In Practice

Cross-Cultural Considerations in Complex Peace Operations

Robert A. Rubinstein

Peace operations create the potential for culturally-based problems in interactions among different organizational actors and with local populations. Because it is impossible to catalog all of the different groups and cultures that may participate in peace operations, it is necessary to develop a general approach to culture and peacekeeping. The author presents a view of culture as a model for understanding and action, and describes some ways in which cultural models are manifest. Specific cultural differences between military and humanitarian participants in peace operations are discussed, as are areas of potential cultural concern for interaction with local populations. Suggestions about approaching these cross-cultural considerations are offered.

Peace operations bring together diverse actors: military officers and enlisted personnel from different services, agents of nongovernmental organizations of varying scope and size, international civil servants, and individual "citizen diplomats," all of whom have different national, institutional and personal backgrounds. In any encounter that includes such diversity, tensions and conflicts can be expected to arise. When the sources of these conflicts arise from mismatches about, for example, expectations of

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what action is appropriate, the speed and directness with which responses should be made, or the motivations which guide action, it is likely that some component of these conflicts may well be the result of cultural differences. In peace operations the situation is complicated by the intersection of diverse organizational and national cultures.[1]

In the same way, peace operations bring the actors in this heterogeneous mission into contact with local populations. These local populations often draw upon cultural backgrounds different from those of the operation and its members. The potentials for culturally-based misunderstanding and conflict are increased. Participants in peace operations must therefore be equally aware of the local cultures of the people with whom they deal.[2]

The resulting challenge to the coordination of peace operations is so great that it has been the focus of considerable discussion. In an effort to meet this challenge, Aall and her colleagues (2000) have compiled brief general descriptions of international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the military, and even briefer descriptions of the characteristics of individual agencies and organizations. This compilation of information about some of the actors in peace operations is very useful. Yet, as Richard Solomon and George Oliver note in their introduction to Aall et al., it could not hope to cover all of the actors involved in such operations.[3] Having a handy catalog of many actors is useful, but because the cast of characters in peace operations is a changing one, there is a need for a general approach to understanding and dealing with this diversity.

In sum, to coordinate the work of the many actors in peace operations successfully a sensitivity to cultural issues is necessary. In this essay, after reviewing the concept of culture as appropriate for application to peace operations, I then focus on culture as a model for understanding and action. Following discussion of cultural models, some ways in which cultural models are manifest are described, particularly the specific cultural differences between military and humanitarian participants in peace operations. I then discuss areas of potential cultural concern for interaction with local populations. In conclusion, suggestions about approaching these cross-cultural considerations are offered.

Cultural Models

Culture is a dynamic, symbolically-based, and learned system. It forms the mechanism through which people construct and enact meaning.[4] It is a learned system of meanings, communicated by natural language and symbols, that allows groups of people to manage social and physical diversity and to adapt successfully to their environment. It does this by enabling members of a social group to construct a particular sense of reality. Based on this image of the world, people: (1) base expectations about what motivates others; (2) learn the "correct" way of responding to challenges in their environment; and

(3) develop emotional responses to their experiences. In brief, peoples' representational, directive, and affective frames of reference for dealing with the world around them are based in their cultural experiences.

Cultural models provide a coherent, systematic arrangement for the knowledge that characterizes each cultural group. The themes that make up the cultural models not only characterize a group, but they distinguish one group from another as well. The process of becoming competent in a culture requires mastering vast amounts cultural knowledge. People acquire their cultural knowledge through observation and activity; this acquisition is made possible because information is assimilated to cultural themes.

A culturally-competent individual uses the fundamental cultural themes as tools with which to respond to unique and new situations. Action is not determined by culture; rather, past experience and culturally-appropriate exemplars form the basis upon which people generate options for structuring their actions and creating solutions to problems. This creative aspect of culture means that not every member of a group will completely share cultural knowledge. Such intracultural variability accounts for why some members of a cultural group have different knowledge and express different values than do others.

Culture is learned through practice — "by doing." Cultural models are manifest through the practices of a group. Practice, in this sense, consists of four mechanisms: language, symbols, rituals, and behavioral models.

Members of cultural groups share verbal and linguistic representations that they use to render behaviors comprehensible, plausible, justifiable and socially acceptable. They also may mark a person's identity on the basis of such factors. For example, styles of speaking, such as different dialects, may mark even through subtle differences, membership in separate social groups — such as social classes, ethnic identities, or place of origin. Further, each style has connected with it a set of patterns (unconsciously learned rules) of speaking with which it is associated. These rules influence such mundane but important speech events as turn taking; how direct (plain-spoken) a person can appropriately be; and with whom and how it is appropriate to speak.

Language depends upon words, which are symbols. Cultural models are also made manifest in by other kinds of symbols. These include pictures, emblems, and activities. Symbols prompt social action and define the individual's sense of self. They also are an important means by which people make sense of the political process, which largely presents itself to people in symbolic form. In peace operations, the most well-known symbols are, for example, the Blue Beret or Blue Helmet, the United Nations' Flag, and, arguably, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Flags. Like all symbols, these convey meanings that are recognized by those who share in a cultural tradition. Also like all symbols, each of these has multiple meanings with which it is associated.

