conflict Management in Intercultural Settings

Anthropologists can aid in identifying and understanding cultural tensions or latent conflicts within a particular operational area. This knowledge contributes to preventing conflict escalation and promoting reconciliation and sustainable solutions. Managing intercultural conflicts is crucial in peace support operations, where factors such as religion, national identities, and cultural differences significantly influence communication [15]. Operational leaders from joint and coalition personnel face complex social issues due to globalization, requiring new problem-solving approaches that consider cultural dispositions.

Successful management of intercultural conflicts involves adapting differences, improving mutual understanding, working on rational solutions, and promoting intercultural harmony [16]. Additionally, understanding cultural differences is essential for effective communication and negotiation in conflicts involving diverse parties [17]. Despite challenges in adapting conflict management styles between

cultures, individuals can partially adjust their approaches based on their counterpart's cultural context, highlighting the importance of cultural intelligence in the dynamics of intercultural conflicts [18]. Managing intercultural conflicts in military and operational contexts is an essential component of missions and operations conducted in regions with cultural diversity or ethnic, religious, or political tensions. Anthropologists can play a vital role in this regard, offering the following contributions: Through in-depth research and analysis, the causes and dynamics of these conflicts, as well as the factors that fuel or sustain them, can be identified. Anthropologists can also facilitate understanding the perspectives and interests of the various parties involved in an intercultural conflict. This analysis aims to identify common ground and find solutions that address the needs and concerns of all actors involved. Anthropologists also serve as mediators, facilitating dialogue between the parties involved in an intercultural conflict. They can promote open and respectful communication and assist in identifying constructive and lasting solutions. These insights contribute to promoting reconciliation and sustainable solutions in conflict contexts.

By deeply understanding cultural and social dynamics, anthropologists can suggest strategies and approaches that contribute to reducing tensions and building a climate of trust and long-term cooperation. Thus, anthropological knowledge and expertise can play a crucial role in preventing the escalation of intercultural conflicts and promoting reconciliation and sustainable solutions in military and operational contexts. These contributions are essential for maintaining security and stability in regions affected by conflict or cultural tensions.

3.4. Analysis of Human Behavior and Motivation

This perspective can provide profound insights into how cultural factors influence

human behavior and individual or group motivations. These understandings are necessary in developing counterinsurgency strategies or managing crisis situations.

Cultural factors significantly shape human behavior and individual or group motivations [19]. Organizational culture influences behavior through values, functions, and levels, impacting the relationship between individuals, groups, and organizations. Motivation is pivotal in the workplace, with cultural factors being key influencers, necessitating individualized approaches [20]. Culture is a shared system of values and customs that guide behavior and can have various motivational meanings in different cultures [21]. Socio-cultural factors, including family, education, and mass media, influence individual development by shaping knowledge and behavior. Cultural diversity affects the motivational climate in physical activity decisions, influencing achievement motivation and expectancy motivation. Understanding and considering cultural influences are essential in understanding human behavior and motivations in different contexts.

Identifying and analyzing how cultural factors, such as traditions, values, and social norms, influence human behavior in a specific region or cultural context. This understanding is essential for adapting military and operational strategies to the specific dynamics of local communities. Identifying individual and group motivations that underlie people's actions and decisions in a particular cultural environment can be used to anticipate future behavior and develop effective strategies for managing complex or crisis situations. By analyzing human behavior and motivations, anthropologists can identify vulnerabilities and resources within local communities. This information can be used to develop counterinsurgency strategies or manage crisis situations in a way that takes into account the specific needs and characteristics of the affected

population. By integrating anthropological knowledge into the planning and implementation of military and operational operations, significantly improves the understanding of human behavior and motivations in diverse cultural contexts, thus leading to the development of more efficient and appropriate strategies for managing complex or crisis situations.

3.5. Evaluation of the Impact of Military Operations on the Local Population

Assessing the social, cultural, and economic impact of military operations on local communities can help minimize adverse effects and promote a more responsible and sustainable approach in operational contexts. In this regard, anthropologists play a crucial role in evaluating the impact of military operations on local communities, focusing on social, cultural, and economic aspects [22]. Assessing how military operations affect social structures and interpersonal relationships in local communities has a decisive impact on families, communities, and the dynamics of social relationships. Anthropological culture examines how military operations affect the traditions, values, and cultural practices of the local population. It is important to understand that these military operations can significantly influence or change the cultural aspects of the affected communities [23].

Anthropology contributes to promoting a responsible and sustainable approach to planning and conducting military and operational operations. This includes considering the social, cultural, and economic impact of operations in strategic and tactical decisions, as well as collaborating with local communities to identify sustainable and responsible solutions and by understanding the local context, military forces can mitigate mistakes and enhance operational effectiveness. Studies highlight the significance of military interactions with local entities, such as self-governing authorities, NGOs, and residents, emphasizing the socio-economic

implications of military presence [24]. Positive relationships between soldiers and local actors are vital for the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, indicating the importance of trust and empathy towards local populations [25].

Anthropological research can provide actionable insights to planners, aiding in responsible and sustainable military interventions that minimize adverse effects on local communities. Through careful evaluation of the impact of military operations on the local population and involving anthropologists in this process, it can ensure that the operations conducted are more responsible, efficient, and sustainable, while simultaneously reducing adverse effects on affected communities.

