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A historical overview of the relationship between 'intercultural dialogue' and associated terminology in UN-level documents in the Twenty-First Century

Tendayi Bloom

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This research programme focuses on a range of issues, theoretical and practical, related to cultural diversity and difference. Migration and media are twin facets of globalization, the one demographic, with crucial spatio-temporal consequences, and the other cultural and technological. While migration often poses the question of cultural difference, diverse forms of media play a key role in enabling representation, thus forging modes of communication. Through a focus on the role of media, this research programme explores the extent to which the latter bridges cultural differences in contexts of migration and facilitates intercultural dialogue. Of interest too are the ways in which media can mobilize societies and cultures. Also relevant is the role of media in triggering migration, as well as in connecting migrants to their homelands.

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Summary

The development of the 'Alliance of Civilizations' concept in the Twenty-First Century is the latest phase in the evolving discussion of 'intercultural dialogue' at the UN-level. Indeed, three main phases can be observed, from the Dialogue of Civilizations in the early 1990s to the Dialogue Among Civilizations at the start of the Twenty-First Century, and most recently embodied as the Alliance of Civilizations since mid-2000. This report builds upon the discussion in (Bloom 2013a) to locate the Alliance of Civilizations discourse within this wider tradition of intercultural dialogue.

Evidence

Mid to late 2000s: the creation of the Alliance of Civilizations

Following the events of September 11 and the Madrid bombings in March 2004, which emphasized a war-like clash (e.g. Koechler 2002 8), the concept of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) was proposed in September 2004, by the then Spanish Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero before the UN General Assembly (UNGA). He was clear in his speech that for him, this Alliance would be 'an Alliance of Civilizations between the Western and the Arab and Muslim worlds' (Zapatero 2004). Indeed, as the AoC concept developed, and the UNAOC was eventually launched, in 2005, this emphasis on Islam and the West became entrenched, as did the rhetoric of war, with coalitions and alliances. This can be seen, for example, in a press release from Kofi Anan, then UN Secretary General, announcing the launch of the UNAOC in 2005. He noted that:

> …The Alliance will aim to address emerging threats emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence, and to bring about cooperation among various efforts to heal such divisions.

> Events of recent years have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding between Islamic and Western societies -- an environment that has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies. The Alliance of Civilizations is intended as a coalition against such forces…(Anan, Press Release 2005).

This new notion of an Alliance replaced the Dialogue Among Civilizations promoted by the then Iranian President Mohamad Khatami (Bloom 2013a 6).

There were some key differences between the earlier Dialogue Among Civilizations (DAC) of Khatami and Zappatero's Alliance of Civilizations. First, the AoC, at least initially, emphasized the opposing factions of Islam and the West, replacing the DAC's stance of intellectual engagement and collaboration across groups. Second, the nature of the participants in the AoC was different from that in the DAC. This was in two ways. Firstly, to join the Alliance, parties had to subscribe already to the dominant neo-liberal or liberal Western ideological framework in order to participate, while the DoC emphasized dialogue between those with differing initial standpoints.

Secondly, President Wade of the Republic of Senegal in 2006, talking about the UNAOC, observed that there is, for example, 'total silence about black Africa and black African civilizations'. He goes on to ask, '[w]ho is talking with whom?', and argues that 'we should insist on a definition of civilization and not simply presume its meaning' (Wade 2006). Building upon this, it is useful to note the emphasis upon the cultural and civilizational experience in the widely-defined region of the Mediterranean, with silence about other regional experiences. That is, crucial to the implicit definition of the Alliance, and indeed, the Dialogue, among civilizations, is the content of the dialogue and who is entitled to participate in it. This will be taken up in more detail below, but it is interesting to note here the focus on Mediterranean religions and disputes, and the key emphasis on these players.

The changing mood in Western countries after the above-mentioned attacks altered the willingness for dialogue. As a result, while Khatami had wanted focus on intellectual debate, the new concept of an Alliance was between officials of allied civilizational groupings (Lachman 2011). Indeed, Khatami has continued to emphasize that the AoC concept cannot replace the previous DAC idea (Khatami 2012). As can be seen in Chart 1 in (Bloom 2013a 4) and in (Bello 2013 4, 6), the number of official documents produced by UN bodies on 'intercultural dialogue' started to climb in 2005, following a small short-lived peak in the production of documents by UNESCO in 2004, with the swiftest climb shown by the UNGA, mirrored by the UNHRC, at a lower level. This coincides with the introduction of the phrase 'Alliance of Civilizations' in 2004, and the staggered introduction of its use in official documents, starting with the UNGA, and followed by the UNSC. The use of the phrase, 'Alliance of Civilizations' peaked in the UNGA in 2008.