All cultural groups have rituals — repetitive, stereotyped, symbolic group activities —which serve to reinforce conjoint action and perceptions. Ritual action has a formal quality. It follows highly structured, standardized sequences and often occurs at certain places and times that have special symbolic meaning. Symbols provide the content of ritual. Each symbol embodies and brings together disparate ideas. During rituals these meanings and ideas are associated with one another in powerful way. Because different people may understand the same symbol in different ways, ritual symbolism can be used to build political solidarity in the absence of consensus. Ritual symbolism, however, is often ambiguous: this complexity and uncertainty of meaning sometime serve as sources of the power the symbols have for shaping understandings.

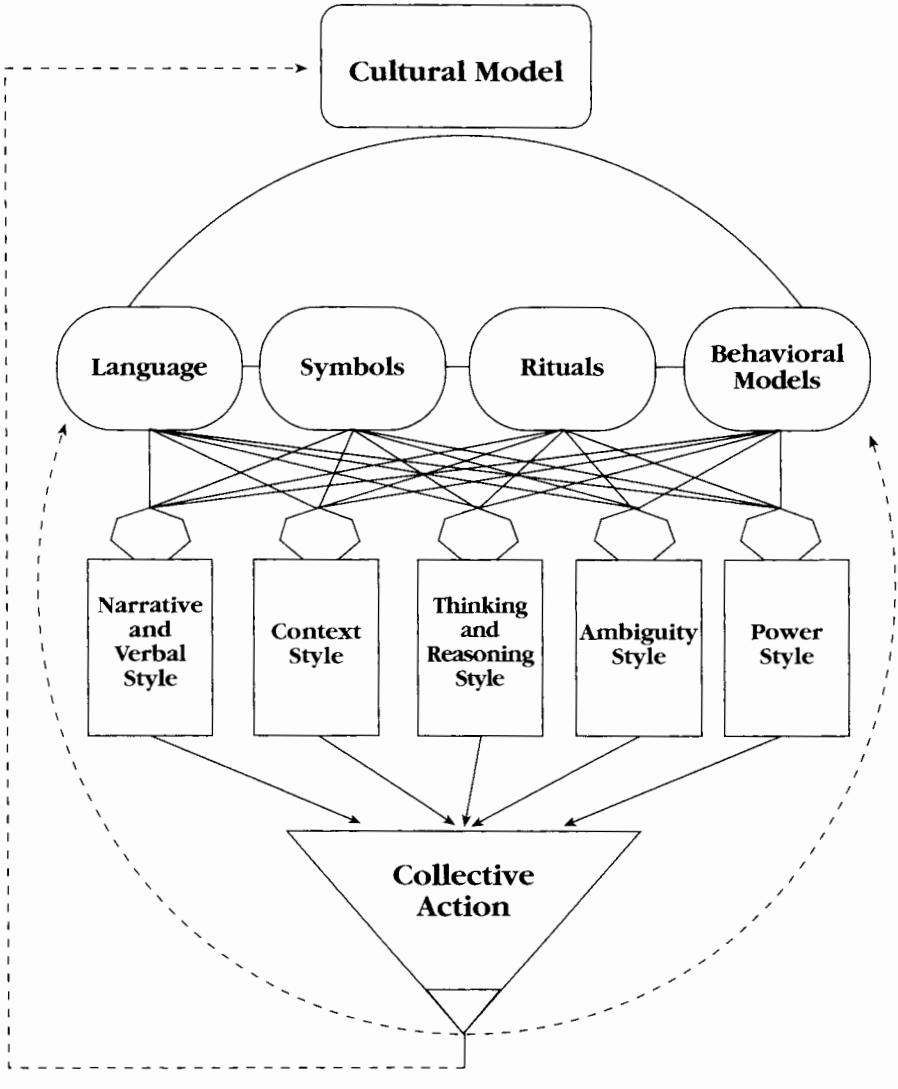
Ritual action can be embedded in daily life, or it can be set apart in ceremonial occasions. In United Nations peace operations, examples of ritual action that serve to orient participants in a mission are found in ritual activity of the Security Council authorizing missions; in medal parades and command change; and in the structuring of the daily activities of patrol and observation.

Just as culture is learned and maintained through practice, culture is learned by watching and emulating the characteristics of people who are believed to embody characteristics highly prized in a culture. These behavioral models provide examples of "proper" ways of acting in various settings, legitimate actions and expectations. Such heroes need not be real persons — they may be characters drawn from literature, movies, or group lore. As such, the traits emulated may be exaggerated or embellished. Both military and civilian groups participating in peace operations have such models. For the military, for example, accounts of lone peace observers standing before advancing tanks, or in the reactions to deaths within a unit. For humanitarian workers, these examples may be found in individuals noted for self-sacrifice in the delivery of aid.