In the context of NATO military operations in Afghanistan, evaluating their impact on the local population has been a crucial aspect to ensure that the actions taken do not adversely affect the communities and their relationships. Evaluating the impact of military operations on the local population has been a complex process and has involved several aspects:

- Protecting civilians: Protecting civilians has been a particularly important priority in NATO operations in Afghanistan. Military personnel have worked hard to minimize civilian casualties and avoid collateral damage. By carefully monitoring incidents involving civilian casualties and analyzing them, NATO has sought to prevent such tragedies in the future.
- Humanitarian assistance and reconstruction: In parallel with military operations, NATO has provided humanitarian assistance and supported reconstruction efforts in communities affected by conflict. Evaluating the impact of these actions has focused on the effectiveness of

the aid provided, identifying the real needs of the population, and the level of involvement and satisfaction among them.

- Interaction with the local population: NATO soldiers have directly interacted with the people of Afghanistan through patrols, humanitarian assistance, and reconstruction efforts. Evaluating the impact of military operations on the local population has included analyzing how these interactions were perceived by communities and identifying any tensions or misunderstandings generated by the presence of foreign troops.
- Respect for local culture and traditions: Integrating Afghan culture into military operations has been crucial to avoid incidents and maintain a peaceful atmosphere. Evaluating the impact of military operations on the local population has involved analyzing how NATO troops respected and understood Afghan culture and traditions, and how these aspects influenced their relationships with local communities.

4. Operationalizing Culture

The operationalization of culture in the military environment involves integrating cultural understanding into the planning, preparation, and execution of military operations. Cultural factors have a significant impact on multinational missions, affecting communication, cooperation, and overall effectiveness [5]. Military organizations strive to cultivate an innovative culture to adapt to evolving challenges, enhance training, and improve collaboration [6]. Managing the development of organizational culture in the military involves shaping the values,

norms, and behaviors of military personnel to achieve stability and progressive development [26]. Understanding the local contexts in which military forces operate is important for mitigating errors and enhancing mission success by studying local practices and social behaviors [27]. In general, incorporating cultural awareness into military planning is essential for optimizing operational outcomes and promoting efficient multinational cooperation.

The essential aspects defining the operationalization of culture in the military are:

- a) Cultural analysis: Before conducting operations, a thorough analysis of the cultural context of the operational area is necessary. This includes understanding traditions, values, social norms, power structures, and specific cultural sensitivities.
- b) Proper training and preparation of soldiers to interact and work effectively in diverse cultural contexts. This stage involves learning local languages, understanding cultural customs and practices, as well as developing intercultural communication and negotiation skills.
- c) Culturally adapted planning: Planning military operations explicitly considering relevant cultural factors by identifying and assessing the cultural impact of operations, as well as developing strategies tailored to the specific dynamics of local communities.
- d) Intercultural communication and engagement: It is essential to promote open, assertive, and respectful communication between military personnel and the local population. Building trusting and collaborative relationships contributes to increased success and reduced tensions during operations.
- e) Continuous evaluation and adaptation: As operations progress, it is important to conduct ongoing evaluations of cultural impact and adapt strategies and tactics based on changes on the ground and

feedback from the local population and other involved actors.

By operationalizing culture in the military environment, the ability to understand and manage cultural factors within military and operational operations can be significantly improved, thus leading to greater effectiveness and success in achieving set objectives. A new approach to predicting and influencing the behaviour of target groups is the use of culture as a weapon in military operations. [2]. Engagement as a warfare function is crucial for integrating socio-cultural aspects into military operations, covering planning, preparation, execution, and evaluation. Developing the cultural capabilities of military personnel, including intercultural competence and specific knowledge of regional culture, is essential for effective involvement in military actions. Regarding the effect of intercultural competence on the conduct of military missions, it has been found that an adequate level of intercultural skills has an impact on reducing misunderstandings with the local population. It also plays a significant role in resolving debates and major conflicts and reduces the level of stress and uncertainty associated with operating in a foreign culture.

Operationalizing culture in NATO military missions is extremely important for their success. Culture represents a set of values, beliefs, and traditions specific to a community or group of people, and in a military context, understanding and integrating local culture can have a significant impact on mission outcomes.

A clear example of applying this concept in a NATO military mission is represented by the operations conducted in Afghanistan. In this country, with a culture and traditions very different from those of NATO member countries, understanding and respecting them were essential for mission success. A crucial aspect of integrating culture into NATO missions in Afghanistan was collaborating with local security forces and communities. This involved not only understanding cultural

aspects but also adapting military strategies and tactics to the cultural specificity of the area. For example, during patrols or interactions with the local population, NATO soldiers had to take into account the customs and cultural sensitivities of Afghans to avoid unintended incidents or the escalation of conflicts. Additionally, in reconstruction and humanitarian assistance missions, knowledge of local culture was crucial for identifying the real needs of the population and providing effective aid. When it comes to integrating culture into NATO military missions, the aim is not only to achieve strategic objectives but also to build a relationship of trust and collaboration with the local population. Thus, the foundation is laid for establishing lasting peace and promoting democratic values and respect for cultural diversity.

5. Conclusion

It is important to integrate anthropological culture into the planning and execution of military and operational operations, therefore the effectiveness of the actions carried out can be significantly improved, and the risk of conflict escalation or

negative impacts on local populations can be reduced.

In conclusion, developing perspectives on cultural anthropology and their applicability in the military operational environment is a crucial aspect of the modern approach to international security. Integrating a profound understanding of cultural aspects into the planning and execution of military operations can significantly contribute to reducing intercultural tensions and increasing the effectiveness of military interventions. When adopting an interdisciplinary approach and using rigorous methodology that integrates anthropological research into military studies, more efficient solutions adapted to the specifics of each conflict context can be identified. In this regard, it is essential to continue and develop collaboration between academic and military communities to promote a better understanding of cultural diversity and to ensure that military operations are conducted in a responsible and respectful manner towards local populations.

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