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Migration, Media and Intercultural Dialogue

Analyzing the phrase 'intercultural dialogue' in the six UN official languages in the UNGA Resolution 62/90 and its relation to the 'Dialogue Among Civilizations'

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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.

Analyzing the phrase 'intercultural dialogue' in the six UN official languages in UNGA Resolution 69/90 and its relation to the 'Dialogue Among Civilizations'[1]

Summary

This report examines the meaning of 'intercultural dialogue', considering both practical implications of the phrasing adopted and underlying value and compositional implications. It draws upon the meanings of the phrases adopted in the six official languages in the UNGA Resolution 62/90. This report also examines the now powerful notion that there must be civilizational parties to the dialogue. Finally, it notes an oft-ignored thread of discussion at the theoretical and high political level, in which the groupings need not be fixed and distinct. This report submits that when the meaning of 'intercultural dialogue' is left unclear, hidden borderings can remain under-examined, and underlying value and compositional judgments unexposed. Further, the report argues that, through the linguistic differences in the definition of the dialogue itself, a potential problem to be encountered in the functioning of the initiative can be perceived.

Evidence

'Intercultural dialogue' is constrained by language. This affects even the concept of the dialogue itself. This report addresses this in three stages. Firstly, it examines the phrases adopted in each of the six UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). This uncovers

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1   Please note acknowledgement for consultative assistance with Arabic and Chinese, respectively, to: Daniel Lowe, Arabic Specialist, British Library and Jing Zheng, Chinese-English Legal Specialist, Square and Circle Consultancy.

interesting questions regarding the meaning of the 'intercultural dialogue' project. Secondly, it considers how each language introduces the civilizational discourse, comparing this with the Persian phrasing adopted by Mohamad Khatami in his discussion of his 'Dialogue Among Civilizations'. Thirdly, this report observes a thread of discussion, often lost, which does not assume non-arbitrary divisibility of culture. This, it is proposed, may overcome some of the problematic elements highlighted in this report.

Traditional use of 'intercultural dialogue'

The 2008 UNGA Resolution 62/90, 'Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace' is presented slightly differently in each of the official languages (Appendix 1 supplies full wording in each language). Exploring this helps to uncover three elements to be re-examined. Firstly, in each language, the use of the term presupposes the existence of distinct cultural groups in different ways. Secondly, despite structural differences in the way definiteness is used in each language, the varied use of definite and indefinite phrasing raises questions about the initial status of the dialogue. Thirdly, the different phrasings can be open to different interpretations about who are the parties to the dialogue. Each of these will be considered in turn.

(1)   Assumption of distinct cultural groups

There are three elements to the assumption of distinctness in this phrase: the meaning of the concept of 'dialogue'; the nature of the participants to it; and the connective used. The European word, 'dialogue' (En, Fr), 'diálogo' (Sp), or 'диалога' ('*dialoga*') (Ru) share an Ancient Greek root (e.g. see Simpson and Weiner 1989VI 601; Beaujean 1959 622; Corominas 1976 212). In English, the word has a political meaning: 'discourse or diplomatic contact between the representatives of two nations, groups or the like' (Simpson and Weiner 1989IV 601) and similar meanings pertain in the other Greek-derived versions of the word.

In Ancient Greek, the first part, δια (*dia*), is a prefix indicating across or between ('*a través*', according to Corominas 1976 212). The second part, λογοζ (*logos*), has a more disputed meaning. It is generally associated with the concepts 'word', 'idea', 'speaking', or 'counting'. It requires the participation of distinct plural agents (and cannot, for example, be introspective). The word carries a heavy intellectual baggage in Western tradition, based most famously in the Platonic/Socratic Dialogues, in which interlocution is used to seek truth and to teach others about truth-seeking[2] (e.g. see Waterfield 1998; Church 1906). This notion of dialogue, then, carries an underlying notion of a pedagogic truth-seeking.