Manifestations of Cultural Models

Culture is an aspect of groups, not of individuals. It is common to think of culture as a characteristic of a nation or of a large group, such as an ethnic group. However, collective or common social patterns that are cultural in the sense discussed earlier are found in groups of varying size and organizational scope. In thinking about the concept of culture for peace operations, it is helpful then to distinguish between a number of "levels" of culture. Important, at least, will be the cultural characteristics of national culture, professional culture (such as diplomatic, military, or NGO), and organizational culture of specific groups (such as local missions, particular military units, or NGO field offices). Each of these levels will have cultural models. Sometimes these models will be consistent with one another; at other times, they will conflict (see Figure One).

Figure One
Culture: Levels of Analysis and Observation



In attempting to understand how cultural models are manifest in daily interaction, researchers have identified a number of ways in which the models influence the shape of social relations. There are many schemes for understanding this influence. Five of the most common frameworks[5] are: narrative resources and verbal style; culture and context; thinking and rea-

soning styles; information processing style; and management of power and social relations.

Looking for culturally-based differences in the narrative resources and verbal styles used by different cultural groups follows naturally from the view of cultural models as symbolic systems that are used to construct meaning. Researchers distinguish between two styles of speech; direct and indirect. Table One shows the contrasting characteristics associated with each style.

Table One
Narrative Resources and Verbal Style

Indirect	Direct
• tend to be more silent	• value self-expression
• use ambiguous language	• value verbal fluency and eloquent speech
• avoid saying "no" to others to maintain harmonious atmosphere	• direct expression of opinions

Language use differences distinguish Western from non-Western speech habits. It is also possible to see such differences in the contrast between, for example, diplomatic language and military language. The directness and "transparency" preferred by military planners in contrast to the diplomatic preference for ambiguity and more "flowery" presentation.

A second culturally-based difference often noted in relation is a variation in the ways in which particular cultures treat the importance of context in social relations. This dimension of difference interrelates with preferences for particular narrative styles. The distinction is drawn between cultural groups that are "High-" versus "Low-"context. Table Two outlines the characteristics of each style.

Table Two
Culture and Context

High-Context	Low-Context
• attend to nuance and nonverbal cues	• explicit content of message primary
• polychronic	• monochronic
• collectivist	• individualistic
• concern with "face"	• tell it like it is

High-context cultural groups promote collective interests over individual interests, strive for harmony and action through consensus as ultimate goals. As a result, great attention is paid to nonverbal cues and situational nuance, multiple activities and agenda are pursued at one time, and care is given to avoid embarrassing others. In contrast, low-context cultural groups privilege individual interests over those of the group and efficient, effective action is more valued than is maintaining group harmony. The result is an expectation that people say what they mean, and mean what they say, and "let the chips fall where they may." This distinction is classically applied to cultural differences between Americans and Japanese or Egyptians, or between organizations that regard highly individual acts of initiative versus those that seek consensus before proceeding.

A third, related difference, is said to be found in thinking and reasoning styles associated with cultural groups. Table Three shows the extremes of the characteristics of thinking and reasoning styles.

Table Three
Thinking and Reasoning Styles

Nonlinear	Linear
• reasoning process indirect	• logic and rationality
• no search for measurement	• search for objective truth
• no external truth	• discovery of external truth

Differences in thinking and reasoning styles are used to account for a variety of cross-cultural misunderstandings. Persuasion is often an important feature of peace operations. Especially in concert with culturally-conditioned expectations about verbal style, styles of thinking and reasoning contribute to the success or failure of persuasive efforts. For example, Americans are said to find most persuasive an account that provides a direct presentation of a logical argument bolstered by independently verifiable objective measures. In contrast, Arabic speakers report finding such arguments sparse and unconvincing, requiring in addition that their interlocutor's presentation display, through linguistic conventions, their own personal commitment to (and belief in) that for which they speak.

The danger of a mismatch in such an exchange is not simply that persuasion will not occur. Rather, the danger is that one or both of those involved in the conversation may attribute to the other ill will, deceitful, motivations, or lack of competence. Such attribution may chill relations beyond those between the two people involved.

A fourth dimension that is useful for approaching cultural differences is the way preferred information-processing styles handle uncertainty and

ambiguity. Some cultural groups highly value the ability of people to act even when a situation is ambiguous, or has uncertain risks; other cultural groups, such action is an anathema. At one end of this dimension are groups that resist innovation and change, finding deviant ideas and ways of proceeding to be dangerous. At the other end are groups that tolerate or seek alternative ways of action. It is often supposed that groups that avoid uncertainty motivate by appealing to group members' sense of security, esteem, or belonging, while groups that tolerate ambiguity are thought to motivate by appealing to group members' sense of achievement and efficacy.

This dimension of cultural difference can be described as tolerating or avoiding ambiguity and uncertainty. The characteristics of this dimension are shown in Table Four.