Regardless of the similarities or differences between the DAC and the AoC, and the political or international relations reasons for this, the AoC concept seems to have gained a momentum not enjoyed by the earlier related terminology. Although (Bloom 2013a) reflects that in fact the increase in UNESCO discussion about intercultural dialogue and associated terminology peaked to the same extent with the introduction of DAC and that of AoC, the existence of a new UN body, the UNAOC, demonstrates the power of the AoC concept, and meant that the discussion of intercultural dialogue was then spread, so that the peak was in fact higher. [Critical] Supporters of the AoC project have

noted that:

> The Alliance of Civilizations will be a long-term initiative which aims to go beyond any other initiative which has advanced, but maybe not managed to mobilize universal conscience (Kausch and Barreñada 2005 16)

and indeed it has mobilized interest. They go on:

> Moreover, the Dialogue of civilizations is limited to the framework of UNESCO, while the envisaged framework for the Alliance of Civilizations is the whole UN (Kausch and Barreñada 2005 16).

Indeed, as UNAOC started to relocate the discussion of intercultural dialogue away from UNESCO, the involvement of UNESCO in the debate changed.

The use of the phrase 'intercultural dialogue' then peaked suddenly in 2009, and there followed a decline in 2010, followed by a steady climb again from 2011. 2009 also saw a peak in the use of the term 'Dialogue of Civilizations' by the Security Council and a little peak in its use by UNESCO, while the use of all associated concepts (intercultural dialogue, Dialogue among Civilizations, Alliance Of Civilizations) continued to fall.

Through this time, the conflation of civilization, culture and religion, continued. This can be seen in a number of resolutions of the UNGA throughout the 2000s, and is discussed in more detail in (Bloom 2013b), which examines in particular the meaning of the phrase. In 2010 the United States joined the UNAOC's Group of Friends. In a government press release of the time, they complement the UNAOC's 'innovative, inclusive, and apolitical approach' (Crowley 2010), which is particularly interesting given the above discussion of the difference between the DAC and AoC.

By the end of the decade, the Alliance of Civilizations concept had substantially replaced the Dialogue Among Civilizations, but the notion of 'civilizations' itself was also now being questioned. Following a resolution in 2007, 2010 was declared the UN International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (note the absence of the word 'civilization' from this name), and by now, 21st May had been instituted as the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (since UN resolution 57/249, in 2002). However, the UNAOC continued to develop as a UN body.

What next? Developing ideas in the Alliance of Civilizations

The civilizational discourse has now, nominally, at least, moved beyond the initial emphasis on Islam and the West (Lachmann 2011 190), but looking at the alternation of Forum hosts between Christian/ Western and Muslim/Arab countries (see Table 2, below) and the composition of the Secretariat and the High Level Group suggests that this has not changed in the heart of the UNAOC. On the other hand, the renaming of the new United Nations Institute in Barcelona from UNU IIAOC in 2012 may indicate a difficulty among academics with the phrase AOC. The documents from the Scoping Conference relating to the name change for this new Institute indicate a problematizing of the notions of both 'Alliance' and 'Civilizations', as well as the notion of an 'Alliance of Civilizations' *tout court*.

Alongside the UNGA and other high level bodies' emphasis on clashing civilizations and cultures, there was a parallel discourse gaining ground in UNESCO and beyond – that of the role of culture in development and in sustainable development in particular. Then, in 2010, a UNGA summit emphasized this, along with the crucial role of culture in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (Vassiliou 2010).

In some ways, then, the Alliance of Civilizations concept is perhaps being replaced by the notion of intercultural dialogue, even in the UNAOC itself. UNESCO has not stopped discussing intercultural dialogue, and cooperation, yet it defers increasingly to the UNAOC when it comes to intercultural dialogue. The UNGA has discussed all three concepts, and has held high-level groups and dialogues relating to intercultural dialogue, understood often as a dialogue between religions, or representatives of religious groups. In UNAOC, there is an emphasis upon intercultural dialogue as a major aim of the organization, and indeed, as discussed above, the renaming of the UNU IIAOC indicates a growing discomfort with the civilizational terminology among some.