The word used here for dialogue in Chinese, 对话 ('*dui-hua*'), literally means something like 'speaking' 'face-to-face', and is traditionally used for the staged conversation between actors in the opening scenes of a play (Zheng, referring to Xu Xuan 2004). This has been adopted more recently in Chinese media to refer to a debate in which protagonists with conflicting view-points are pitted against each other. This emphasizes, then, the formality of the dialogue, and the perceived need that participants should have conflicting views. The Arabic word used, حوار ('hiwar'), derives from the root, h-w-r, meaning to return, recede or diminish. In this form, it means 'to talk, converse, have

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2   Arguably, though, Socrates drives each dialogue towards a conclusion he has pre-determined.

a conversation', 'to discuss, debate, argue' (Lowe, referring to Cowan 1994 212). Like the other terms mentioned, it also contains the implication of a debate.

That the participants to the dialogue are distinct groups is made clear in two further ways. Firstly, a plural noun (signifying 'cultures') is used in the Arabic, French and Spanish versions of the text. This will be taken up in the section on fluid culture, below. Secondly, the connective used in each language would not make sense unless the cultures are distinct. In each of the six languages, the prefix or connective, 'inter-' (En; Allen 1990 617), 'entre' (Fr; Beaujean 1959 767, Sp; Corominas 1976 237), بين ('bayna', Ar; Baalbaki and Baalbaki 2007 256), ' меж- ' ('mish-', Ru) and 间 ('jian', Ch) presupposes that the dialogue is between discrete participants.

> (2)   The initial status of the dialogue

Considering only the English language version of the phrase, it is possible that the dialogue is non-extant. Indeed, Chinese and English offer phrases that are not definite. In Arabic, French and Spanish, definite articles are used. Note also that, while English and Russian offer the compound word, 'intercultural' or ' межкультурного ' ('mishkulturnoro'), in French and Spanish, where the compound words, 'interculturel' (Fr[3]) or 'intercultural' (Sp[4]) exist, they are not used.

While the different languages use definiteness in different ways, noting this difference in formulation helps to raise questions for the nature of the dialogue being discussed. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the Security Council meeting analyzed in depth in (Bello 2013) (6322nd Meeting of the UNSC, discussing 'Intercultural dialogue for peace and security'). For example, in this important meeting, only three countries are recorded to have used the phrase 'dialogue among cultures' or 'dialogue between cultures': France (three times), and Mexico and Austria (once each). Table 1 indicates different patterns in the use of the phrase 'intercultural dialogue' among those who were translated and those who were not. There are of course many possible reasons for this (as discussed in Bello 2013), but it is interesting to note the possible effects of translation on this (especially as those most using 'intercultural dialogue' are those that do not have English as an official state language).

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3   The Academie Française have confirmed by personal correspondence that this is currently officially a French-language word, though it does not appear in the official online dictionary (www.academie-francaise.fr/le-dictionnaire/la-9e-edition) or in (Beaujean 1959).

4   Note that, while this does not appear in Real Academia Española (1992), it does appear in the official dictionary from 2009, available from the website of the Real Academia Española at: http://lema.rae.es/drae/

Table 1: Number of references to 'intercultural dialogue' in the 6322nd Meeting of the UNSC (and references to 'intercultural dialogue' as a percentage of all references to 'dialogue' by each participant)

Language used, if not English	State represented	References to intercultural dialogue
	Japan	10 (59%)
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	9 (69.2)
	Turkey	8 (53%)
	Austria	7 (33%)
	Uganda	7 (70%)
Chinese	China	6 (60%)
French	Gabon	6 (60%)
French	France	6 (43%)
	UK	6 (46%)
	Brazil	4 (44%)
Arabic	Lebanon	2 (7%)
Spanish	Mexico	2 (29%)
Russian	Russia	2 (67%)
	Nigeria	1 (11%)
	USA	1 (11%)