Table Four
Information, Uncertainty and Ambiguity

Strong Ambiguity Avoidance	Weak Ambiguity Avoidance
• vigilant to avoid uncertainty	• uncertainty is a natural part of life
• ambiguity is a challenge and is stressful	• ambiguity does not provoke stress
• different ways of doing things are dangerous	• different ways of doing things are interesting
• structure and rules essential	• structure and rules kept to a minimum

Finally, it is often useful in analyzing organizational conflicts to consider how members of different groups relate to differences in power and authority. According to this line of analysis, cultural models create expectations about the proper way in which, for example, powerful supervisors should relate to those who are less powerful, and who they lead. This approach characterizes groups according to culturally-based expectations about the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a cultural group expect and accept that power is distributed unevenly. This is a continuum the extremes of which, "low" and "high" have the characteristics shown in Table Five.

Culture allows people to interpret their experiences and see their own and other's actions as proper or meaningful. Culture is analyzed and observed at four levels of abstractions: cultural models, mechanisms, styles, and collective action. The relationships among these four levels are illustrated in Figure One.

In general, experience has different meanings for members of different cultural groups. Culture allows us to see some ways of speaking and acting as more proper — appropriate, honest, effective — than alternative ways of speaking and acting. At its most general level, the essence of culture can be characterized by cultural models that are inferred by observing the actions of members of a social group. People learn and experience their culture through four mechanisms: language, symbols, rituals, and behavioral models. When these models are experienced and enacted, people learn how to conform to the culture of their social group. At the same time, the experience and enacting of these mechanisms may affect the cultural model, allowing it to change, or creating variations among members of a social group.

Table Five
Power and Social Relations

Large Power Distance	Small Power Distance
• great dependence on supervisor	• expect to have limited dependence of subordinates on their supervisor
• great emotional distance	• subordinate cannot contradict supervisor who is seen as separate and unapproachable
• no collaboration in decision making	• prefers collaborative decision making
• small emotional distance between supervisor and supervised	• subordinate can approach and contradict supervisor

The way that people employ the abstract system of interpretation and meaning created by cultural models and supported by cultural mechanisms can be seen in the styles that they employ in everyday activity. In my view, five such styles — verbal and narrative, context, reasoning, ambiguity, and power — are particularly useful for thinking about complex interactions among people.

These five cultural styles are valuable because they serve to orient attention. They do not describe the immutable truth about a group's culture. Rather, they provide a way of understanding the cultural characteristics of a group. It is important to recognize that not every member of a cultural group will react identically. When speaking of a cultural group, these styles can be used to construct characterizations that should be seen as changeable.

Cultural Aspects of Military and Civilian Conflicts in Peace Operations

During peace operations, people from many kinds of organizations and from different nations come together in the interest of maintaining collective security and promoting humanitarian ends. Obviously, cultural conflicts can occur between people from different national groups. Yet, even among people from the same national group who participate in different organizations — military, relief, or international civil service — conflicts based on different organizational cultures may arise. Cultural models help people form expectations about the right way proceeding. They also provide the tools that people use to understand their experiences in a meaningful way.

In looking at specific cases, it is important to keep in mind that culture *informs* these processes; it does not determine them. Thus, even people from the same national group, serving in the same organization, may have differing understandings and expectations. Nonetheless, being aware of the role of cultural mechanisms, and the place of cultural styles, can help one deal with cross-cultural conflicts and considerations.

There are several areas in which culturally based differences lead to conflicts in military and civilian expectations and understanding of peace operations. Not recognizing these areas of conflict may lead to difficulties in coordinating action. In general, such cultural considerations can be grouped into four different areas: management structures; context and legitimacy; symbols, boundaries and security; and media and information.

Management Structures

Just as there are different cultural styles in governing the relations between powerful supervisors and those whose work they direct, so military and civilian organizations in peace operations also give different meanings to and have differing expectations of management structures.

At one extreme is the military. A consistent theme in the military's peace operations management structures is reflected in a command framework that has four essential characteristics. There should be unity of command; the chain of command should be structured so that it can respond quickly and promote fast and efficient decision making; areas of responsibility should be clearly defined; and areas of responsibility should be of manageable size. In terms of cultural styles, this view of command-and-control would be similar to the "large power distance" style outlined in Table Five.

Humanitarian organizations, especially the smaller ones, view management very differently, at the other extreme. Humanitarian organizations — in part because of constraints of size and resources but especially for reasons of cultural (and historical) development — may be characterized not as seeking "unity of command" but rather "camaraderie of command." In contrast to a hierarchical structure in which each bureaucratically-nested individual has

well defined tasks and responsibilities, all are expected to contribute their efforts and expertise whenever and wherever these are needed, regardless of the structural definition of their position. This view of management is similar to the "low power distance" style.

Some of the larger humanitarian agencies, like the Red Cross, appear to have a commitment to a hierarchical management structure. In fact, these organizations are cultural hybrids; they have explicit structures that imply larger social distances between supervisors and staff, but the organizational ethos still demands consultation and smaller distance.