Despite the foregoing discussion, it is also possible to discern a more recent decrease in the use of the phrase 'intercultural dialogue' in the statements of the High Representative of the UNAOC, as the tables below demonstrate (though this may just be an anomalous wobble). Indeed, as can be seen, whereas there was initially a rough fifty-fifty split between documents mentioning, and those not mentioning, intercultural dialogue, by 2011 this had changed significantly:

Table 1. Number (and proportion) of speeches and statements by the High Representative of the UNAOC mentioning and not mentioning 'intercultural dialogue' from 2008 until the end of March 2013[1]

	Mentioning Intercultural Dialogue		Not Mentioning Intercultural Dialogue	
2008	5	(0.5)	5	(0.5)
2009	0	(0)	1	(1)
2010	1	(0.5)	1	(0.5)
2011	4	(0.23)	11	(0.73)
2012	3	(0.43)	4	(0.57)
2013	1	(0.11)	8	(0.89)

It is interesting to compare this with the references in the UNAOC Forum Reports, as demonstrated in Table 2, below.

Table 2. References to 'intercultural dialogue' in the main documents emerging from UNAOC Forums[2]

Year and location of Forum	Nature of document	Number of genuine references to intercultural dialogue	
2008 Madrid	Forum Report	1	
2009 Istanbul	Forum Report	25	
2010 Rio	Forum Report	56	
2011 Doha	Forum Report	47	
2013 Vienna	Concept Paper	8	[3]

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1 This analysis was conducted on each of the speeches available from the UNAOC website (http://www.unaoc.org/about/high-representative/speeches/).
2 This list is compiled from the documents to be found at the website for each of the UNAOC Forums. These can all be accessed from the central UNAOC website (http://www.unaoc.org/events/global-forums/).
3 At time of writing, the Forum Report for the 2013 Forum was not yet availailable. That there are 8 references in the Concept Paper is interesting, but as this is a shorter document than the full report, it cannot be used for drawing conclusions. There was no Forum in 2012.

Indeed, that this more recent decrease is a mere wobble is suggested by the UNAOC's priority for 2011:

> …developing strategic efforts to build a clear definition of intercultural dialogue, its goals and targets, including quality criteria and indicators to assess the impact of programmes and activities carried out under National Plans and Regional Strategies (UNAOC 2011 4).

It goes on to explain the key role of UNAOC with regard to intercultural dialogue:

> Over this fairly short period [the 4 years since the High Level Report on UNAOC began to be implemented, with the High Representative appointed in May 2007], the UNAOC met a number of pre-conditions so that now it is considered as the UN platform for global intercultural dialogue and cooperation (UNAOC 2011 2-3)

…and it goes on…

> The UNAOC is now recognized by the international community as a main partner for intercultural dialogue issues (UNAOC 2011 3).

As discussed in this report, this role is emphasized by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon and, for example of the OIC (Ihsanoglu 2010) and also by UNESCO, which was previously the key location for discussion about culture.

It is important to recognize, however, that despite the gradual move in the UNAOC away from its inception as a response to the supposed situation of two specific clashing 'civilizations', there still exists a clear subtext relating to the relationship between Islam and Christendom, as has been discussed above. With this in mind, it is particularly interesting to consider which states are not members of the UNAOC Group of Friends, shown in the table in the Appendix (though more research is needed to establish, in each case, the reason for the non-membership of the Group of Friends). Of the 84 non-members of the UNAOC's Group of Friends, 35 are in Africa, 60% of all African states, 15 are in the Caribbean and Central America region, 42% of all states in this region. Indeed, of the 39 members of the Alliance of Small Island States, 31 (79%) are found in this list of non-members of the Group of Friends.

This serves to emphasize which states and which regions are considered players in the dialogue being developed. It is interesting to note that the list includes states with proportionally large populations of both Christians and Muslims, as well as those with history and current experience of conflict. Given the aims of the UNAOC discussed above, it is a shame that these states are not part of the dialogue. The UNAOC could perhaps learn from these diverse experiences, and perhaps contribute to the ongoing dialogue-creation work in some, such as Fiji and Sri Lanka, for example. It is important, then, to conduct further examination into the reason for these absences from the UNAOC Group of Friends.