(3)   Parties to the Dialogue

The English and Russian language versions of Resolution 62/90 imply that the dialogue described is one where *cultures* can dialogue with each other and *religions* can dialogue with each other, but there is no dialogue involving both religions and cultures. However, the other language versions suggest a more open possibility. That is: while the prefix 'inter-' (En) or ' меж- ' (Ru) is attached separately to 'religious' and to 'cultural' in the English and Russian; the 'بين' (Ar) or '*entre*' (Fr; Sp) connective is used only once, and is associated collectively with religions and cultures in Arabic, French and Spanish, so that the dialogue may also be between cultures, as a group, and between religions, as a group, or between a mixture of cultures and religions. Interestingly, when the Resolution was introduced to the General Assembly, the Russian representative (speaking in Russian) emphasized the 'interreligious dialogue' over the 'cultural dialogue' (UNGA 2007b). Furthermore, whereas the English phrase could refer to specified dialogue between religions and between cultures, alongside more generalized understanding and cooperation, in other languages, it is the cooperation that is the most closely tied to the groups in question, with possibly more generalized dialogue and understanding.

These slight differences in potential interpretation highlight uncertainties in the definition of religions and of cultures, and the nature of dialogue, and reflect wider ambiguities affecting how the civilizational discourse is introduced.

Culture as civilization: a dialogue among the enlightened

Three key phrases are used officially to refer to the project of intercultural dialogue at the UN level.

Their emergence is associated with three key historic moments:

- Dialogue of Civilizations (1990s)
- Dialogue Among Civilizations (early 2000s)
- Alliance Of Civilizations (mid to late 2000s)

This emphasis on civilization arose from rhetoric that emerged in sociology in the 1990s and was taken up by the international community (Bloom 2013a). The translation of 'intercultural dialogue' into a dialogue involving civilizations indicates assumptions about the mode of the dialogue and the appropriate parties to it. One way to examine the intended nature of the dialogue is to examine the semantic relationship between the 'cultures' and the 'civilizations' that are to participate.

Considering the Chinese phraseology adopted is most helpful in demonstrating the intended relationship between 'cultures' and 'civilizations'. The Chinese text of Resolution 69/90 uses two characters to refer to culture: 文 ('wen') 化 ('hua'). Here, 'wen' refers to the coming together of lines and drawings in the form of language and books (Zheng, referring to Xu Xuan 2004). It carries also reference to rituals and other man-made accomplishments, and in some early writings, has been used to refer to beauty, kindness, and acting morally. 'Hua' refers to the changing of the form and character of a thing. Consequently, in the concatenation, 'wen-hua', 'hua' can be seen to mean the guiding of people to appropriate and good behaviors (Zheng). In the Chinese version of the 2001 Resolution 56/6 of the GA on the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations, the word for 'civilization' adopted uses the same character for culture, 'wen', this time qualifying it with 明 ('ming', 'enlightened'), to produce a word phrase that can be used, for example, to describe behaviour or people that are appropriate or enlightened (Zheng).

In Persian, the word adopted by Mohamad Khatami in his discussion of the 'Dialogue Among Civilizations' concept (Bloom 2013b 6) is تمدن ('tamdun')[5], which derives from the Arabic root *m-d-n*, meaning to urbanize (the same root as gives the Arabic word مدنة 'medinah', city). This bears a close relation to the European word civilization, deriving from the Latin 'civilis', 'pertaining to the city' (Corominas 1976 153; Simpson and Weiner 1989III 257). To understand the sense of the English word, civilization, it is useful to consider the discussion recorded between Boswell and Johnson in 1772 when compiling the first dictionary of the Language. Boswell notes that Johnson:

> …would not admit *civilization*, but only *civility*. With great deference to him, I thought *civilization*, from to *civilize*, better in the sense opposed to barbarity, than *civility* (quoted in Simpson and Weiner 1989III 257, emphasis in original).