When management structures follow clearly separate styles, opportunity for discord is great, but the source of the discord can be quickly identified. In settings where management structures are very similar or structurally identical, problems may still arise because members of different organizations give different interpretations to those arrangements. A frequent complaint about peace operations, for instance, is that, although they have what appears to be a traditionally hierarchical command structure, in fact this structure is interpreted differently by different national militaries and by civilian organizations. The high value on consultation and participation placed by humanitarian organizations, even in the context of clear, hierarchical, structural management arrangements, presents a challenge to coordinated action.

Context and Legitimacy

In cross-cultural encounters, differing interpretation of the nature of the context for action and how to relate to that context may disrupt relations. Similarly, a second area where cross-cultural considerations are important to managing peace operations is in the area of legitimacy. Humanitarian organizations, as a rule, determine the legitimacy of their actions by applying the principal that everyone who needs assistance has a right to it regardless of their politics, religion, or ethnicity. This humanitarian impulse may lead to the disregard of "legal niceties" like sovereignty, with aid workers sometimes acting in situations where national authorities have not given permission. This approach leaves the scope and nature of legitimate action open-ended and ill-defined.

In contrast, military actions in peace operations are made legitimate through the political process and by reference to international law. When peace operations (such as observer missions) are authorized by the Security Council mandate, they derive their legitimacy from the legal status of the United Nations. The mandate sets out what actions may and may not be legitimately taken by the mission. These general mandates are then operationalized through the articulation of Rules of Engagement. Thus, the scope and nature of legitimate action is highly specified.

The tension between seeing legitimate actions as those that accomplish what must be done, versus seeing legitimate action as that which conforms

to the explicit mandate creates the possibility for culturally based discord between military and humanitarian organizations in peace operations.

Symbols, Boundaries and Security

Related to the question of how different organizations establish their legitimacy is the way this legitimacy is enacted and symbolized "on the ground," perhaps especially in relations with the local population. For humanitarian organizations, legitimacy derives from the application of the humanitarian impulse, as noted earlier. In its most straightforward form this leads humanitarian organizations to act without regard for a political program. Rather than seeking to provide aid as an instrument used to forward a political outcome, aid is distributed impartially. It is from this impartiality that the security of humanitarian workers traditionally derives. This impartiality is enacted in the way humanitarian workers give aid, and it has also been symbolized by the placement of operations in the midst of local populations. Few boundaries — physical, political, or symbolic — are placed between aid workers and the people they serve. Aid workers are in close daily contact with the local population.

In contrast, military units involved in peace operations symbolize and enact their legitimate purposes by control and separation. Thus, even in the most "uneventful" peace observation missions, military personnel are physically separated from the local populations. Buildings and observation post perimeters are secured and entry into the compound is tightly controlled. In more complex missions, posts are typically located in strategically appropriate sites, remote from local populations, perimeters more heavily secured and access more tightly controlled.

These actions and symbols indicate that humanitarian and military organizational cultures expect and support different kinds and amounts of ambiguity in their operating environments, and that "security" is interpreted differently as well. One result of this is difference is that security arrangements felt appropriate by one organization feel to the other to undermine their own safety and security.[6]

Media and Information

Just as culturally-based verbal and narrative styles can lead to conflict among individuals, different expectations about the role of information and media may make difficult military and civilian coordination in peace operations. On the one hand, humanitarian actors treat information and its public spread through the media as a mechanism for indicating the dimensions of the humanitarian crisis they face. Images of refugees displayed by the media — the starving and the ill — serve to raise popular public support, including money, for their efforts. The tragedy is newsworthy and its display, at least initially, helpful for mobilizing public support.

Particularly in the case of peace operations that involve the use of force, news coverage can both generate support for the military and raise public

protests against it. Images of civilian casualties from military actions in a peace operation may turn public support just as quickly just as images of soldiers dead or captured. The media, then, is a contingency to be controlled and given just the information deemed appropriate by the mission.

A potential for misunderstanding, suspicion and conflict in relation to media access to information exists between military and humanitarian organizations. This is complicated by the need to include also the organizational cultures of the media.

Peace Operations and Local Populations: Cultural Aspects

In order to be effective, peace operations must engage the local populations' sense of credibility and potential. It is therefore essential that the mission operate with an understanding of the traditional local structures of legitimacy and of how these structures may have fissured and fragmented. Understanding the cultural aspects of relations with local populations can be developed using the same general tools described earlier. Collective action on the part of local populations results in part from the enactment and elaboration of cultural models.

Since cultural models are open to modification from feedback derived from prior action, it is important to recognize that the meaning and significance of words and deeds may change over the life of the mission. The field of action is broad as well as variable. The following is a list of general "sign posts" that peacekeepers should be alert to during the life of the mission. Prior to deploying to an area understanding the dynamics of these cultural domains will form the basis of a case-specific "cultural knowledge briefing." Having this information will help to in devising strategies to address culturally-sensitive areas of action in ways that will help to enhance the efficacy of the operation and limit the negative effects of intervention.