Looking forward, it seems likely that the notion of 'intercultural dialogue' will continue to play an increasingly important role in high level international discussion. Returning to the UNESCO Directors

General, in an address in Paris in January of this year, Irina Bokova, current DG of UNESCO, proposed the creation of a Centre for Social Transformations and Intercultural Dialogue within the UNESCO Secretariat (Bokova 2013 33), alongside a partnership with the UNAOC initiative and the proclamation of an international decade for the rapprochement of cultures (2013-2022) (Bokova 2013 34). It is clear that for UNESCO as well, intercultural dialogue continues to hold an important position.

Predicting how things will develop, it will be essential to be aware both of the changing situation in the Mediterranean Region (the focus for interactions between the groups that are the focus of the intercultural dialogue currently most discussed), as well as the relationship of other powers. It is especially important, for example, to consider the relationship between the BRICS powers (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the UNAOC. The BRICS powers are particularly interesting to consider, both for their rising importance in the international arena, and for the fact that they represent 'civilization' groups currently lacking in prominence in the UNAOC discourse.

Conclusions and recommendations

It has been posited in this report that the discourse and practice of UN-level intercultural dialogue reflect and reinforce implicit assumptions among its instigators:

- There is an emphasis on conflict between the undefined entities of 'the West' and 'Islam', and the idea of bringing in Islamic partners who ascribe to liberal ideology, rather than a genuine dialogue based on equal respect.
- This emphasis on Islam and the West is largely driven by the West, with discomfort among 'Islamic' partners, even including Turkey, co-sponsor with Spain of the UNAOC. As power shifts, particularly towards BRICS, all of whom are members of the UNAOC Group of Friends, it will be interesting to see if this will precipitate a shift.
- The exclusion of large parts of Africa, and almost all Small Island States from the Group of Friends means that key voices are lost, and demonstrates certain assumptions among the instigators of UNAOC about which arenas and which players are considered to be important to the global intercultural discussion.
- The exclusion of these players is a particular loss given the importance of finding means of dialogue in many of these states in the aftermath of decolonization, dealing with ethnic divides imposed by European rule, for example.

The coming years will be interesting and important in terms of how power is located in shifting political arenas. If intercultural dialogue is to continue to play a role, it will be crucial to revisit its purpose, its players, and its remit. This report has argued that intercultural dialogue is not emerging on its own. It must be seen alongside the regional geopolitical climates evidenced in the development of each new set of accompanying terminology, and to continue to do this, going forward. Moreover, policy-makers should use the term with caution, acknowledging that certain questions cannot be assumed. Central to these are: what is the dialogue for? And who is included within it? Explicitly addressing these questions in developing policy around intercultural dialogue will help to make it positive, meaningful and sustainable.

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Appendix: States that are not members of the UNAOC Group of Friends

Africa	Caribbean and Central America	Other Small Island States	Other
Benin	Antigua and Barbuda	Fiji	Andorra
Botswana	Bahamas	Kiribati	Bhutan
Burundi	Barbados	Maldives	Cambodia
Cameroon	Belize	Marshall Islands	Hong Kong
CAR	Cuba	Micronesia	Iceland
Chad	Dominica	Nauru	Iraq
Comoros	Grenada	Palau	Israel
DRC	Haiti	Papua New Guinea	Korea, DR
Cote d'Ivoire	Honduras	Samoa	Kyrgyzstan
Djibouti	Jamaica	Singapore	Lao PDR
Equatorial Guinea	Nicaragua	Solomon Islands	Lichtenstein
Eritrea	St Kitts and Nevis	Tonga	Moldova
Gabon	St Lucia	Tuvalu	Monaco
Guinea	St Vincent and the Grenadines	Vanuatu	Myanmar
Kenya	Trinidad and Tobago		Nepal
Lesotho			San Marino
Liberia			Sri Lanka
Libya			Tajikistan
Madagascar			Turkmenistan
Malawi			Venezuela
Mauritania			
Mauritius			
Namibia			
Niger			
Nigeria			
Rwanda			
Seychelles			
Sierra Leone			
Somalia			
South Sudan			
Swaziland			
Togo			
Uganda			
Zambia			
Zimbabwe			
35	15	14	20