In the European languages (where it is contrasted to barbarian), civilization refers to those who participate in a sophisticated political and social arrangement (Corominas 1976 153; Beaujean 1959 353; Allen 1991 206), and has repeatedly been used historically to refer to those who have adopted the political and cultural practices of an imperial power (e.g. Bowden 2009; Geary 2002; Kishlansky et al. 2007).

The word adopted in Arabic for 'civilizations' in this document (حضرات, 'hadaraat') derives from

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the root, حضر (h-d-r), which refers to being present, taking part, or being settled, and is often contrasted with بدو ('baduw', or nomadic; Baalbaki and Baalbaki 475; Lowe, referring to Cowan 1994 184). Interestingly, the word 'hadaraat' does exist in Persian, and derives from the same Arabic root, but refers to the audience of a play, for example. It is interesting that the Arabic text adopts 'hadaraat' rather than 'tamdun', which does exist in Arabic, and shares the Persian meaning, though in Arabic it also carries the notion of being secular (Baalbaki and Baalbaki 475).

Although Khatami has advocated a move away from considering the old meanings of these words, examining implicit implications of the terms used helps to uncover underlying meanings in the concepts. As shown, the meaning of the word adopted to refer to civilization, etymologically and historically, in each of these languages, contains, to different extents and in different ways, undertones of cultural superiority. This suggests that the interaction between civilizations is an interaction between enlightened parties[6] and might help to give a vehicle for critiquing the exclusion of, for example, a large number of African and of Small Island states from the UNAOC Group of Friends (Bloom 2013b 7).

Culture as fluid

This section introduces another potential understanding of the dialogue. From the UN-level documents, it is apparent that intercultural dialogue is intended to enable a coming-together and collaboration, with an appreciation of diverse expressions and instantiations of culture. As Ban Ki Moon put it in 2010, talking about the International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures, 'quite simply, we are in this together'.[7] Sometimes, the groups coming together are defined by religion (e.g. UNGA Resolution 60/10[8]), sometimes geographical location (such as the myriad of resolutions focusing on specificities of inter-state relations), or other divisions. Further, when an official document does not specify which of these meanings of culture is being used, or uses another undefined term, like 'civilization', yet still assumes culture is divisible into groups, it can hide the implicit border-creation that is taking place. That is, while the project may appear to be one of coming together, it can in fact be rooted in a hidden process of bordering.

It is possible to envisage a theory that moves away from the discussion of cultures as distinct, countable entities, and instead sees them as malleable and dependent upon context. There is precedent for this in the literature. Among English-language UNESCO documents can be found a discourse about 'culture' as a non-divisible noun (UNESCO 2009). Indeed, UNESCO criticizes the assumption of divisions:

> One of the fundamental obstacles to intercultural dialogue is our propensity to hypostatize other cultures, to conceive of them as fixed entities, as if fault lines separated them. … One of the main objections to Huntington's thesis of a 'clash of civilizations', apart from the risk that it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy, is that it presupposes singular rather than multiple affiliations between human communities and fails to take account of interdependency and interaction

6   For an interesting perspective on this see (Febvre 1929).
7   Though he goes on to reiterate the assumption of division: '[d]ialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions is crucial to fulfilling the central objectives of the United Nations Charter, upholding human rights and advancing development.' www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhpIKabDnCI
8   'Promotion of interreligious dialogue and cooperation for peace'

(UNESCO 2009 39).

It goes on to explain that it is not cultures that are engaging in dialogue (through human representatives of particular groups), but people, 'with their complexities and multiple allegiances' (UNESCO 2009 45; see also e.g. UNGA 2011). This is also taken up by some within the UNAOC. For example, co-sponsor with Spain of the UNAOC initiative, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan notes:

> In our judgment, throughout history, all communities have contributed in their unique way to the humanity and to our common civilization with their cultural and religious richness (Erdoğan 2005).