Because peace operations enter a scene where social and cultural institutions already exist, the areas of potential concern to a peace operation are as varied as is social life, and attention to cultural domains may prove particularly important. These include the cultural aspects of: law, politics and conflict; social stratification; gender relations; and economics and subsistence.

Law, Politics, and Conflict

All societies provide a context for the managing competition about resources and for resolving disputes over how those resources are acquired and used. These frameworks are often translated into various sets of rules, formal or informal. Informal expectations about how people should behave — norms — encode conceptions of appropriate or expected behavior. Such normative expectations include general, though perhaps ambiguous guides like, "public officials ought not take bribes," or "be good to one's parents" as well as specific behavioral directives, like "thou shalt not kill." A single society may hold contradictory norms.

When norms are systematized or elevated to a formal status, binding rules are created which are called laws. Laws encode the overall adaptive strategy of a society. Legal systems, as societies themselves, change over time. It is important to be aware of both the set of cultural norms that guide the behavioral expectations of the local population and those of members of the peace operation. It is also important to be aware of the legal system that guides the behavior of the local population and of how this system has changed over time.

Norms are based on cultural models and, like cultural models, they perform several different kinds of work within a society. Three aspects of normative expectations are particularly important for peace support operations. First, norms provide what might be called *reality assumptions* or general beliefs of what can be taken for granted in regard to actions that are thought to be meaningful within the local context. For example, the degree of intimacy required of friendships is often a normative behavior that is taken for granted. In some societies, it is expected that friendships that involve intense and frequent interactions while other friendships may be maintained over great distance and with infrequent contact. Second, norms help people evaluate others actions. Such norms, which might be called *ranking norms*, are evaluative and underlie the achievement of rank or status within a society. The third type of norm includes those that form the underlying expectations for membership in a particular group or social stratum. Such *membership norms* can include expectations about behavior, the performance of tasks, adherence to specific guidelines about how to act or the display of a certain kind of symbolic costume. In areas of conflict such membership norms may include manner of dress or use of symbolic forms of greetings.

Legal systems and social norms are dynamic. Both change in response to new social and environmental realities. Sometimes these changes fracture traditional attitudes and ways of acting, breaking down various sets of relationships and of the normative order surrounding them. It is likely that such transformations will occur in situations where peace operations take place. It is useful therefore to try to understand both the traditional normative structures and the ways in which these may have fissured and fractured prior to the deployment of the peace mission.

Understanding the current systems of laws and normative relations is important for many reasons, but one of the most important is that these undergird a social group's sense of its traditional moral system. Such a moral system is the matrix from which legitimacy derives. For peace support operations to be successful, they must be viewed as legitimate through their entire life cycle — from their beginning to their withdrawal. In addition, we need to understand both the nature of the norms and laws underlying political legitimacy at the time the mission is deployed, and to keep a sense of the ways in which these change while the mission is on the ground.

Failing to pay attention to the changing nature of normative expectations and legal encounters in a local population can lead to some untoward consequences. For example, a mission may be accepted and welcomed as it is deployed, but as normative expectations change (influenced in part by the actions of the peace support operation itself), that welcome may turn into rejection and hostility. Anticipating such a change in the mission climate depends perhaps most importantly upon keeping an awareness of the changing norms of behaviors and expectations and group affiliations among the local population.

Peace support operations are often called upon to manage conflicts among the local populations or to resolve disputes. It is important therefore to understand the traditional, legal and normative dispute resolution mechanisms available in a society. Again, the cultural models underlying disputing lead to norms and expectations about questions such as responsibility for actions, appropriate compensation, appropriate people for resolving disputes, and the like.

For instance, how do members of a society become part of a dispute? In some societies, responsibility for a dispute and its settlement rests only with those individuals who are involved in the creation of the point of contention. In other societies, the inclusion of people as disputants may derive from a normative expectation that all members of a group — perhaps a kin group — are automatically included among the disputants simply because of their relationship to the original protagonists.

Working from a dispute resolution model that emphasizes the individual's responsibility, it is possible to transgress the normative expectations of society, which sees responsibility as lodged in kinship, corporate, or friendship groups. Transgressing such a boundary would make the mission appear partisan within the dispute, perhaps even escalating the critical events; yet, to the unsuspecting member of the support operation, the action undertaken would appear neutral and nonpartisan.

Authority, which is the right rather than the ability to make decisions to command obedience and arrange for the settlement of disputes, reflects the normative expectations about the proper boundaries of power. It is likely that different individuals will have authority over different domains of social life — thus we need to understand the relationship between those in authority in, for example, a household to those in authority in the local community and in larger corporate contexts.

Law, politics, and conflict management systems are all undergirded by cultural models, which are often capsulated in terms of political symbols and traditions of behavior and action. An understanding of the meaning of such symbols and sensitivity to them is one way to avoid unintentionally behaving in ways that appear partisan in the more general conflict. Such symbolic encodings range from hand signals (for example, various forms of peace sign) to an understanding of different forms of dress. Since these kinds of

subtle symbolic communications can have major ramifications for the success of the mission it is important early in the mission to try and articulate a set of potentially problematic political symbols.

Social Stratification

All societies make distinctions among people. These distinctions separate the "in group" of the society from outsiders. Distinctions are also drawn within the society to classify people in groups or categories that are considered to be significant and distinct. This classification is based on selected perceived cultural, physical or other differences. An important aspect of this process is that even things that strike an outside observer as being the same can be made significant in the process of group differentiation.

How people speak, what they eat, the style of their clothing, or the design of their houses, for example, may all serve as "markers" for various group identities. These markers often form a cluster of symbols, some of which are considered to be essential for the definition of identity. Under ordinary circumstances, individuals may manipulate or deploy in strategic ways the various characteristics that are used to form identities. As resources become scare, or there is increased competition for political power and access to goods and societal benefits, identity can become a point of tension and conflict. Under such circumstances, it may become difficult for people to move back and forth among the various social identities in which they might otherwise participate. Boundaries between groups, which may at one time be relatively porous, may at times of stress and conflict become quite rigid.

When deploying a peace support operation, it is important to understand the dimensions of stratification within, and the ways in which this stratification is marked, symbolized and enacted by, the local populations.

Gender Roles

Even when collective violence is addressed toward an ethnic group without particular regard to gender, women generally suffer more than men do. In circumstances where organized fighting is taking place, men may leave their homes to join with an organized or guerilla-fighting force. This frequently leaves women at home with increased responsibilities for child care and the maintenance of collective cultural identity, in a setting where resources are limited and they are exposed to manipulation and pressure from within and outside of their communities. It is frequently the case that women carry a kind of special responsibility for their group's cultural identity. This inscribing of identity on women — by circumscribing the modes and range of their action, by regulating their sexuality, or by "nationalizing" reproduction — may be taken up voluntarily or forced upon them. In either case, the result is that women's individual reproductive acts come to symbolize the collective identity of the group. As a result, political violence against women becomes

freighted with symbolic meanings that go beyond the physical consequences to the individual woman.

Women remain especially vulnerable when peace support operations are deployed in post-conflict situations. There are two ways that this vulnerability is manifest. In many peace operations, local staff are hired to support the work of the operation. When this happens, real opportunities are created for women as well as for men. Unfortunately, in practice when local staff is hired in a professional capacity they are paid less-well and given fewer benefits and privileges than their international counterparts. Moreover, women are less likely to be hired for those professional positions. This creates a gender gap, with women finding employment in lower-paid, more menial jobs that serve the well-paid international personnel. Such jobs include secretarial work, housekeeping, or work in hotels, restaurants and other legitimate but low-paid service roles. In addition to the non-professional roles, women who are vulnerable in post conflict settings may become involved in liaisons with the more powerful and wealthy international civil servants who are suddenly in the area.[7]

Criminal activity, including drug sales, smuggling of goods and people and prostitution, may flourish especially in the early stages of peace operations. In those early stages, the rule of law has not been fully established because the police force and judiciary are not yet working smoothly. Rehn, and Sirleaf note, "Perhaps most disturbing of everything we saw and learned was the association, in the vast majority of peacekeeping environments, between the arrival of peacekeeping personnel and increased prostitution, sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS infection."[8]

Those planning peace support operations should be alert to the distortions in gender roles that can result from the sudden influx of wealthy and powerful personnel to an area. Also there is a great need for planners to structure the operation so that it avoids creating the conditions in which women may be exploited through criminal activities.

Economic and Subsistence Practices

In societies where conflict is severe enough to merit multinational humanitarian interventions, traditional economic practices and subsistence patterns will undoubtedly be disrupted. In addition to understanding how those traditional patterns are reflected in the organization of disputing groups, peace support operations must be conducted with a self-conscious sense of how their presence distorts local practices.

Peace support operations introduce goods — like food supplies — that would be otherwise unavailable to locals, and they infuse the economy with currency resources that can distort local economies. In such a context, peacekeepers should be alert to the effects of this infusion. Care must be taken that the relative abundance of goods and money in the peace support

operation does not get turned to socially destructive ends. Profiteering, exploitation and illegal activities are all likely to accompany such distortions.

Even under "normal" circumstances in some societies, business activities and patterns of reciprocity may be quite different from those members of peace operations are used to from their own societies. Thus, distinguishing between damaging distortions and appropriate activities may present a challenge. It is thus essential for people involved in peace operations to understand as fully as possible the normative local business and economic practices, so that care can be taken not to reproduce situations of dependency and partisanship.