And indeed, the very name of the 21st May, 'World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development', proposed by UNESCO and approved by the UNGA, allows the possibility of a more complex understanding of culture.

Theoretician, Amartya Sen goes further, noting that, not only are human communities multiple and fluid, but individual humans are more complex than the civilizational discourse can imply. The sentiments of Sen and Erdoğan can be summed up using James Tully's description of cultures as 'overlapping, interactive and internally negotiated' (Tully 1999 20). Sen goes on:

> …we do know in fact that any real human being belongs to many different groupings, through birth, associations, and alliances…

and

> …[t]he intricacies of plural groups and multiple loyalties are obliterated by seeing each person as firmly embedded in exactly one affiliation, replacing the narrowness of insisting that any person is "situated" in just one organic pack (Sen 2007 20).

Edward Said also makes this point:

> …cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality (Said 2001, quoted in Bacli 2009).

The intention here is merely to note that, while there is a strong (liberal) tradition assuming divisibility of peoples, cultures and nations (e.g. Rawls 2000; Miller 1999; Kymlicka 1995)[9], for example, there is also a tradition critiquing this and proposing another way to organize political life.

It seems that there has been a move away from fluid notions of culture. Indeed, UNGA Resolution 58/128, of 2004 ('Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation') was worded quite differently to the Resolution examined here. There, in the English and Russian, 'intercultural' was not used, and in each other language also, 'cultural' and 'religious' were used as fluid adjectives, rather than divisible or plural nouns. It is important to note this shift and to critique

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9   That these authors all assume divisibility is contested, and is addressed in (Bloom 2013c).

it. Given there are both theoretical and high level political criticisms of the assumption of distinct cultural groupings, this report proposes using either a clear demarcation between groups or, better, a fluid term like 'culture' (rather than 'cultures' or 'intercultural'), which allows that such discrete non-arbitrary divisions might not be possible.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report submits that the value of intercultural dialogue, its meaning, and the practice it implies, need to be both defined and defended. With this in mind, four key recommendations are made:

- It is necessary to appreciate that dialogue needs shared schemes of reference, from the use of the terms used to define the discussion, to the words used within the dialogue with itself. To achieve this, it is necessary to address the different understandings held by participants regarding what the process is setting out to achieve;
- It is necessary to recognize the bordering that can be hidden when there is reference to 'intercultural dialogue' rather than an explicit reference to the type of cultural grouping that is being delineated;
- The implied value-judgment regarding who is to be included in the dialogue or alliance among, or between, civilizations, must be explicitly acknowledged and defended in the discussion of the efficacy and purpose of the initiatives; and finally
- Culture does not need to be seen as divisible; indeed, there is a strong political theory and high-level political tradition in which this is not the case.

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Appendix 1: Text of the title of the UNGA Resolution 62/90 (25th January 2008) in each of the six official languages

Arabic

٩٠/٦٢ – تشجيع الحوار والتفاهم والتعاون بين الأديان والثقافات من أجل السلام

Chinese

62/90. 为了和平而促进宗教间和文化间的对话、了解与合作

English

62/90.   Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

French

62/90. Promotion du dialogue, de l'entente et de la coopération entre les religions et les cultures au service de la paix

Russian

62/90. Поощрение межрелигиозного и межкультурного диалога, взаимопонимания и сотрудничества на благо мира

Spanish

62/90. Promoción del diálogo, la comprensión y la cooperación entre religiones y culturas en pro de la paz

Appendix 2: Text of the title of UNGA Resolution 56/6 (9th November 2001) in each of the six official languages

Arabic

٦/٥٦ – برنامج عالمي للحوار بين الحضارات

Chinese

56/6. 不同文明对话全球议程

English

56/6. Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations

French

56/6. Programme mondial pour le dialogue entre les civilisations

Russian

56/6.   Глобальная повестка дня для диалога между цивилизациями

Spanish

56/6. Programa Mundial para el Diálogo entre Civilizaciones