Approaching Cross-Cultural Considerations

Intervention always involves claims about legitimacy, standing, and authority that are socially constructed and culturally mediated. In peace operations, the intervention maintains a perspective on the conflict — most often, an interest in stopping violence, establishing a climate of human rights, and facilitating self-determination. Throughout the mission and at all levels of action, there will be assertions of legitimacy (what actions are appropriate); standing (who has the appropriate status to carry out those actions); and authority (who has the power to intervene). In some arenas, these assertions are based on international law or other international instruments. But within the operation, and in dealing with local populations, these assertions also are supported by less formal, culturally guided understandings. In order to be effective, cultural considerations should be a priority for the mission administration.

Culture guides — but does not determine — individual and collective action. As a result, cross-cultural considerations cannot be reduced to a discrete set of items which complicate the coordination of military and humanitarian efforts in peace operations. The most effective way of dealing with cultural considerations is to approach attempts at coordination with care and with an awareness of and sensitivity to the dimensions involved. There are, however, several general principles that can aid in guiding this work:

1. *Be aware of meaning.* Actions and statements that we make and do repeatedly quickly become taken for granted as natural. It is then very easy to forget that the meaning applied to words (such as coordination) or actions (delivering aid) may differ from the understanding of others with whom one works. It is critical to pay attention to these nuances of meaning and to the ways in which that meaning is communicated and modified.

2. *Pay attention to symbols.* Meaning is often communicated through symbols, linguistic and otherwise. Especially in areas where actions are closely watched, gestures, flags, vehicles, and so on may take on strong symbolic values. It is important to observe those meanings and to try to

understand their effects on those to whom they are important. Although they may seem innocuous, the use of symbols may contribute to facilitating or frustrating cooperation.

3. *Avoid attributing motive.* One of the most common aspects of cross-cultural miscommunication is the supposition that others act with the same motives as we do. Thus, any deviance from our norm means that others are acting in poor faith. Misunderstanding that leads to the misattribution of motives soon leads to deep suspicion and a breakdown in communication. Under those circumstances, opportunities for consensual action are greatly diminished.

4. *Understand the organizational cultures involved.* Before seeking to develop a coordinating mechanism, take time to learn about the organizational cultures of the others involved in the operation. Since these will be different in each operation, experience in one operation will not necessarily translate directly to another. Since organizational culture can vary even within one organization (depending, for example, on such factors as the closeness of a unit to headquarters) it is imperative to find this information anew for each operation, and to revise it periodically.

5. *Cultural expectations should be made explicit.* The culturally-based needs and expectations of organizations participating in peace operations will vary greatly. In organizing the operation it is best to make these differences explicit so that they can be addressed.

6. *Clarify objectives.* It may be that not all of the participating organizations can participate fully in coordinated action. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify and give priority to the things that need to be accommodated through coordinated actions.

7. *Avoid in-group/out-group formations.* In developing a coordinating mechanism, avoid creating a situation where participants in that mechanism are placed in opposition to their organization. Representatives of a group to a coordinating mechanism may be persuaded by their colleagues at the table. After that, however, the representative must return to the organization and gain agreement. No coordinating mechanism should isolate representatives from their organization.

8. *Be aware of power differences.* Some organizations participating in a peace operation will be more powerful (be stronger, have more resources, have access to political influence, or be better funded) than others. Coordination requires real cooperation. This will be undercut if consensus is gained by persuasion or pressure from superior power.

In Conclusion

Cultural factors come into play in many areas of peace operations. These influences may be subtle or unmistakable. Some of the conflicts to which

peace operations respond will, in fact, be based on such cultural factors. Within military and civilian organizations participating in peace operations, cultural factors will affect views of what to do, right and wrong, what goals should be pursued, and whether they are being accomplished at an acceptable cost.

There is no "right" formula for minimizing these cultural differences. But an awareness of their existence and analytic tools for understanding them are essential elements for meeting the challenges they pose.

NOTES

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1. See, for example, Abiew and Keating (1999); Slim (1996); and Weiss (1999).

2. For instance, see Duffey (2000) and Rubinstein (1989).

3. See Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss (2000).

4. This discussion of culture summarizes material from anthropology and organizational development studies. For fuller descriptions of these materials, see Alvesson and Berg (1992); Avruch (1998); Holland and Quinn (1987); Jacquin-Berdal, Oros, and Verweij (1998); Rubinstein (1989, 1993); and Shore (1996).

5. The cultural styles discussed here are just a few of the dimensions developed by anthropologists and others interested in managing intercultural conflicts. For more information on those presented here, see Cohen (1997); Fisher (1988); Hall (1967) Hofstede (1991); and Kochman (1981).

6. To some degree, conventional military units tend to be more consumed by force protection questions than do special forces SOF units, and this varies across national militaries as well. This does not change the broader point that, without the same infrastructure/superstructure supporting them, aid workers tend to live in much closer relationship with local populations ("more in-the-weeds") than do uniformed personnel (personal communication from Anna Simons, 28 December 2000).

7. See, for instance, Johnston (2001). Also, personal communications from Donika Kaçinari, 12 January 2001.

8. Rehn and Sirleaf (2002: 61). Also, personal communication Elizabeth Callendar, 1 June 2002.

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